

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

No. 53, Spring 2017

A Momentous Aqueduct Opening, 175 Years Ago

This year marks the 175th anniversary of the 1842 opening, to joy and excitement in New York City and admiration and wonder far beyond, of the first Croton Aqueduct. At the time, the city consisted of a developed area from the Battery to about 23rd St., with a population of 313,000. The rest of Manhattan Island was sparsely settled, with several substantial villages – Harlem, for example. The city had been trying, with assorted plans, proposals, and aborted construction efforts, to secure a wholesome, abundant water supply since 1774; all had come to naught while fires and epidemics took their toll and a flourishing economy was held in check by the foul conditions of daily life.

Finally, a plan to use water from the Croton River in northern Westchester was formulated and the public voted to proceed, taxing themselves to pay for it, in a referendum held in April 1835. Work began in 1837. After five years of difficult construction, political controversy, and persistent naysaying by skeptics who said the Aqueduct would never work, success was at hand.

The opening was actually a progression of carefully planned stages:

June 8-9, 1842: The Water Commissioners and engineers conducted a final, 33-mile inspection of the masonry conduit's interior on foot, from Croton Lake – the reservoir in northern Westchester County – to the Harlem River.

June 22, 1842: At 5am, water was first admitted into the Aqueduct from the gate at the original Croton Dam. A 16-foot skiff dubbed the Croton Maid was navigated through the Aqueduct and arrived at the Harlem River on June 23, along with the first water. The High Bridge was not yet constructed; the water crossed the river on a temporary, low-level iron siphon to reach Manhattan.

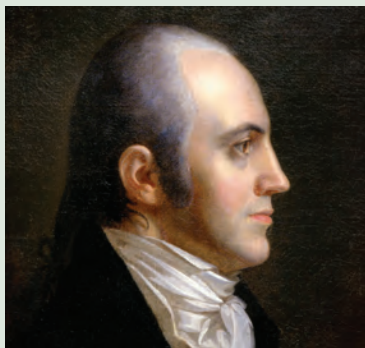
June 27, 1842: Water was admitted at 4pm to the north division of the York Hill receiving reservoir (now under Central Park's Great Lawn). According to Edward Wegmann, writing in 1896, "A large assemblage of people, including the Governor, Lieutenant-Governor, the Mayor, and many other distinguished persons was present. A salute of thirty-eight guns was fired...by a detachment of artillery, and the Croton Maid, which appeared soon afterwards, was greeted with much enthusiasm by the assembled citizens. The boat was presented by the President of the Water Commission... to the Fire Department of the city."

July 4, 1842: At sunrise, water was admitted into the Murray Hill distributing reservoir (site of today's New York Public Library). Turnout was smaller but 45 cannon boomed. And finally, Croton water entered the city's mains, built by the city while the Aqueduct was under construction. Success! *(cont.)*



Sheet music cover showing the City Hall fountain, 1842. (NY Public Library, Eno Collection)

The Friends' Annual Meeting Sunday, April 23, 2pm Warner Library, Tarrytown NY



Turning Water Into Money: Aaron Burr's Manhattan Company

The story of Burr's maneuverings to found a bank (now JPMorgan Chase) by pretending to meet New York City's urgent need for clean water is one of the more colorful sidebars of our water supply history. In this 175th anniversary year of the Old Croton Aqueduct, learn how Burr pulled it off, Alexander Hamilton's ambiguous role, and the consequences of Burr's ruse for the emerging metropolis.

Speaker Gerard Koepfel has written widely about aspects of New York history and infrastructure and is a popular speaker and panelist on these topics. His books include the highly regarded account of the Old Croton Aqueduct, *Water for Gotham: A History*, and, most recently, *City on a Grid: How New York Became New York*.

Members will receive a mailed invitation with additional details.

A Momentous Aqueduct Opening (cont. from page 1)

Amid general rejoicing, visits to the two reservoirs soon became favorite excursions. In September two great fountains were built, one in Union Square and an even larger one in City Hall Park, presaging the astonishing parade held on October 14 – the subject of a future article here. It took much longer for Croton water to be in general use, owing to the expense of connecting to it, but it soon became a key element of the city's explosive growth, its sole source of pure water for 50 years, and the foundation

of today's renowned water supply.
–Charlotte Fahn and Robert Kornfeld, Jr.

Note: The Friends are looking forward to commemorating the 175th anniversary around the time of the great parade. Also in the fall, the Museum of the City of New York is planning a special exhibition to mark the anniversary.

Sources: E. Wegmann (1896), "The Water-Supply of the City of New York, 1658-1895"; G. Koepfel (2000), "Water for Gotham: A History."



▲ This beautiful new map of the city's water supply, created primarily for teaching purposes, has been published by New York City's Department of Environmental Protection. The map, conceived and developed by Kim Estes-Fradis, DEP Director of Education, and designed by Laurel Marx Design, is displayed in the Keeper's House Visitor and Education Center on the Old Croton Aqueduct trail in Dobbs Ferry. The decorative compass rose was used on 1880s maps to celebrate the New Croton Aqueduct, a cross-section of which is in its center. (Compass rose courtesy of NYCDEP Archive.)



Photo Gallery • *Spillway of the New Croton Dam from Croton Gorge County Park, after Hurricane Irene in 2011. (Photo by T. Tarnowsky)*

Improving Highbridge Park: The Next Steps

Highbridge Park, the Manhattan gateway to the High Bridge, is one of five neighborhood New York City parks selected to receive \$30 million each in capital funding through the city's Anchor Parks program. Based in part on input gained at well-attended community planning sessions, a master plan for the 130-acre park is being developed. Preliminary analysis of the park and Phase 1 plans were announced on March 7 at a Community Board 12 Parks Committee meeting.

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct are participating in the process. Among our priorities: restoring and reopening High Bridge Tower; improving the Aqueduct trail in the park; and restoring interpretive signage at both ends of the High Bridge. Work on the Tower, which is separate from the Anchor Parks program, is expected to start next year. Aqueduct trail work and signage will come in later phases.

For the digitally minded: The Parks Dept. has installed five "smart benches," one next to the Bronx entrance to the High Bridge and four in Manhattan Highbridge Park including one at the base of the steps leading to the bridge. The benches, designed by Cambridge-based Soofa, provide free, solar-powered charging for mobile devices and help Parks staff estimate visitation by counting Wi-Fi-enabled devices as they pass. Users need to bring their own cable.



Interior staircase of High Bridge Tower.

Walkers of the World

We never anticipated the variety of nationalities who come to the Keeper's House. How do a couple of Icelandic citizens – in the U.S. on a temporary assignment – manage to find us? And that group of Germans who came late on a cold brisk day! They were serious hikers. One explained, speaking to me in German – that he is a butler, working temporarily in New York City. Two francophone Montrealers came down for a weekend. Forget those Broadway shows. The trail and the Keeper's House are what delighted them. On a recent weekend we could have used a docent who speaks Chinese. Where was Lesley Walter, our board member who speaks Mandarin? Another day, a native Korean brought his young daughter, whose name is Arizona.

Evidently, visitors just Google “Interesting walks in the area” and then they find us. We love it. Not to forget all the rivertowns walkers and runners and historians who come on repeat visits, bringing friends and neighbors. Come soon and try out our marvelous new interactive map of the trail. –*Mavis Cain*



Keeper's House Visitor and Education Center

15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY
between Broadway (Route 9) and Main St.

The house is adjacent to the Old Croton Aqueduct trail.

Hours: Saturdays and Sundays, 10am to 4pm

The Keeper's House is an estimated 5- to 10-minute walk uphill from the Dobbs Ferry Station on Metro-North's Hudson Line Railroad. Service from Grand Central Terminal.

For more information call **914-693-4117**. In case of inclement weather, the house may be closed.



Have You Earned Your Miler's Badge?

Aqueduct Walks & Tours co-leader, Sara Kelsey, reports that 30 people have earned certificates and patches from the Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct's Milers Program. And there are quite a few others still “working on it.” Sara created the program in 2014 in response to member requests. Aqueduct walkers and runners who have completed the entire Westchester trail distance of 26.2 miles, between the New Croton Dam and the New York City border, earn a “26” badge and certificate. Those who complete the full 41-mile distance to the New York Public Library, where the Aqueduct's distributing reservoir once stood, earn a “41” badge and certificate.

The program runs on the honor system. Participants can cover the distance in however many segments and in whichever direction they wish, over weeks, months, or years. Sara confesses it took her eight years to cover all 26 miles, though some have done it in a single day. So far seven milers have become docents at the Keeper's House; one said she and her husband “fell in love” with the trail as they earned their patches. For complete details, contact Sara Kelsey at skelsey@aqueduct.org or visit the Friends' website at www.aqueduct.org, where application forms may be downloaded.

Self-Guided Walks by Carlos Gee

Friends member and avid trail walker Carlos Gee has walked the entire 26-mile length of the Aqueduct in Westchester trail (thereby earning a Patch). His ambitious and accomplished blog, *Scenes from the Trail*, recounts his multi-day journey photographically, with helpful tips and photos of what he saw along the way.

Carlos has generously allowed the Friends to reproduce his blog entries on our website, www.aqueduct.org, where you will find links to the following five trail segments:

- Croton Gorge Park to Sing Sing Kill Greenway
- Ossining Weir to Sleepy Hollow
- Sleepy Hollow to Dobbs Ferry
- Dobbs Ferry to Yonkers
- Yonkers to The Bronx

Follow along on his adventure, and thank you, Carlos!

Calendar Notes

Watch the calendar at our website www.aqueduct.org for details on events listed below and for guided walks, tours, and visits to the weir chamber in Ossining led by the Friends.

Join Earth Day Trail Cleanup in Yonkers Saturday, April 22

Volunteer with Mayor Mike Spano in beautifying the Old Croton Aqueduct. Visit www.aqueduct.org (Calendar) or www.yonkersny.gov/cleanup for details, or call 914-377-6429. Co-sponsored by the Friends, NY State Parks, and the City of Yonkers.

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct 2017 Annual Meeting Sunday, April 23, 2pm

"Turning Water Into Money: Aaron Burr's Manhattan Company," a talk by Gerard Koeppel. See full description in this issue.

Fifth Annual I Love My Parks Day Saturday, May 6

The Friends will again lead an event to control invasives on the Aqueduct in the Croton area.

Editorial Change. Ruth Gastel is stepping down after eight years as editor of the Friends' newsletter, with appreciation from the Friends for her skilled and dedicated service in this role. We invite expressions of interest from Aqueduct devotees with writing and editorial experience. Please contact Charlotte Fahn (see back page).



The view at Greystone Station, a reminder of the scenic splendors of Metro-North's Hudson Line, which gives ready access to and from much of the Aqueduct trail. (Photo by D. Chazin)

Take the Train...to the Aqueduct!

Mark Perrault, an experienced walker and hiker from out of town who, in early December 2016, walked most of the Westchester portion of the Aqueduct trail, sent the Friends the following note:

"I did my walk in two days. The proximity of the parallel Metro-North line is unique in the USA, and presents great opportunities for doing sequential walks without packs from a single home base, in my case the Hampton Inn in North Yonkers...I am very confident in making this statement. It is not just the fact that there is a parallel rail line with passenger trains. It is the frequency of the trains and the existence of stations every few miles only a short walk to the west, all of which provide great freedom in walking (with one major exception: you can reach the Croton-Harmon Station from New Croton Dam, but the road walk along Route 129 is dangerous. I hope something can be done to connect the dam to Quaker Bridge Road in a safer and more agreeable manner). I am surprised there is not active marketing of this as a walking experience by the regional tourism industry."

Mr. Perrault is a retired career freight railroad management employee.

Daniel Chazin, a New Jersey resident who is also an experienced hiker familiar with the Aqueduct, as well as a railroad buff, commented as follows:

"I was about to agree, but then I realized there is a similar trail located just a few miles away: the Bronx River Pathway. It too is paralleled by a railroad – in fact, a different branch of the same railroad – and it has stations every few miles that are even closer to the trail than the ones along the Aqueduct, with at least the same frequency of passenger service.

"One can argue that the Aqueduct provides a more interesting walk, especially since the Bronx River Pathway runs right along the Bronx River Parkway for most of its length (although in some sections, they are a significant distance from each other). The Bronx River Pathway is only about 10 miles long (with a two-mile break in Scarsdale-Hartsdale), while the Aqueduct is over 20 miles long (although the northern portion is not easily accessible by train, and there are several interruptions where roadwalking is required). But both trails do, in my view, offer a relatively similar experience, and both are equally accessible by frequent rail passenger service.

"I'm not aware of any commuter rail line elsewhere in the country with a parallel trail."

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct
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Interim Newsletter Editor: Charlotte Fahn

News items, reminiscences, and comments welcome:

email: czfahn@gmail.com, tel.: 914-478-3961,
or by mail c/o the Friends.

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Join Us!

Your tax-deductible contribution helps to protect and preserve the trail.

Members receive our newsletters. New Members can choose
to receive our Westchester ☐ or NYC ☐ map at no charge.

☐ Renewal

☐ New Member

☐ Keeper \$500

☐ Good Friend \$50

☐ Best Friend \$250

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☐ Very Good Friend \$100

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Added donation (thank you!): \$ _____

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Please make checks payable to Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct. Send with this
coupon to the Friends at Keeper's House, 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522.

**For inquiries about Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic
Park** or to report trail conditions, call Historic Site Manager
Steven Oakes at 914-693-5259, or write to him at 15 Walnut
Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522.

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct is a
private, non-profit, volunteer organization
formed to protect and preserve the Old Croton
Aqueduct in Westchester County and New
York City. The Friends work to raise public
awareness of the Aqueduct and trail, and to se-
cure the resources that will enable this historic
greenway to remain unspoiled in perpetuity.
Tel.: 914-693-4117. Website: www.aqueduct.org

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