



*A ventilator located just south of Lyndhurst*

## Trail Graffiti - finally a way to restore old stones by the Editor

Anyone walking the Aqueduct trail has seen ventilators and weirs covered with graffiti. Over the years Parks has experimented with a variety of techniques to remove graffiti, but none passed the requirement that the underlying rock be unharmed. Until now.

A fine limestone/glass powder, applied with water spray, removed graffiti on 2 ventilators with no ill effects. As a final corrective, an outer "sacrificial" coating will allow the removal of future graffiti on a regular basis. So far two ventilators received the test treatment.

The Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park budget never included funding for graffiti removal, an admittedly ongoing effort. The Friends will soon start a campaign to raise financing from our neighbors and local businesses. Grants have been applied for and fundraising letters to the 1,400 adjacent neighbors, a crucial first step, will be sent out soon, so that work can begin next year.

The Aqueduct trail is a backyard front-row seat to Nature. We hope to inspire our neighbors and friends to give back to the outdoor places they love.

### What's going on?

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Fixing Trail  
Graffiti

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The Riverwalk  
Connection

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Managing  
Invasives

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Park Manager  
Notes

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Winner of 2nd  
Annual Essay  
Contest

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AqueFest 2024!!

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## **Riverwalk - Connecting all the Trails**

**by Jeffrey Anzevino, AICP, Director, Scenic Hudson's  
Land Use Advocacy**

In addition to the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail, two other long-distance north-south trails serve Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown, and Irvington: the Empire State Trail and Westchester RiverWalk. In order to provide maximum benefits to everyone, these trails must connect to each other, so missing trail sections must be constructed.

One of the most critical sections slated for construction is the 0.6-mile gap that would connect two sections of the Westchester RiverWalk that extend under the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge. The “Westchester RiverWalk Connection,” once completed, would allow people to walk or bike between places north of the Bridge (waterfront parks, new developments, the Tarrytown Metro-North Station) with popular spots south of the Bridge (Lyndhurst, the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail, Sunnyside, and the Village of Irvington).



Working with partners (including the Village of Tarrytown, Westchester County, Metro-North Railroad, and the New York State Thruway Authority), Scenic Hudson is coordinating an environmental review of the RiverWalk Connection that is expected to begin in the fall. A robust public outreach effort is part of these plans. We want to hear from you! If you have ideas about about the project, or if you would simply like to learn more, contact Jeffrey Anzevino, at [janzevino@scenichudson.org](mailto:janzevino@scenichudson.org).



## Managing Invasives along the Trail

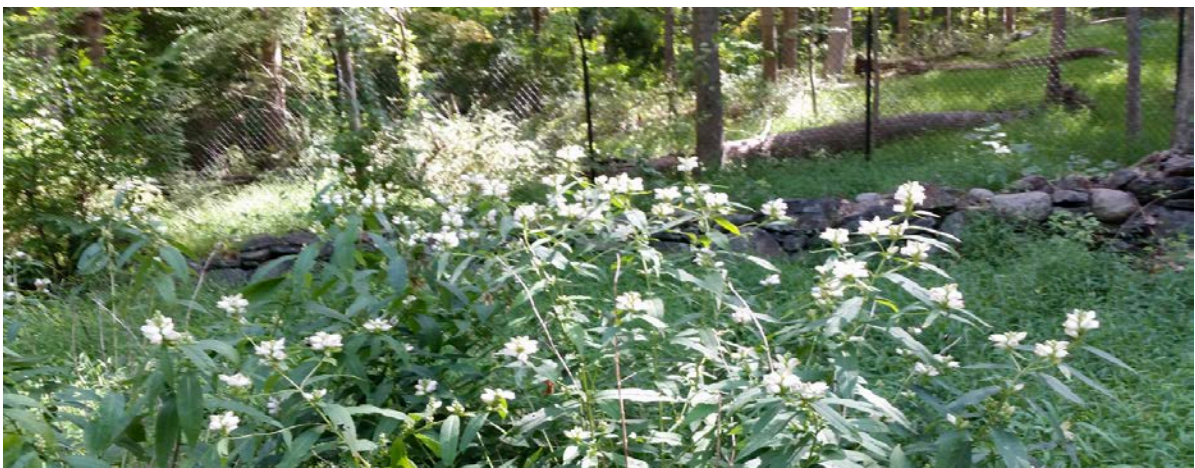
by Diane Alden

Walking the trail, I observed a few beautiful native New York asters growing in a small area. The next week they had been mowed! With permission from our Park Manager, I had logs placed around the perimeter with the understanding that section would not be mowed. Over the years, the asters re-emerged and flourished with the removal of many invasive species threatening to engulf them.



*A plot of thriving asters*

With support from FOCA and with help from volunteers, colleagues and nature organizations, I have been tending sections of the Aqueduct Trail since 2012, using different approaches. One method involves finding native plants and nurturing them. Or, removing invasive species in an area and evaluating if there might be a sufficient native plant seed bank in the soil to permit the emergence of native plants, which happened when we removed multi-flora rose bushes and Turtlehead plants emerged.



*Invasive turtleheads*

Or, if not done carefully, diligently, and over time, invasive plants could return so we may have to reconsider our strategy. Or, in sections overwhelmed by invasive species, removing them might leave barren areas in which case we can consider restoring with native plants, which we have done two years in a row. *To be continued....*



## Park Manager's Notes by Steve Oakes

The Aqueduct trail resonates with many of those who know of it, but not always for the similar reasons. For some the trail is utilitarian, a shortcut. For others, a route that avoids streets, or merely a convenient place to walk the dog. Most would agree that the trail is tree-lined, or at least 'leafy,' and liken it to an earlier era.

Trees were an important cultural component of the communities along the Hudson River, and indeed throughout the east. The American elm was one popular street tree, renowned for its spreading, graceful shape which often gave a cathedral-like look to city and country streets. Alas a fungus and a beetle to spread it arrived in 1930 with European elm logs destined for a sawmill in Chicago; by the 1970s most elm trees in the east were dead, an estimated 77 million trees, and streets barren.

The aqueduct property, however, had few trees on it for much of the time the water system was in operation. Engineers rightly feared that tree roots would work their way into the stones that faced many of the steeper slopes and retaining walls, and potentially into the aqueduct conduit itself, and wreak havoc as they grew. Old photographs show a barren landscape, with the only trees on the land hugging the edge of the property lines. The land was wide open for most of its width, looking like a small-scale iteration of a clear-cut power line scar across the land.

At some point—a case could be made this started during WWI, with labor shortages—the efforts to keep the Aqueduct property clearcut seemed to have waned, although only to a point. Clearly the efforts to prevent tree growth ended completely by the mid-1950s, and within a decade a walker on the trail was more likely to be in shade than sun. Most of what grew is typical for the area—lots of invasives like Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) and Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), trees that commonly colonize disturbed ground. These trees are not the strongest or most long-lived, which is the basis for another story



## **The Park Manager's Notes - continued**

The mid-1960s image shows the Mill River Culvert, which is at the south end of Rockefeller State Park Preserve. Note the cut grass at the top, descending down the sides to the point where the steep, 45-degree slope with its stone face began. A current view today would be one of what looks more like the tree-covered ridgeline of a hill, with little to mark it as manmade.



*Mid-1960s Mill River Culvert*

## **A Short Note on Bikes on the Aqueduct**



The Aqueduct is very much a shared trailway. Strollers, runners, tricycles, bikes, dogs and people of all ages come out to play. At certain times of day in certain sections the trail can be relatively crowded. So we at the Friends hope that bikers make themselves known before they pass walkers. A friendly “On your

left!” or a bell ring can work wonders and enhances safety. Not everyone is as nimble as they might wish! And remember when trails are wet biking may cause ruts. Please consider walking at these times.



## 2024 Winning Yonkers High School Essay - Shennaiya Rose



*Shennaiya Rose won \$500 First Prize for herself and \$500 for Lincoln High School in the Second Annual Yonkers High School Aqueduct Essay Contest. Her teacher, Ms. Sunitha Howard, is a New York State Master Teacher in Science. Here is Shennaiya's winning essay, which was a hit with all the judges!*

### Mr. J and the Croton Aqueduct

My boy is sick, he vomited twice since his papa left for work. That was two hours ago when his papa kissed his head and held his hand while whispering something under his breath. He must be praying for our boy to get better. He couldn't look me in the eyes before he left, I understood, the silence was enough. We have seen this twice before with our girl and her grandmother before they left us for the abode of the blessed. If I remember correctly, first came the tummy aches, second came the fatigue and the vomit, I forgot the rest but if you skip a few other symptoms, we always end the same, death. The rancid smell would not leave, no matter how long I stayed on the floor scrubbing with grandmother's old head wrap or how many times I washed the sheets. The smell came out, eventually, my fingers felt raw but at least the smell was gone.

The same smell that was left, made me nauseous. It didn't smell like home.

Grandmother's stew was the smell of home not the smell of sickness and death. I can imagine the taste in this moment, the taste of good chicken. Not the chicken we find in cans but the kind that was plucked up right from the farm straight onto our dinner plates. But that is only a pipe dream, we are not like Mr. J.

The state of New York and Mr. J are why we are currently stable. Mr. J is mysterious to me, my husband comes home covered in dirt, mud, dried leaves and other things I could not identify, because the first things that leaves his mouth are how he saw the back of Mr. J's head today or how Mr. J's expensive work boot left a print in the mud or how Mr. J invited some of the workers for a drink over by the pub two nights ago.



Fall 2024

## Mr. J and the Croton Aqueduct *continued*

Mr. J is mysterious to me, mysterious in the way that I must wonder why he is constantly plaguing my husband's mind. I eventually found out in the morning why it is that my husband cares so much about Mr. J, my husband feels indebted to him because in past jobs he earned forty cents less. My husband wants to show his gratitude to Mr. J by mailing him a nice card with a kind note inside. He must be out of his mind, buying a nice card cost money but mailing costs something that we could not possibly afford with our boy being sick.

Our boy is sick because of the water; it's dirty because of how much trash and waste is being thrown in our water source. That water that I give my boy is dirty, how can I possibly make up for that as a mother, after all our family went through to get here, the land of opportunity, just for it all to end because of dirty water. I complained to my husband, but he says the water aqueduct is almost finished, he keeps on saying, "...in a few months my love."

I've seen it in the newspapers, it's supposed to be big and complex, starts from the Croton River here in Westchester County and travels forty miles to Manhattan. My husband is proud that he worked on this project that would help better the life of our boy and the other children of our neighbors. At nighttime after another vomiting and cleaning session and my boy constantly asking for water, I put him to bed.

I'm tired, I go to bed to seek the comfort of my husband, but the word that left his mouth next sent me into a fit of rage. What did he say? "Mr. J..." I was getting more tired listening to that man's name constantly being mentioned in our home.

Did he live here? No.

Does he know my son's name? No. My daughter's name? No.

Mr. J does not even know the name of my husband. He just looks at me with this look of disappointment, he then tells me, "Two months." We made a promise to each other when our boy first started getting sick, we told each other we would never lose hope, but I lied, I couldn't be hopeful after our girl left us. I tried though.

The day came, the day that would lead to a big improvement in the way of life for the people of New York. The Croton Aqueduct provided clean water for New York and the children of our neighbors. Someone caught my eye; it was Mr. J or that was what my husband called him, I never cared to ask what his full name was. Many people were credited for the creation of the Croton Aqueduct, but I finally learned who Mr. J really was, John B. Jervis was his name. My boy would've been happy to see such a magnificent structure that his papa helped to build. I would like to think that he is probably discussing with his sister and grandmother the idea of the Croton Aqueduct in the abode of the blessed.

# AQUEFEST 2024!!!!



*A trailside puppet show*



*County Legislator Imamura, Mayor Rossillo and State Representative Mary Jane Shimsky cut the birthday cake*



*Aqueduct water fun*



*Senator Stuart-Cousins and Dobbs Ferry Trustee Jessica Galen*



*Building arches*



*Celebrating State Parks' 100th Anniversary*



# Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

This *Occasional Newsletter* is written for our wonderfully engaged and supportive Friends' members. We want to update you about current concerns, ongoing trail work, mighty volunteer efforts and Keeper's House news. Our longtime outstanding editors, Charlotte Fahn and Ruth Gastel, have both retired. We hope this will fill some of the gap they left when the Friends Newsletter was last published in 2017. If you have comments please send to [OCATrailTips@parks.ny.gov](mailto:OCATrailTips@parks.ny.gov)



We are always on the lookout for volunteers with an interest in people, local history, walking or a passion for improving the trail ecology. Have you met our experienced docents at the Keeper's House? They welcome weekend visitors and know all about our National Historic Landmark aqueduct. Try it out!

Please submit information about downed or precarious trees, trail washouts, illicit use of the trail and other trail matters to [OCATrailTips@parks.ny.gov](mailto:OCATrailTips@parks.ny.gov). Describe your concerns in detail and describe the location, including municipality and cross streets. Steven Oakes, manager of Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park, and his State Park staff will tend to the matter as soon as they can.

The Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct is a private, nonprofit volunteer organization formed to protect and preserve the Old Croton Aqueduct. The Friends work to raise public awareness of the Aqueduct and trail and to secure the resources that will enable this historic greenway to remain unspoiled in perpetuity.