



Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

Newsletter

No. 25, Winter 2006/07

The Long Shadow of the Croton

Christopher R. Tompkins

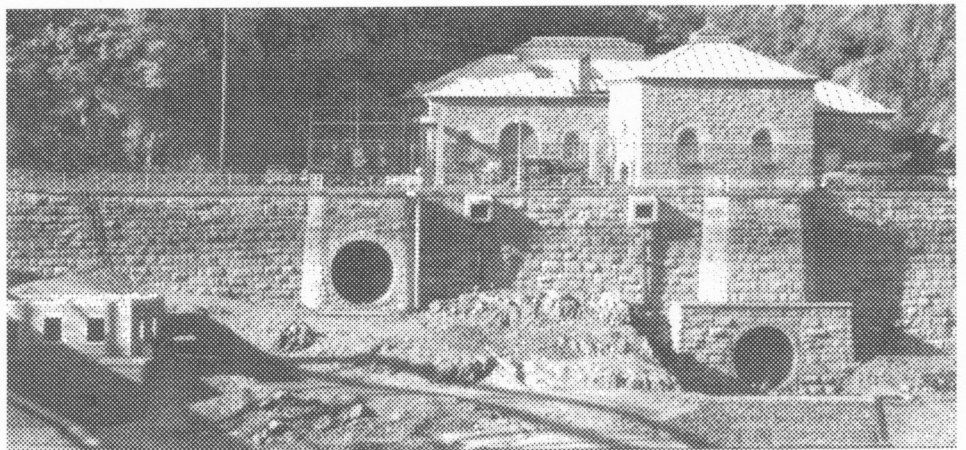
I vividly recall the sound of rushing water, the sound of our steps echoing off the stone walls, and the winding staircase disappearing into the depths of the gatehouse. My grandfather held my hand and coaxed me forward, but I just could not go any further—my fear had overcome my curiosity in this fascinating building that reminded me of a fortress or a castle. My grandfather, John Matthew Tompkins, was the superintendent, or “gate keeper” in archaic terms, of the Croton Aqueduct gatehouse in Yorktown, but was coming to the end of his long career with the Department of the Water Supply for the City of New York.

John Tompkins’ career spanned the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, and Viet Nam, not to mention the terms of many mayors of the City of New York. All that while, though, his job and the jobs of so many others was to protect New York’s water and to ensure that there was a constant flow of clean water from the taps of every home and business in New York. Granted, by the 1950s, the original

Croton Aqueduct was more on “reserve” than in use, but its location and importance in the entire system—both historically and into the future—was not lost on me, despite my being only a child.

“Poppy,” as the family called him, came from a long line of Tompkinses connected to the Croton Valley. In the mid-eighteenth century, an earlier John Tompkins purchased land at the confluence of the Croton River and the Hunter’s Brook from the Van Cortlandt family of what we know today as Croton-on-Hudson. That purchase began the connection between the Croton Valley and the Tompkins family that exists to this day. Poppy and his twelve brothers and sisters were born

Christopher Tompkins lives in Pennsylvania and is the author of “The Croton Dams and Aqueduct,” Images of America series, 2000, Arcadia Publ., Charleston, SC. This is a two-part memoir.



The New Croton Aqueduct gatehouse, showing aqueduct intakes, c. 1956, when Croton Reservoir was drained. Remains of 1842 gatehouse are at left. This view is now obscured by the current New Croton gatehouse, built in the 1980s. (All photos are from “The Croton Dams and Aqueduct” by Christopher Tompkins)

within sight of the Croton, but he was one of those numerous children born after the New Croton Dam was completed in 1906 and the waters of the enlarged Croton Reservoir had covered their ancestral home. Poppy's older siblings were born at the family farm while the dam was under construction and experienced the move from the family lands to their new location above the encroaching waters.

Poppy's life in the Croton Valley was influenced by the presence of the Croton Reservoir, the New Croton Dam, and the Croton Aqueduct. The three provided employment and some recreational enjoyment for the many members of his family. With so many family members, various members used non-agricultural means to make a living. Chester Tompkins was an exceptional stonemason; Arthur Tompkins opened and operated a repair garage for "horseless carriages" that still operates under the name Tompkins Garage to this day. Relatives such as Harvey Anderson and Lester Wilson gained employment overseeing the upkeep of the park below Croton Dam, known today as Croton Gorge Park.

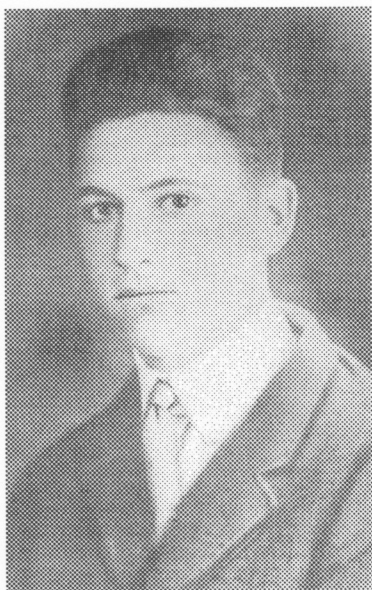
John married Irma Dennison, who grew up in Peekskill and whose family owned Dia Maria's in Cortlandt. His years working for the City of New York were spent residing in

the Palmer House (Keeper's House), along Route 129 and just down the road from the Gate House Bridge (also known as the Arcady Road Bridge and the "Thunder Bridge," for its loud "thunder" when its deck was made of wood planks), the City Barn, and the gatehouse itself. The house, still owned by the City of New York, is now used by the Department of Environmental Protection police, but is slated for demolition. After surviving the encroachment of the reservoir's waters when it was moved to higher ground by a team of 50 oxen, its abandonment during the Viet Nam era when it was used

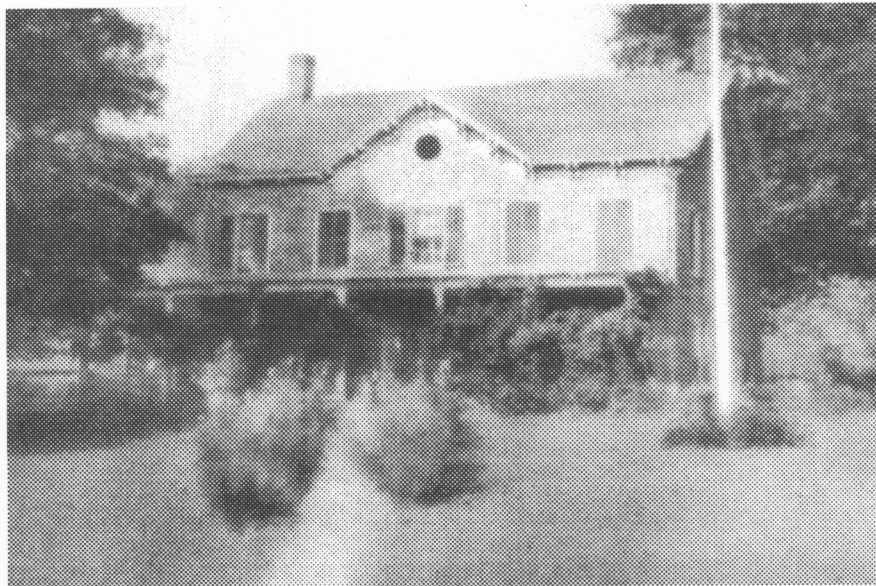
by squatters, and now its service as a police station, its historic value in the Croton Valley will be lost unless steps can be taken to save it.

Poppy's life in the Palmer House was simple, but fruitful in many ways. Known throughout town for his gardening interests and capabilities, he also kept chickens and rabbits in an outbuilding that still had straw in it when I walked the grounds in the 1980s. A small cement dam that can still be seen off Chapman Road provided spring water run-off from Turkey Mountain for the family. Coal deliveries were made from Peekskill on a regular basis and Poppy and my father, John Roger, would rise early in the morning to "get the heat up" and start the kitchen stove. A rowboat was always nearby for fishing in the reservoir just below the house, and a rain gauge stood out front for official measurements taken daily for the record at "Croton Lake."

Amidst this rural life-style, Poppy oversaw a water supply system that provided water for the financial and



John M. Tompkins, Croton Reservoir superintendent, photo c. 1920.



Palmer House, 1920s.

business capital of the world, just 35 miles to the south. The atmosphere changed during World War II, when fears of sabotage of the water supply were as high as they are today. The Japanese caretaker of the Chapman estate, located just above the Palmer House, was attacked as he went to pick up the mail at the rural delivery boxes. It was Poppy who stopped the grievous assault.

(Part 2 will be in the next issue of the newsletter.)

Results of High Bridge Inspection Reported

The long-awaited results of a painstaking engineering inspection of the High Bridge have been released, providing the technical basis essential to planning the bridge's restoration. The inspection was conducted by the New York City Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the Department of Parks & Recreation, which has jurisdiction over the bridge, and with support from the Department of Environmental Protection, which is responsible for the bridge's water pipes and gatehouses. On November 17, the commissioners of the three agencies, Iris Weinshall, Adrian Benepe, and Emily Lloyd, respectively, came together on the bridge to announce completion of the inspection.

The event, held in Bronx Highbridge Park on a day of crystalline clearness, was attended by elected officials, community leaders, local residents, and schoolchildren and had a celebratory air. Commissioner Lloyd called the bridge "another wonderful public space from our historic water supply system." Commissioner Benepe said "we now have a road map" of what it will take to open the bridge.

In pipes beneath its deck, the landmark 1848 bridge, the city's oldest and linchpin of the "Old" Croton Aqueduct, carried New York City's earliest supply of clean water high over the Harlem River to Manhattan, and was a favorite tourist destination and heavily used pedestrian link between Bronx and Manhattan neighborhoods. The High Bridge Coalition, including Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct, is campaigning to reopen the bridge, closed since the 1970s.

The multi-year inspection, which included structural assessment, seismic analysis, and evaluation of the masonry and underwater piers, found—not surprisingly—considerable loss of mortar in the joints

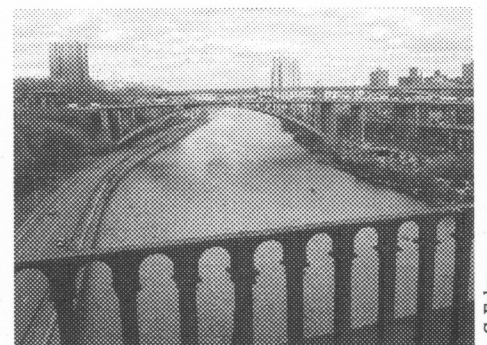
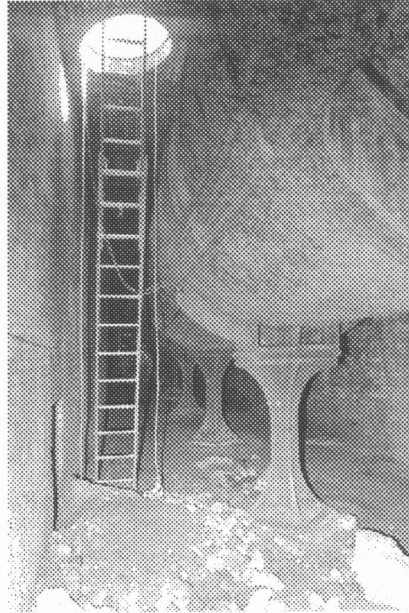
between the stone blocks. Water infiltration has damaged the attic (the chamber below the deck housing the water pipes), and the tie-rods, which join and reinforce the north and south walls of the attic, were

found to be of "very high quality wrought iron but of a low strength." Foundation inspection revealed no bridge settling and the submerged timber piles to be in good condition. The steel span that replaced five arches in 1928 is in fair condition, with some of its deterioration again attributable to water leakage. The roofs and stone walls of the two gatehouses need substantial repair.

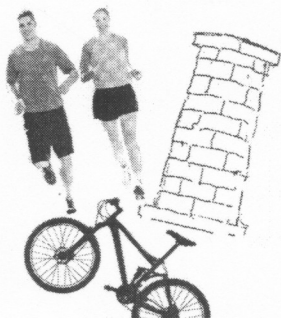
The largest item in the report's recommendations is replacement of the tie-rods. Other recommendations include removing and later re-installing the brick walkway, painting and repairing the steel span, repointing the masonry piers, making repairs in the pipe vault, power-washing the bridge, and removing, restoring, and resetting the historic railing, whose design echoes the arches of the bridge. The cost estimate for complete restoration is close to \$60 million; Congressman Jose Serrano has secured an initial \$5 million in federal funds. It is not yet clear whether the work can be done in stages that will allow the public on the bridge before all the work is done. The inspection was carried out by Baker Engineering NY, Inc., under contract to the Department of Transportation.



Looking toward Manhattan's High Bridge water tower, the deck of the High Bridge (left) and the pipe vault beneath it (right), showing the 90-in. pipe added in 1862 to increase capacity. (Photos by Daniel Avila/NYC Dept. of Parks & Recreation)



High Bridge railing.



An AqueFest Thank You to all who made it happen!

In Yonkers Tom Tarnowsky, Joe Kozlowski, Robert Baron, Marc Turken and The Drop Dead Blues Band, Mala Waldron and Colorful Kenny!

In Hastings Eileen Charles, Fred Charles, Sarah Brockus, Gaby Bordwin, Andrew Bordwin, Helena Crowley, Tom Quinn, Sarah Knox, MaryEllen MacCabe, Acoustic RiverRun, Jessica Linton, Maria Carluccio, Denise Rene Face Painting, Jake Shulman-Ment and Riverspa.

In Dobbs Ferry Mavis Cain, Bill Cassella, Ruth Gastel, Sara Kelsey, Jeremy Larsen, Nicholas Reiter, Amy Bennett and son, the Brosnahan family, Liz Selzer, Deniz Tuzun, Lu Hamlin, Hal Kaplan. And our artists and musicians: Matt Turk, David Goldman, Mia DeBethune and The High Arts Conservatory and Ed Bettinelli.

In Irvington Karen Schatzel, Michele Sheehy, Molly Penn, Nina Orville, Judy Kalderon. And from the Irvington High School Key Club: Erin Madden, Marisa Zipay, Storey Katherine Day, Beth Armstrong, Jordana Holden, Katelyn

Menard and Candice Herschkorn. Our musicians: Dan Elias and Ed Pitaro, Paul Mandry and Maureen Lackner, Riverspa and Chris Ceccilini.

In Sleepy Hollow John Flack, Sharon Blackwell, Lindsay Blackwell, Dave and Kitty Starky, Joan Tosi, MaryLou Gladstone of the Tarrytown/Sleepy Hollow Arts Council, Ildiko Viczian and her troupe of NYC dancers of yogis and Christopher Reising.

In Ossining Holly Daly, Charlotte Fahn, Peter Iskenderian, Linda Levine, Susan Meigs, Todd Vunderink. The Ossining H.S. "High Voltage" Jazz Band, Fred Gillen Jr. and Blake Rowe.

In Croton Carl Grimm, Bob Kornfeld, Ed Rondthaler, John Selkelsky, Lloyd Moss, Diane Alden, Mayor Gregory Schmidt, Robert Elliot, Charles Kane, Ann Lindau, Scott Urgola and Rachel Sukert.

Our special thanks to Rachel Ginsburg, Eli Nivin, and Doug Emilio.

Aqueduct News / In Brief

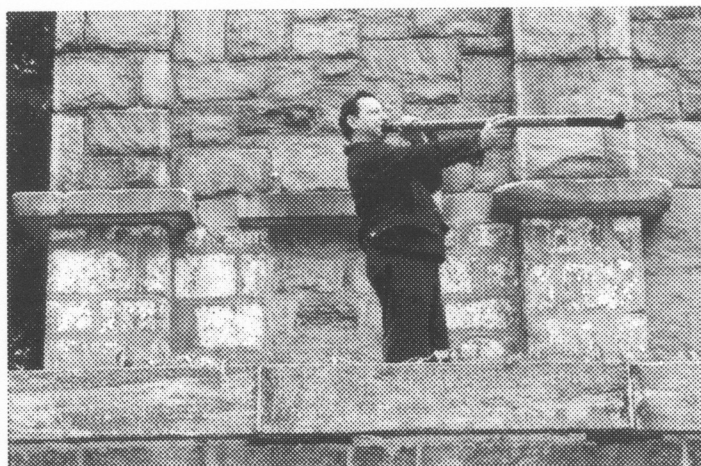
Trail users must wait until 2008 for the end of the detour around the back of Sleepy Hollow High School. Until then a longer detour, to Broadway, is required because of major construction at the school. . . . Congressman Jose Serrano has secured \$200,000 in federal funds to refurbish the wide stone stairway connecting the Bronx end of the High Bridge with the Harlem River waterfront. The stairway was built in the 1880s to serve tourists visiting the bridge. . . . The Friends hosted the October 17th meeting of the Westchester Chapter of Green Drinks International, a network of planning and environmental professionals. The event included a visit to the Keeper's House. . . . The Village of Ossining has added 10 acres of woodland with big Hudson views to its Crawbuckie Nature Preserve,

reachable from the Aqueduct. . . . Some 240 runners and 200 walkers took part in Ossining Matters' 4th annual 5K run/2 mile walk on the Aqueduct on Sept. 9 to raise funds for local schools. Famed marathoner Khalid Khannouchi again lent his support. . . . An exhibit of projects by Architecture for Humanity New York, at the Urban Center (457 Madison Ave., 50th-51st St.) beginning January 17, will include ideas the group has been developing for the High Bridge and its two parks. . . . When asked by the Rivertowns Enterprise's Inquiring Photographer, Anne Marie Leone, in the Oct.6 issue, "What are your favorite fall activities in the Rivertowns?," 3 of the 4 area residents interviewed put walking or otherwise enjoying the Aqueduct at the top of their list.

AqueFest 2006! September 30 was a gorgeous fall day and hundreds of folks enjoyed music and merriment all along the trail. Many toured the Keeper's House in Dobbs Ferry, and many more contributed to the Friends' project to preserve the house for use as a visitor center. Our goals of raising Aqueduct awareness and support for the Friends' work were amply met.



At the Ossining weir, the High Voltage band from Ossining High School, while inside the weir . . .



Dance, and David Galt on the didgeridoo, at the Pocantico weir.



A warm reception awaits visitors in Irvington. From (l-r): Dan Elias, Ed Pitaro, Marisa Zipay, Erin Madden, Storey Katherine Day, and (seated) Michele Sheehy.



Inside the Keeper's House: why we seek contributions!

Photo credits: Ossining and Pocantico pictures by C. Fahn. Irvington picture by K. Schatzel. Keeper's House picture by Anne Marie Leone.

The Gatehouse – “Where Culture Flows”



Excitement and water images flowed with equal abundance at the ribbon-cutting on October 17 of the Croton system's landmark 135th St. gatehouse, now transformed into a theater. “This is both the oldest and the newest performance venue in New York City,”

said Patricia Cruz, Executive Director of Harlem Stage/Aaron Davis Hall Performing Arts Center, in presiding over the festivities. To the accompaniment of drums, costumed dancers evoking the motion of water welcomed Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Congressman Charles Rangel, and other dignitaries, celebrities, and guests into renovated space.



The excavated portion of the subsurface chambers of the 135th St. gatehouse, before construction of the new theater's floor at about the height of the top of the ladders. The four round openings at the base of the back wall are the pipes of the Old Croton Aqueduct as they exit the chamber and head west a short distance, then down Amsterdam Ave. (Photo by John Bartelstone, courtesy of Harlem Stage)

“The Gatehouse is a happy addition to New York City's cultural life, and its laudable goal is to give artists a space of their own,” wrote the *New York Times*, calling it a “welcoming space.” The adaptive reuse project, at 135th St. and Convent Ave. in Manhattan, across the street from City College, will also give tangible life to the story of Croton water for audiences and the general public,

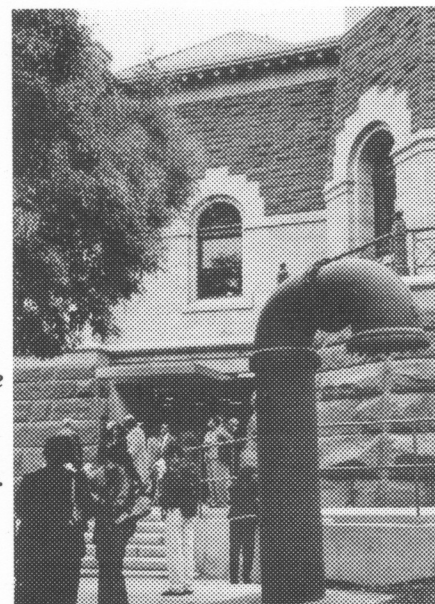
through both interpretive plaques and the unique character of the space.

The ornate 1890 stone gatehouse, designed by Frederick S. Cook and in service until 1984, was one of the few structures where the Old (1842) and New (1890) Croton aqueducts came together, the Old Croton Aqueduct having been rerouted to enter the new gatehouse. The 47-foot-high main space – now the new theater – was actually a street-level shelter over six stories of complex underground waterworks, extending in places 75 feet belowground.

The theater's nearly 200 seats can be flexibly configured to accommodate the needs of the experimental works planned for it. The top two of the six subsurface stories have been excavated and in part will provide subsidized studio space and other services to the arts community. Ornamental brick borders around the tops of the walls, stained glass in the arched doorways, and a proscenium-like arch between the Old and New Aqueduct sides of the building attest to the inspiring quality of historic infrastructure. A new entrance has been added on Convent Ave., and a terrace on the south face affording a view to midtown Manhattan.

The \$21 million project, mainly city-funded through the Dept. of Cultural Affairs, was designed by Ohlhausen DuBois Architects in partnership with Wank Adams Slavin Associates (WASA); Douglas Emilio, a Friends board member, headed the WASA team that restored the exterior and interior of the main theater space. Information on “Waterworks,” new works commissioned for the opening, and the fall/winter season is available at www.harlemstage.org or call 212-650-7100. Plan a visit to this once and future Croton monument!

The new entrance on the Convent Ave. (east) side of the gatehouse on ribbon-cutting day. The thick pipe is one of several around the building, ventilators for New Croton Aqueduct equipment. (Photo by C. Fahn)





CALENDAR NOTE:

Sun. , Dec. 3. 11 am. Aqueduct walk, North Yonkers (Greystone) to Irvington. Includes side trails in nearby parks. Drivers: park near Greystone Sta. (Warburton & Harriman Ave.). From Grand Central take 10:20 am train, Hudson Line; exit Greystone. 8 mi. Inclement weather cancels. Sponsor: Appalachian Mountain Club. Leader: Hal Kaplan, 914- 376-3156; call for hike message beginning Sat. and for information about **Jan. 7** and **Feb. 4** hikes.



Sharing the trail on a Friends-led, September walk in Rockefeller State Park Preserve. (Photo by T. Parliment)



A new sign at the north end of the trail in Van Cortlandt Park, thanks to Park Administrator John Herrold and Friends member Michael Graff, who led the July hike. A sign was also installed at the south end, at West Gun Hill Road.

To our members: Please renew early when the notice arrives. We depend on your contributions. Thank you!

For inquiries about Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park or to report trail conditions, call Park Manager Peter Iskenderian at 914-693-5259; mailing address: 15 Walnut Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

An Easy Gift. The Friends' color map-guides of the Aqueduct in Westchester (Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park) and New York City fit into a holiday stocking or business envelope. The following carry one or both maps.

Westchester County (area code 914)

"& Antiques," 111 Grand St., Croton-on-Hudson, 271-6802 or 762-7533*

Art Barn, 211 North Highland Ave., Ossining
Ossining Heritage Area Visitor Center, J.G. Caputo Community Center, 941-3189

Hudson Office Supply, 10 Main St., Tarrytown, 631-0192

Cary's Pharmacy, 105 Main, Dobbs Ferry, 693-0008

Corey Glass Picture Framing, 3 Main St., Hastings-on-Hudson, 478-0154

Good Yarns, 8 Main, Hastings-on-Hudson, 478-0014

Office Ink, 572 Warburton Ave., Hastings-on-Hudson, 478-0777

Hudson River Museum Shop, 511 Warburton Ave., Yonkers, 963-4550*

New York City

Bronx County Historical Society, 3309 Bainbridge Ave., 718-881-8900*

Urban Center Books, 457 Madison Ave. betw. 50th and 51st St., 212-935-3595

Posman Books, Grand Central Terminal, 212-983-1111

*Call ahead to check on hours and map availability.

By mail: The maps are \$5. each (members, \$4.). Add 75 cents shipping and handling for the first map, 50 cents for each additional map. Please specify which map(s) you want. Send a check for the total to the Friends at 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522. Questions? Visit www.aqueduct.org or call 914-693-4117.

MEMBERSHIP COUPON

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

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal | <input type="checkbox"/> New Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Students & retirees \$10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good Friend \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Best Friend \$100 |

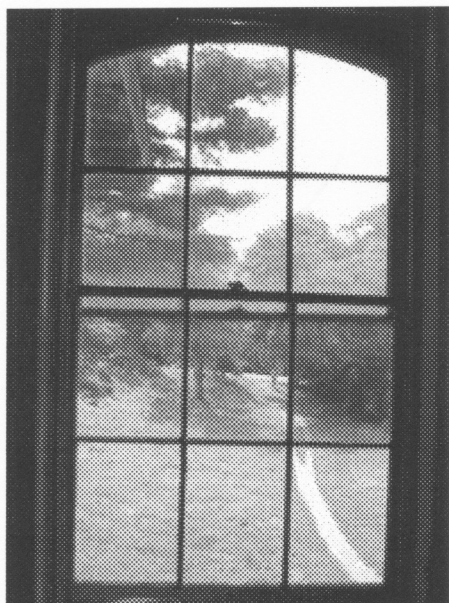
Please make check payable to Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct. Send it with this coupon to the Friends at Keeper's House, 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Please let us know if you would like to volunteer.



The trail from the Keeper's House
(Photo by Anne Marie Leone)

Newsletter: Charlotte Fahn, *Editor*. News items, reminiscences, and comments welcome: 914-478-3961 or czfahn@yahoo.com or by mail c/o the Friends.

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Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct is a private, non-profit, 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. *Address:* Keeper's House, 15 Walnut St. Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109; *telephone* 914-693-4117, www.aqueduct.org

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