

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct



Newsletter

No. 27, Summer 2007

New York City To Restore and Reopen the High Bridge

"Every resident of the city knows where High Bridge is, no matter how dense his ignorance may be as to other points of the water-service."

—Scribner's Monthly, 1877

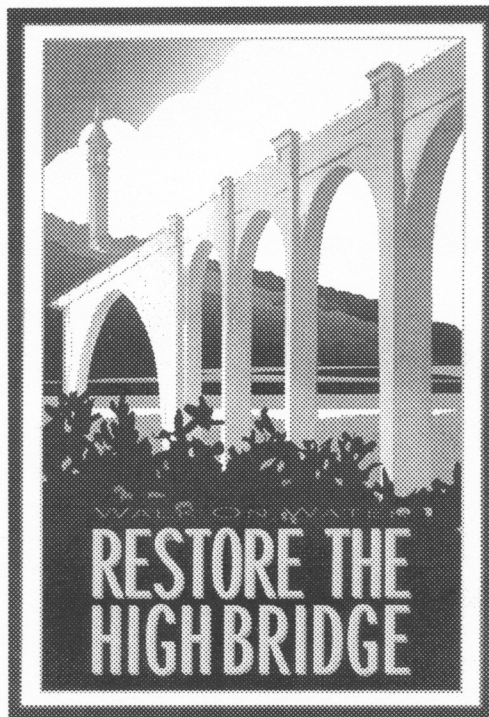
Perhaps miracles are still possible, especially when helped along by enlightened planning, in this case by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and his administration; civic activism; and perseverance. In his April 22nd Earth Day speech, the mayor revealed a far-reaching package of open space initiatives to be implemented over the coming decades as part of PlaNYC 2030. He then went on to make this stunning announcement:

"...One of the eight large parks we will be upgrading merits special attention, and I want to mention it today: Highbridge Park in Washington Heights. The park is named for the High Bridge, which was completed in 1848 to carry water from the Croton Reservoir across the Bronx and into Manhattan. It is one of our City's oldest bridges – but it has been closed to pedestrians for decades, a glaring symbol of a time when New York failed to preserve its historical treasures. It's time to fix that.

"And that's why we are committing to re-open the bridge, benefiting communities on both sides of the Harlem River. The High Bridge aqueduct was part of a water supply system that remains an engineering masterpiece – now delivering over a billion gallons of water, pure water, every day, to more than nine million people."

The Mayor is budgeting \$4.6 million for use starting this year, and \$55 million for expenditure starting in 2009, in addition to an anticipated total of \$12 million in federal money. With the needs of every component of the bridge, including the 1928 steel span, having been meticulously documented in an engineering inspection completed last fall, the project is virtually ready to go. The first phase will be to draw up design documents.

The announcement caught most High Bridge advocates by happy surprise, including the "sleeper cells" of High Bridge devotees around the city, in Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe's apt phrase. A campaign to restore and reopen the bridge began in 2001 with the formation a High Bridge Coalition steering committee, consisting of New York City's Parks & Recreation and Environmental



*The High Bridge Coalition's campaign poster.
(Design by Patti Mollica for the National Park Service)*

Protection departments and several nonprofit groups, including Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct.

The High Bridge was part of the 1992 designation of the Old Croton Aqueduct as a National Historic Landmark, the highest federal landmark status possible; it is a designated New York City landmark as well. The pipes that carried Croton River water high across the Harlem River from the mainland to Manhattan are still beneath its deck, and will serve as a reminder, in microcosm, of the monumental effort it takes to bring water to the city. The bridge's reopening should provide further impetus to the budding revival of the Harlem River as a venue for recreation, just as its completion in 1848 led to an entire tourist industry to serve the throngs who made a stroll on the bridge their destination for a day's country outing. Even now, the bridge serves as a starting point for occasional rowing regattas, and the city is developing and improving waterfront parks and esplanades along both shorelines that will connect with the bridge.

The High Bridge became a Parks Department property in 1960, transferred from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Under Commissioner Benepe, Parks has led the High Bridge campaign with years of steadfast effort by dedicated agency staff. DEP, now led by Commissioner Emily Lloyd, has provided invaluable support, reflecting its mission to promote water conservation and an understanding of the water supply. The city's Department of Transportation carried



Tourists on the Manhattan end of the High Bridge, 1925, taking in the scene below on the Harlem Speedway, which eventually became the Harlem River Drive. Source: NYC Municipal Archives.

out the multi-year engineering inspection. The commissioners of these three agencies have met on the bridge any number of times, to both raise its public profile and show support for bringing it back to life.

Representative Jose Serrano of the Bronx provided early financial support by securing \$5 million in federal funds for the bridge's restoration. And special mention must be made of the *Daily News*, whose editorial page has made the bridge's reopening one of its long-term missions. Following are excerpts from "Open the High Bridge," a November 20, 2006, editorial:

SPANNING THE HARLEM RIVER IS A MID-19TH CENTURY MARVEL, A ROMAN-STYLE AQUEDUCT THAT BROUGHT THE CITY ITS FIRST RELIABLE FRESH WATER SUPPLY AND OFFERED SPECTACULAR VISTAS TO PEDESTRIANS. A TOURIST ATTRACTION WHEN IT OPENED IN 1848, THE HIGH BRIDGE, ALAS, EVENTUALLY FELL VICTIM TO CHANGING TIMES AND A PUBLIC THAT NO LONGER THOUGHT TO CELEBRATE THIS ARCHITECTURAL GEM. IT BECAME DERELICT AND FORSAKEN AND WAS CLOSED. . . . FOR AN HOUR OR SO [ON NOV. 17], ANYONE WHO HAPPENED BY COULD AMBLE OUT ONTO THE 1,250-FOOT-LONG SPAN. THERE, THE WALKER WAS SURROUNDED BY ENDLESS SKY, THE VISTA OF MANHATTAN'S SPIRES, SEA GULLS WHEELING ON THE THERMALS BELOW, THE CURVE OF THE RIVER 116 FEET DOWN, METRO-NORTH TRAINS STREAMING ALONG THEIR TRACKS ADJACENT TO THE TRAFFIC INTERCHANGES OF THE CROSS BRONX AND THE MAJOR DEEGAN. BUT TRAFFIC AND TRAIN NOISE WAS TOO FAR AWAY TO HEAR. THERE WAS ONLY THE SOUND OF THE WIND AND THE GULLS. AND THE ECHOES OF A TIME LONG PAST, FOR THOSE WHO CARED TO HEAR. AND THEN THE GATE WAS LOCKED AGAIN. IT CANNOT REOPEN SOON ENOUGH.



On the High Bridge, Nov. 17, 2006, l. to r.: Environmental Protection Commissioner Emily Lloyd, Congressman Jose Serrano, Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe, and former Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall. (Photo by C. Fahn)

A First? Running the Aqueduct's 41 Miles

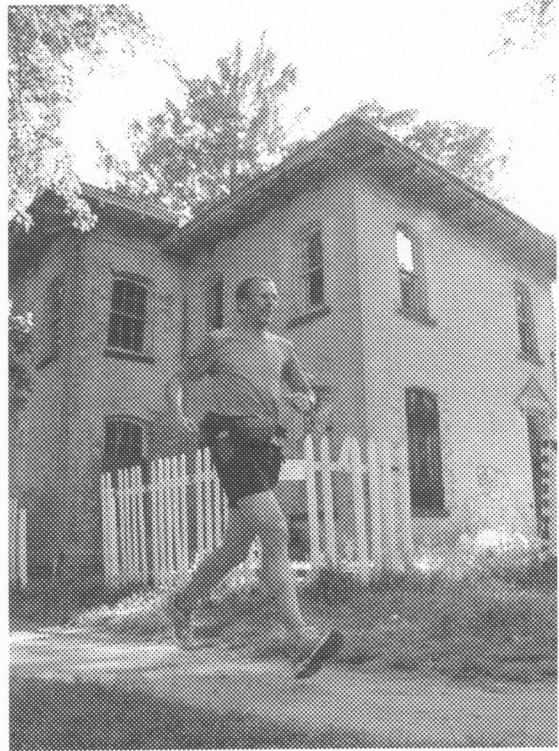
When Mavis Cain, Friends president, first received a call in mid-May about an "ultrarunner" from Colorado who was planning to run the full route of the Old Croton Aqueduct in a day, down to the library at 42nd St., she thought she might have misunderstood the message. The full 41 miles? in one day? The Friends are used to people pointing out that the distance in Westchester, 26 miles, is the standard marathon distance, but this was something altogether new.

As it turned out, on May 25 – a warm, mildly humid day – Peter Bakwin achieved his goal and more. Bob Kornfeld, our historian, had pointed out that the Aqueduct's oft-cited 41 miles (actually 40.6) were measured from the original Croton Dam, now submerged under the Croton Reservoir about three miles north of where the Aqueduct trail begins near today's New Croton Dam. Peter measured his Aqueduct run from a point close to the old dam, having to take a more indirect route along the reservoir shore than the old brick tunnel's straightline route down the valley of the Croton, adding about half a mile. These 41 miles, from the old dam to the library, took him a jaw-dropping 7 hours and 22 minutes. Actually, he ran further than that, because he started from the Ossining home of his father, Michael Bakwin, about three miles from the old dam, for a total of 44 miles in 7 hours and 54 minutes.

What was at least as impressive as the time and distance was Peter's apparent ease in accomplishing the run. When he reached the High Bridge Water Tower in Manhattan, which coincidentally was open for school groups taking part in the Department of Environmental Protection's Project Wise, he didn't seem particularly winded or tired despite having already gone about 36 miles. His father had accompanied him by car as best he could to act as "crew," providing food and water. The feat, like the runner, was eminently low-key and unassuming – no fanfare, no press coverage, just "something interesting to do."

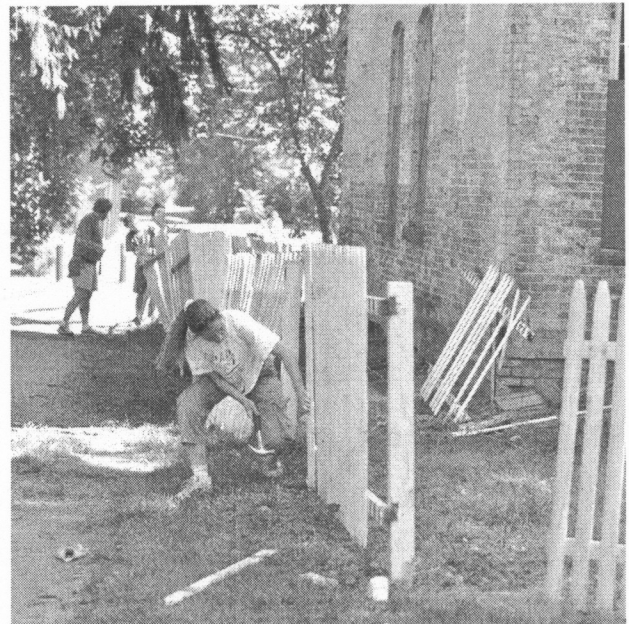
The Friends did their best to help. Mavis Cain provided maps and general guidance and contacts. Elisa Zazzera, a Friends member from Hastings, connected with him in Dobbs Ferry and kept him company, on her bike, for several miles. Charlotte Fahn, who was participating in Project Wise, greeted him at High Bridge Tower.

Peter is no stranger to the Aqueduct, having gotten to know it during boyhood summer visits to his grandparents, who once lived in the house his father now lives in. His comments after the run? "Everything went extremely well . . . It was great to be able to get up the Tower – wow, what a view. I look forward to crossing



Peter Bakwin passing the Keeper's House. (Photo by E. Zazzera)

High Bridge some day . . . That's a long siphon! Impressive construction for 1840 [about Amsterdam Ave. between 135th and 119th streets, underlain by the Manhattan Valley siphon] . . . What a great route!"



Fence-mending. A high-energy crew of Friends volunteers repaired and repainted the fence at the Keeper's House on July 14. Above, Elisa Zazzera working at the rear of the house. (Photo by F. Charles)

Aqueduct News / In Brief

On April 23rd, a glorious morning, the entire Dows Lane School, 500 strong including teachers and parents, enjoyed an exuberant ramble on the Old Croton Aqueduct as part of the Irvington School District's wellness, get-out-and-walk initiative. . . . On May 20 a hardy contingent from Temple Beth Shalom cleared out major amounts of trash from the Aqueduct culvert next to the marble quarry in Hastings. The cleanup was in preparation for creation of a village trail connecting the quarry and Aqueduct to the Hudson River waterfront. The synagogue works on the Aqueduct yearly as part of its community service program . . . The Friends were pleased to participate in the recognition ceremony held at Cooper Union's Great Hall on May 11 by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, for grade school winners in the 21st annual, citywide Water Conservation Art and Poetry Competition. . . . As part of an intensive unit studying the New York water supply, some 81 sixth-graders from the Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School in Manhattan (M.S. 238), near the High Bridge, were hosted by the Friends on May 22 for a tour of the weir chamber in Ossining. . . . The Aqueduct was briefly featured in a June 4 History Channel program about New York City's underground infrastructure, photographed mainly in the Ossining weir chamber section of the tunnel . . . Alix Schnee, senior manager of Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park, and GroundWork Yonkers were among those recognized by the Beczak Environmental Education Center on May 20 for helping to foster the plan to "daylight" – uncover – two sections of the Saw Mill River in downtown Yonkers. Further upstream in Yonkers, the river flows through twin openings at the base of the Nepperhan Bridge, a major Aqueduct crossing.



Aqueduct Fest

Save the date . . .
Saturday, October 13

**Our 3rd Annual Trail-Wide
 Celebration**

This year's **Aqueduct Fest** planning is underway. Join us for live music and merriment along the trail. Spread the word!

If you'd like to volunteer for a shift at a celebration station, or if you are a musician or children's entertainer who has an hour or two to perform outdoors, please contact Eileen Charles at ewords@mindspring.com.




All of Irvington's Dows Lane School was out on the Aqueduct for a walk on April 23. (Photo by E. Samra)

Sampling the Archival Treasures of the Water Supply

The archival treasures of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection provided the striking visual core of Professor Kevin Bone's engrossing talk on the city's water supply system at the Friends' 2007 annual meeting, held on April 22 at the Irvington Public Library. Professor Bone, of Cooper Union's architecture faculty, with his students catalogued and restored the archive starting in 1995. This work was the basis for the multi-authored 2006 volume, "Water-Works: The Architecture and Engineering of the New York City Water Supply," edited by Professor Bone.

The talk focused on the technical innovations that enabled the city to construct its monumental system. These ranged from the malleable wrought iron used to fabricate the 90-inch pipe added to the High Bridge in 1862, a form of the metal that could withstand the pressure of a larger volume of water; to advances in concrete technology that made the Catskill Aqueduct (1907-17) a showcase of esthetic as well as technologic modernism; to the diamond-tipped boring machine that today is cutting "a perfect opening" through bedrock for the Third Water Tunnel.

The Catskill Aqueduct's "heroic endeavor" was in tunneling through bedrock to bring water across the Hudson River, a goal finally achieved at a depth of 1,100 feet. It took years of the most difficult drilling and the use of newly developed deep pressure pumps to find suitable bedrock beneath the river, between Storm King and Breakneck mountains. The Catskill Aqueduct delivered its water to the Kensico Reservoir, impounded by the massive masonry of the Kensico Dam, as did the later Delaware Aqueduct.

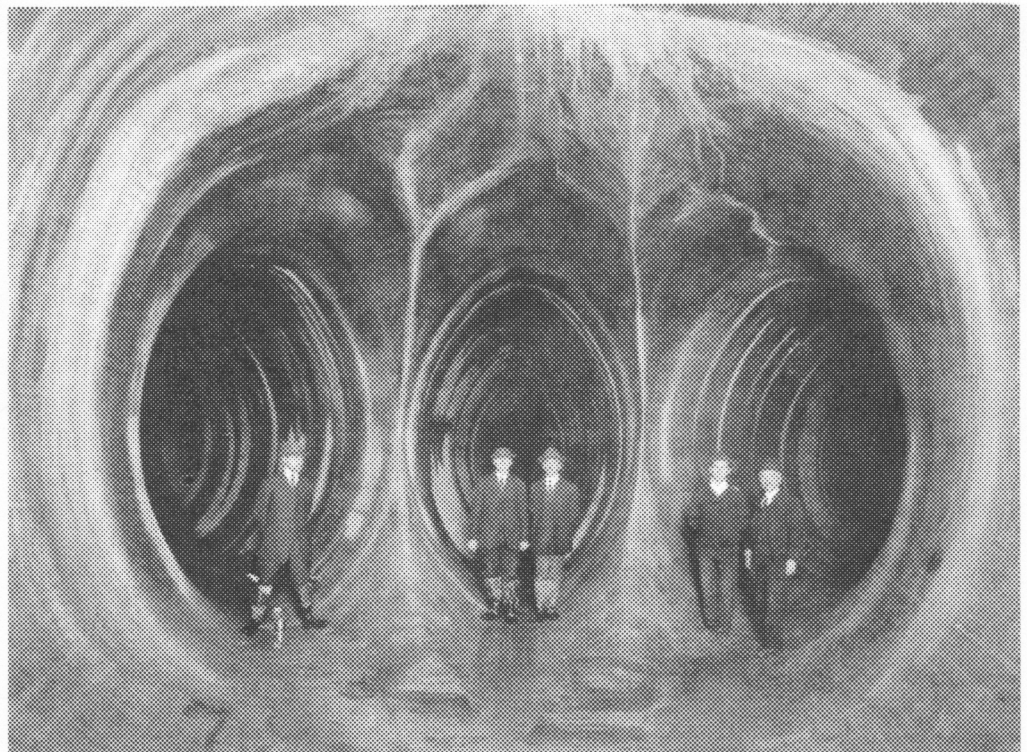
About the first (1842) Croton Aqueduct, Professor Bone commented that New Yorkers, who then occupied only the southern tip of Manhattan Island, had long failed to take their water supply problems seriously, in contrast to cities like Philadelphia and Boston, and to Venice, which captured and conserved "every drop." The Harlem River was a huge obstacle to the dream of drawing on the continent's abundant waters—a constriction

eventually surmounted by the High Bridge.

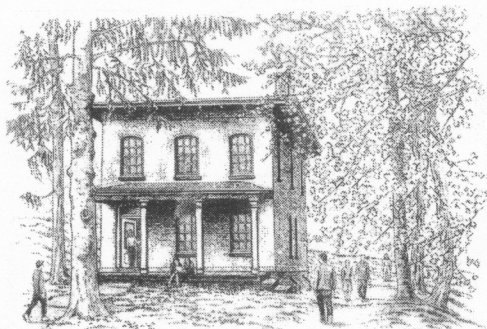
This earliest New York aqueduct was designed for 72 million gallons per day (mgd) – an incredible amount at the time. With the Croton Aqueduct's huge success came awareness of the city's vulnerability: "near-panic" ensued when, in the early days, the water flow would be stopped for several days for aqueduct maintenance, leaving the city to draw down the supply in the reservoirs. An effort to push more and more water through, attempting to reach 100 mgd, caused the upper arch of the Aqueduct to begin breaking apart. The need for the New Croton Aqueduct (1890) quickly became apparent.

Finally, taking note of Earth Day, Professor Bone remarked that the world is facing a fresh water crisis exacerbated by climate change, and that a system supplying 165 gallons per person per day, as New York's does at present, is neither sustainable nor expandable. Going forward, we can "increase" our water supply only by better managing what we have now.

A brief business meeting preceded the talk. The Friends thank its volunteers and the Irvington Public Library, as well as our speaker, for making this year's annual meeting a great success.



"Catskill Aqueduct. Yonkers Siphon. Junction of three elliptical branch tunnels with standard circular pressure tunnel. Nov. 21, 1913." (From NYC DEP Archive, published in "Water-Works," K. Bone, ed., p. 150.)



Keeper's House Donors

Our heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed to the Keeper's House project.

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World War I Water Guard Honored

A solemn ceremony on May 6th at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery honored the memory of the First Provisional Regiment of the New York Guard, which protected the New York City water supply during World War I. This was the 89th ceremony, held the first Sunday of May each year at the imposing monument to the regiment located just north of the cemetery's main gate. The 56th Brigade of the New York Guard organized and hosted the memorial service, whose highlight was the laying of wreaths at the monument, followed by a rifle volley and the playing of Taps. Among the flags on parade was one for the First Provisional Regiment, on which are the dates 1917-1919. Music was provided by the New York Guard Band, and comments were made by officers of the 56th Brigade and by Mayor Philip Zegarelli of Sleepy

Hollow, who is a devoted participant in and supporter of the event.

According to the New York Guard's website, "over 40 soldiers of the regiment gave their lives during the mission." The regiment headquarters were first at Croton Lake and later at Ossining.

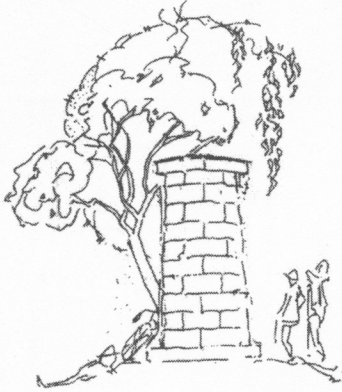
After the ceremony, which is open to the public, Jean Horkans and Charlotte Fahn, members of the Friends who attended, talked with Mayor Zegarelli. He said a contingent of the First Provisional Regiment had camped in bitter winter conditions on the Old Croton Aqueduct, which borders the cemetery on the east, and were threatened by the influenza epidemic of 1917-18 that killed tens of millions of people worldwide. Eventually St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Scarborough provided shelter for the men. Flags of the regiment that hung in the church for many years are now in a repository in Albany.

The monument is actually a great boulder "hewn from Bonticou Crag on the line of the Catskill Aqueduct by the storms of ages . . .," in the words of one of its plaques. The plot for the 1919 monument was donated by William Rockefeller, whose estate, Rockwood Hall, was nearby. A 1962 news article reports that 8,000 enlisted men and 150 commissioned officers guarded the water supply.

The New York Guard, not to be confused with the New York National Guard, is a volunteer corps started in World War I to provide non-combat support, within the boundaries of New York State, to the National Guard.



A wreath being placed at the monument to the First Provisional Regiment in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. (Photo by C. Fahn)



Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

Please Share Your Thoughts About the Keeper's House Restoration Project in Dobbs Ferry

As we continue to work on turning the Dobbs Ferry Keeper's House into the Old Croton Aqueduct Visitor Center, we value your input as a trail lover and Aqueduct enthusiast.

1. What interests you most about the Aqueduct trail and its history?
2. What services would you like to see provided at the Old Croton Aqueduct Visitor Center?
3. What information/exhibits/other would you like to see inside the house?
4. What types of programming or events interest you most? Historic, family, lectures, environmental, hikes/walks, other?
5. What is your personal connection to the Aqueduct? (Stories welcome!)
6. How do you use the Aqueduct now? How often? Alone/with others?
7. Do you have any questions, thoughts or ideas about the Keeper's House restoration?

Name: _____ Town/City: _____ email/phone: _____

Thank you for your time and thoughts.

Please send to the Friends, c/o 41 Fraser Place, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY 10706, or fax to 914- 478-8819.

Work Starts on Manhattan Access to the High Bridge

An important as well as festive groundbreaking took place on June 27 for a project key to bringing the public back onto the High Bridge. While the Bronx end of the bridge is at street level and thus easy to get to, the



"Groundbreaking" at High Bridge Water Tower Terrace for the Manhattan High Bridge Access Project. (Photo by S. Horenstein)

Manhattan end is some 75 feet below street level, partway down a steep hillside. The Parks Department's High Bridge Access Project will remedy this by reconstructing the iron staircase that once connected the Water Tower Terrace with the bridge, and building a new, ramped path from Highbridge Park's 167th St. Sunken Playground to the bridge, creating "a safe and inviting connection" between the bridge, the park, and the surrounding Manhattan neighborhood.

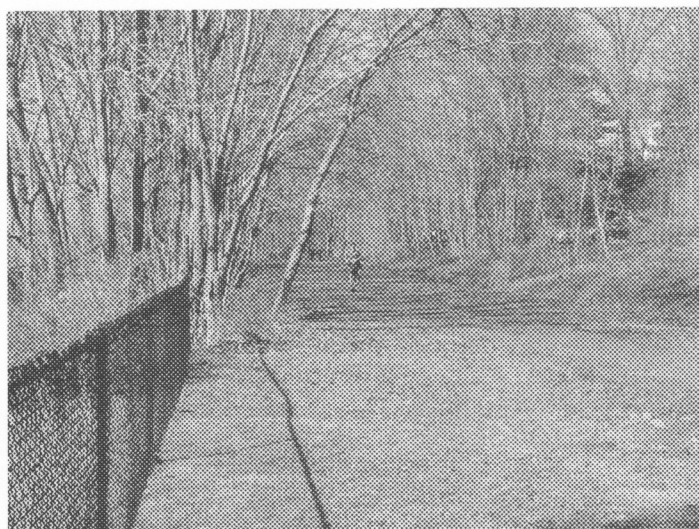
The project includes reconstructing the plaza at the bridge terminus and improving visibility and safety on the Old Croton Aqueduct trail in Highbridge Park (the southernmost section of visible green Aqueduct trail) by clearing brush and restoring plantings in selected areas. An air of celebration prevailed at the start of an undertaking so long hoped and worked for. Funding is through \$2.2 million in city funds and a \$2 million federal grant.

The symbolic groundbreaking took place at the Water Tower Terrace. Parks Commissioner and longtime High Bridge supporter Adrian Benepe presided in his best avuncular style, engaging an audience of Manhattan and Bronx residents, public officials, bridge and park advocates, Parks Dept. staff, and Middle School 238 sixth-graders, who have been studying the city's water supply. Deputy Commissioner Anne Canty, First Deputy Commissioner Steven Lawitts, and Education Director Kim Estes-Fradis represented

the Department of Environmental Protection, long active in High Bridge efforts.

Also among the speakers were David Rivel, executive director of City Parks Foundation, High Bridge Coalition co-chair Lourdes Hernandez-Cordero, and Brandon Limbar, one of the young students. Manhattan Borough Parks Commissioner William Castro announced that construction work has already begun. Ellen Macnow, Inter-Agency Capital Coordinator and High Bridge Coalition co-chair, and North Manhattan Parks Administrator Jane Schachat are among the Parks Dept. staff members who helped make the project a reality.

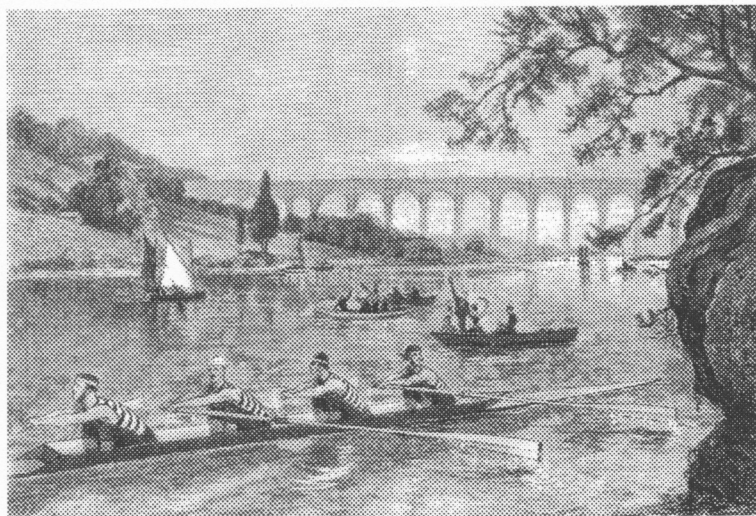
During Commissioner Benepe's "question time," the audience learned from geologist Sidney Horenstein that Highbridge Park sits on 570-million-year-old rock, and that the High Bridge Tower's granite is from Quincy, Mass.



A fence at Flower Avenue, on the Hastings-Dobbs Ferry border, that for years had encroached on Aqueduct parkland was moved in March to enclose only a private yard. The full width of the Aqueduct (above) is now accessible for trail users to enjoy. (Photo by C. Fahn)

Trail Notice

The Aqueduct trail in Rockefeller State Park Preserve, from Gory Brook Road to Country Club Lane, will be closed on Sunday, October 14, from 6:00 a.m. to about 1:00 p.m. for a special event.



"The Columbia College Regatta — The Henley Four." High Bridge in background. From Harper's Weekly, June 1, 1878.

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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