



# Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

*Newsletter*

**No. 7, November 2000**

## Twenty Years on the Trail: A Naturalist's Diary

*Jim Caposella*

For two decades I have lived immediately off the Old Croton Aqueduct in Ossining, and—especially since 1993—have kept a written journal of my observations. What follows is a selection of those. They are in order seasonally, but from different years. Everything described took place well within the village limits of Ossining.

*January 30* — Today, groups of squirrels were milling around and chasing each other wildly up and down trees. This is the only time of year I observe this, and presume it to be a prelude to mating. The gymnastics are accompanied by a fair amount of vocalizations. Very warm weather continues. Notice that the wild rose canes have gotten greener — growing? What is small dark bird size of chickadee? Head and neck nearly black. (Later notation: dark-eyed junco.) Found a dead opossum on the trail two days ago.

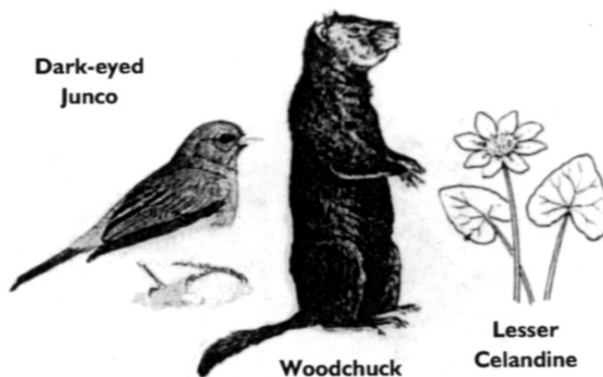
*February 2* — Saw two tufted titmouse, only winter bird that is crested according to Stokes. Shrub with bark that has baffles is in genus *Euonymus*, common domesticated plants. One common name is burning bush, reference to spectacular fall foliage.

*March 27* — First of the lesser celandine. Forsythia in full bloom. First shadbush I've seen on the trail, just starting to bloom. Also, pretty blue flower blooming next to celandine. Spring peepers have been spectacular everywhere I've driven past few days. (Later notation: blue flower is purple dead nettle. Lesser celandine spreading like wildfire in Westchester.)

*April 14* — Saw the "Myer's woodchuck" for the first time today, by the immense silver maple that looks to be 200 years old (?). Harvested nettles and had for supper in a casserole with carrots. Also black birch for tea, and garlic mustard for root (horseradish substitute). Song sparrow song variable on Thoreau's basic mnemonic: "Maid, maid—tea kettle-ettle-ettle-ettle."

*May 10* — Saw what was probably an American goldfinch today. "Rollercoaster" flight was a clue. Said to dote on dandelions — and dandelion seeds now abundant. Was with a darker bird that may have been the female. Umbeliferous plant ID still troublesome — sweet cicely? (Later notation: bird may also have been a yellow warbler.)

*June 7* — A branch from a small Eastern cottonwood broke off last week and the tree seems doomed. This hanging branch, however, has put forth an



incredible profusion of "cotton" (seeds). Is this a spectacular last-ditch effort of the organism to procreate?! Yesterday, a dog chased up a hen turkey just off the trail. Today, I saw her young—a whole brood. Wild turkeys nesting just nine yards off the trail!

**Wild Hen  
Turkey**



*July 15* — Hemlocks dying everywhere—very sad. (Later notation: culprit is an insect called a wooly adelgid—there is some attempt being made to control this insect by introducing a predatory beetle.)

*August 8* — Cicadas and crickets started just about four days ago and continue. This is one of first clues that fall is coming.

*September 2* — Lest anyone doubt the durability of a spider's web— I first spied this web on August 17. At least two times I stood and watched its maker repair it and possibly expand it. It's now in tatters, but it's heartening that in all that time no trail walker disturbed it. Three fawns and a doe just N of tower. Saw crows apparently chasing other crows. Lovely evening walk, in all.

*October 9* — A real treat! From my living room I heard a great booming owl in the night, coming from the woods next to the trail and no more than 150 yards from my house. Sounded like a great horned. I recollected a line from an article Gene Hill wrote for *Field & Stream* about owls: "No joy-to-the-world intent booms back from way back across the brook to lift my heart against the scudding clouds."



**Eastern Cottonwood**

*November 20* — The thieving migrating birds have eaten all my spicebush berries. I guess they need them more than I do. I'm only going to Mom's for Thanksgiving. They're going to South America.

*December 10* — An amazing line of fresh buck scrapes on the trail. New ones every couple of days. Could be that the limited number of does in this confined habitat prompt this apparent second round of breeding-related activity. (Note: At this latitude, whitetail breeding is centered on mid-November and scrapes—patches of ground roughed up by bucks—are most commonly made from mid-October to late November.)

## From the president . . .

The steadily growing recognition of the Aqueduct as a major local and regional asset is cause for satisfaction. The Westchester portion has been designated one of only four historic parks in the state. Linkages with other trails are being planned. And a new book, Gerard Koepfel's *Water for Gotham*, has traced the convoluted history that led to the construction of this 19th century American engineering marvel.

Underlying everything else for many of us are the enormous pleasures this "simple" footpath provides. It slips quietly through the landscape, partaking of the life of the villages and drawing the walker through a green panoply of woodlands and streams, backyards, great mansions, and views of the incomparable Hudson River. Its straight-as-an-arrow quality and high-shouldered embankments hint at an unspoken, greater mission.

The Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct strive to be a public voice for this neighborly landmark. You can help in many ways. One is to volunteer to head up some of the efforts we would like to undertake. Organizing an art show, designing a brochure, and training docents are just a few examples. Another is to continue supporting our work by returning the contribution envelope you recently received with our once-a-year appeal, if you haven't already done so, or by using the coupon in this newsletter.

A third is to urge the Governor, whose staff is now formulating the next state budget proposal, to increase funding for the operation of all state parks and historic sites. The state's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is severely underfunded. Voluntarism and private contributions help, but are no substitute for state stewardship. Address your messages to Governor George E. Pataki, The Executive Chamber, The Capitol, Albany, NY 12224; tel. 518-474-8390; E-mail: gov.pataki@chamber.state.ny.us.

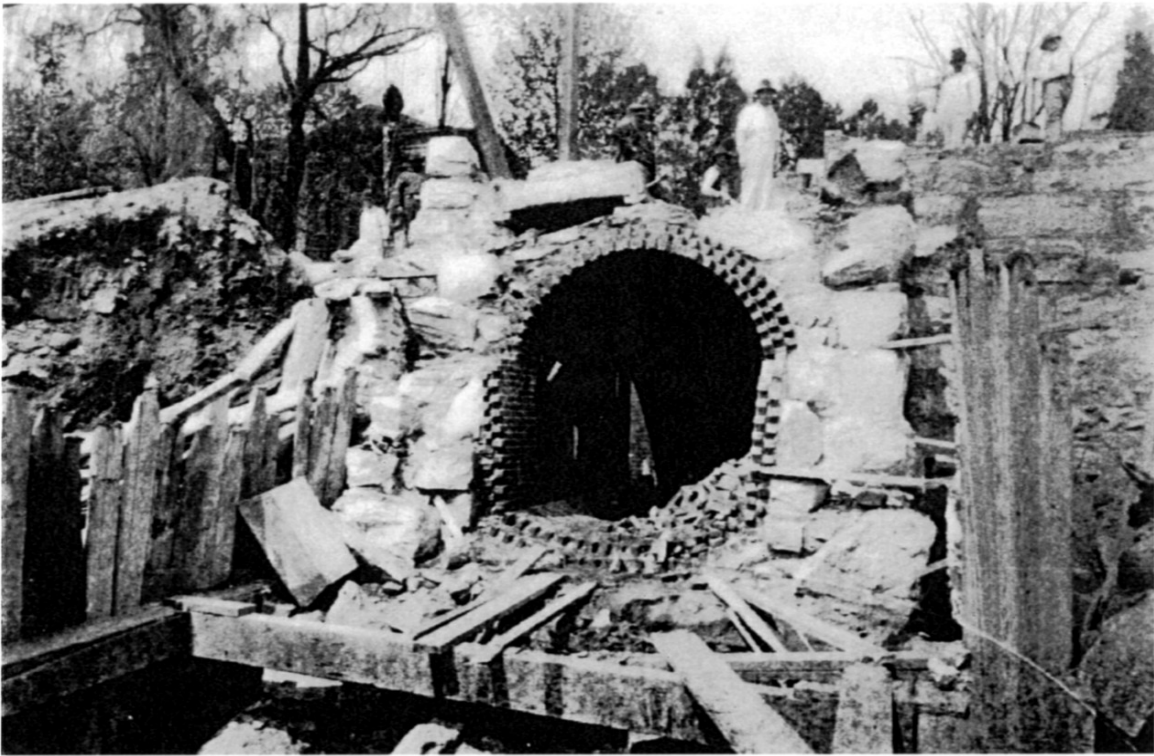
And, as always, keep the Aqueduct clean! With thanks,

*Charlotte Fahn*

### A Universal Value

"In the Islamic world, a ruler could give no greater or more meritorious service to his people than the provision of clean drinking water. Vast resources were spent on dams, reservoirs, aqueducts, and water mains, and the funding of a public fountain was deemed an act of great religious merit."

*From the exhibit, "Palace of Gold and Light: Treasures from the Topkapi, Istanbul" shown at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC, earlier this year.*



*Old Croton Aqueduct being reconstructed in the wall of Jerome Park Reservoir, c. 1898.  
(Courtesy of Robert Kornfeld, Jr.)*

## Jerome Park Reservoir Honored

*Robert Kornfeld, Jr.*

Jerome Park Reservoir has been recognized as a work of national significance with its listing in July on the State Register of Historic Places and, in September, on the National Register. The majestic 95-acre reservoir was built along the Old Croton Aqueduct just south of Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx between 1895 and 1906, on the site of Jerome Park, a racetrack developed by Leonard Jerome. Jerome was the Wall Street speculator whose daughter, Jennie Jerome Churchill, was Winston Churchill's mother.

The reservoir marks the intersection of the Old and New Croton aqueducts. The reservoir was constructed to allow water to be transferred back and forth between these two aqueducts, to provide a settling and storage basin, and to supply Croton water to the Bronx, which New York City had recently annexed from Westchester County. Planning of the reservoir began in 1875, but the work was postponed until after the New Croton Aqueduct was completed in 1890.

Jerome Park Reservoir was built by the Aqueduct Commissioners at the same time as the New Croton Dam. It was landscaped as a reservoir-park, like the Central Park reservoir, which opened in 1862. The reservoir is listed on the National Register as an Historic

District; the district includes Old Fort No. Four Park, Fort Independence Park, and Reservoir Avenue, which were all part of the original reservoir grounds.

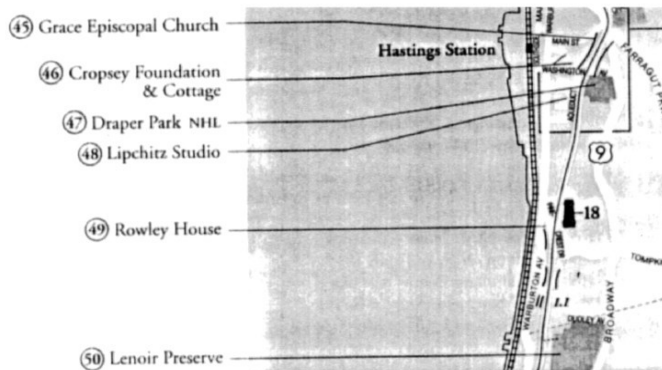
The granite wall of the Old Croton Aqueduct is exposed for nearly a mile in the reservoir's eastern wall, which parallels Goulden Avenue (across from the Bronx High School of Science and Lehman College). It is visible from Reservoir Avenue, Fort Four Park, and Fort Independence Park, all of which border the reservoir. The western edge of the reservoir runs along tree-lined Sedgwick Avenue, where the picturesque adjacent streets reflect the 1877 Frederick Law Olmsted street plan into which the reservoir was set.

The National Register Nomination and the illustrated Jerome Park Conservancy Preservation Report are posted on Lehman College's web site at [www.lehman.cuny.edu/whatisnew/landmarkstatus/form.pdf](http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/whatisnew/landmarkstatus/form.pdf), and [www.lehman.cuny.edu/preservationreport/](http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/preservationreport/).

*Editor's Note: Friends board member Bob Kornfeld, Jr. researched and prepared the National Register Nomination and is Chairman of the Jerome Park Conservancy's Preservation Committee.*

## Hastings Plan for Aqueduct Buffer and Waterfront Link

A plan by the village of Hastings to acquire a 14-acre parcel of land from the Graham-Windham School, if successful, would have major benefits for Aqueduct users. The Aqueduct cuts through the parcel, which extends roughly from the area of Dudley Avenue near the Hastings-Yonkers border on the south to Rowley's Brook on the north, and from the Graham School campus on the east downslope to the Hudson on the west.



*The Graham School parcel extends from a little below feature 49, Rowley House, almost to Dudley Avenue on the trail.*

The land thus borders both sides of the Aqueduct trail. The village describes it as an exceptionally well preserved natural area having a remarkable diversity of trees and birds and varied species of wildlife. Designating it as open space would provide a permanent green buffer on this stretch of the trail and preserve the habitats of the plants and animals whose presence enriches the trail experience. Keeping the property undeveloped would also preserve the views of the Hudson and Palisades that add drama to this part of the Aqueduct.

More dramatic still is the opportunity the acquisition would open for a trail link between the Aqueduct and the Hastings waterfront. This would be accomplished by extending the Rowley's Bridge Trail, soon to be built along a 1,600-foot route east of and parallel to the Metro-North tracks, uphill along Rowley's Brook all the way to the Aqueduct. Aqueduct users would reach the waterfront by descending the Rowley's Brook/Bridge trail to its start at an existing pedestrian bridge over the tracks. The extended trail would also provide views of the beautiful (and mysterious?) Gothic arch at the base of the Aqueduct embankment in this area. The Rowley's Bridge Trail, conceived of by Hastings naturalist Dr. Fred Hubbard, was recently approved by village trustees.

The village has applied to the state to fund half the cost of the acquisition. If the application is successful, it

will then need to raise matching funds to complete the purchase. The Graham School and Graham-Windham Services, a non-profit residential treatment center for children that is the oldest non-sectarian child care agency in the country, would use the proceeds to make needed improvements on its campus. The purchase would also allow views from the campus to remain unobstructed.

*Editor's note: Planning is underway by Westchester County to link South County Trailway (the former "Old Putnam" rail line right-of-way) and the Aqueduct through Dobbs Ferry and Hastings. More information will follow in a future issue of the newsletter.*

## Fall and Spring Events

Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park participated in the first Hudson River Valley Ramble with two guided hikes on September 23, one from Greystone to Lyndhurst led by Marge and Dan Schlitt, and another from Ossining to the New Croton Dam led by Nestor Danyluk. Historic Site Manager Brian Goodman conducted his ever-popular Ossining weir tours. Thanks are owed to the walk leaders, fully versed in Aqueduct history and tales, and to Karen Schatzel for distributing literature and information at the weir for the Friends.

The Friends had Aqueduct information tables as well at the Hastings, Ossining, and Croton village fairs in the spring and at Yonkers' Riverfest during the Ramble weekend in September. Many thanks to table volunteers Mavis Cain, Karen Schatzel, Gwen Thomas, Joe Koslowski, Doug Emilio, Helen Barolini, Ann Murray, Carolyn Andrews, Kaye Marron, and Sanford Faden for helping us to meet the public.



*A group from Cooper Union's Public Education Program, led by Justin Ferate, signing up at the Friends table and about to tour the Ossining weir.*

*(Photo by C. Fahn)*



## "Of Dams and Gatehouses"

More than 50 people turned out at Croton Gorge Park for this Friends-sponsored program on October 22nd, a sparkling autumn day. Carl Oechsner, president of the Croton Historical Society, led the group in a car shuttle up the Croton Reservoir to Gatehouse Bridge. Standing on the bridge, nearly at the place where the original Croton Dam is just a few feet underwater, he pointed out the opening on the hillside where the water of the Croton River in 1842 started flowing to meet New York City's dire need for clean water.

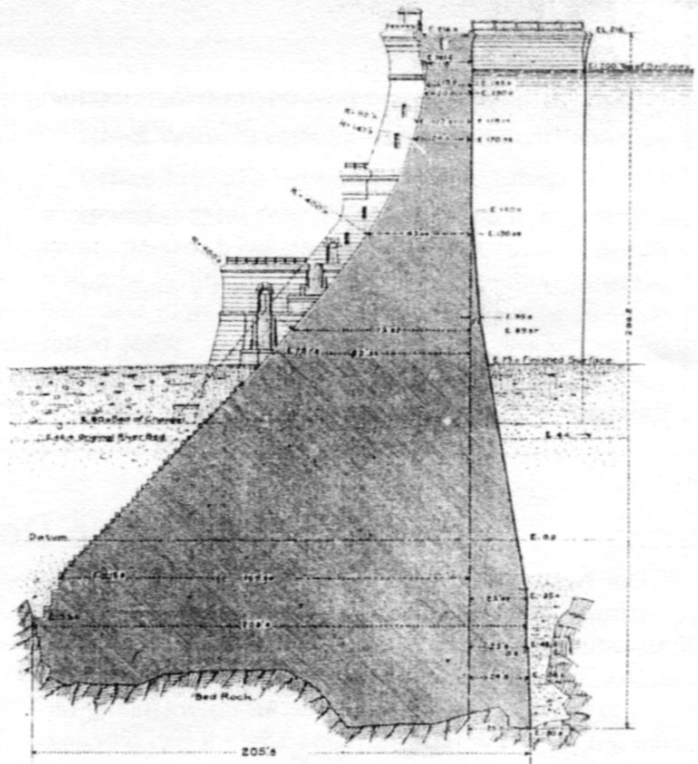
Carl recounted the dramatic story of the 1841 collapse of the first construction of the dam. At 3 am on a January morning, after five days of rain, cold, and snow, a 50-foot wall of water broke through the two-thirds completed structure and rushed downstream with such force that it filled in the bay about where Shop-Rite, Van Cortlandt Manor, and the Metro-North Croton-Harmon Station are now located, washing away farms and permanently changing the configuration of the land around the mouth of the Croton River. Warnings shouted by assistant engineers on horseback as the dam weakened helped keep loss of life to a minimum. The dam was redesigned and built with hydraulic cement and concrete instead of earth and stones. It became the prototype for many large municipal dams in the eastern U.S. and is now listed on the National Register as an underwater archeological site.

The program continued with discussion of the three gatehouses (1842, 1890, and early 1990s) clustered at one end of Gatehouse Bridge. After returning to the present, spectacular New Croton (Cornell) Dam, the second highest hand-hewn structure in the world - after the pyramids - participants heard colorful stories of its design and construction. The centennial of the New Croton Dam will be celebrated in 2005-06.

Friends of the Aqueduct thank Carl Oechsner for a lively and informative tour, as well as all those who helped organize the program.



*Carl Oechsner on Gatehouse Bridge showing a photo of the original Croton Dam. The photo was taken during a drought in 1949, the last time the dam fully emerged from the reservoir. (Photo by C. Fahn)*



*Side view of the New Croton Dam, showing its great thickness below ground. The dam is 301 feet in total height, above and below the ground.*

## James Bremner is Smiling Down on Bill Logan and Holly Daly



*Holly Daly and Bill Logan on their wedding day, on the porch of the Overseer's House with family and Friends. (Photo by B. Goodman)*

They met doing volunteer work on the Overseer's House where James Bremner lived as Aqueduct overseer in the 1800's. Bill is the architect who first came up with a plan for restoration and Holly was chief puttier for window glass replacement. What better background for an encounter than a derelict old house that had been boarded up for years?

After their wedding in Draper Park in Hastings, on October 7th, Bill and Holly made a pilgrimage with their families to the house where they met. Brian Goodman provided his famous chocolate torte, served under a banner sporting loganberries for Bill and what else but holly berries for Holly. All the Friends wish them all the best.

## Thanks to a Devoted Friend

Our hearty thanks to Bill Hoppen, former Friends board member, for his many years as a staunch advocate of Aqueduct preservation. Bill was a charter member of the Croton Aqueduct Committee, formed in the early 1970s to prevent an eight-foot-wide pavement along the entire length of the trail. In 1994 when a gas pipeline was proposed for the Aqueduct from Dobbs Ferry to Yonkers, he again was one of the first to agree to lend support in coping with this encroachment.

As volunteer legal advisor to the board, Bill dealt with the massive paper work necessary to set up Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct and keep it functioning. Our files bulge with documents he handled for us.

The Friends was only one group this dedicated environmentalist helped. Many organizations in the Hudson Valley, Long Island and New York City benefited from his expertise. During the summer, Bill moved upstate. Our best wishes go with him.

## Publication Notes

***The Palisades: A Surprising Wilderness.*** 2000, Beczak Environmental Education Center, Yonkers, NY. 24 pp. \$5.95.

Views of the Palisades, the towering rock cliffs that line the west shore of the Hudson, are one of the most striking features of a walk on the Aqueduct in Yonkers and Hastings. If you've ever wanted to know more about this formation, this small publication, with user-friendly text by nature writer Jim Capossella and photography by Toby McAfee, is just the right introduction. It explains in simple terms the origin of the cliffs, emphasizes the flora and fauna that inhabit them, and describes convenient access points. It is available in local bookstores or by mail (\$5.95 per copy plus \$2.05 shipping for one book, 50 cents for each additional book; address orders to the Beczak Center, 21 Alexander St., Yonkers, NY 10701).



Source: *New York Walk Book*

**About water, for kids.** The environmental education office of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection has compiled a two-page annotated listing entitled "Great Books and Web Sites for Children About Water and the New York City Water Supply System." For a copy, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct, Overseer's House, 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522. You can also visit DEP's Web site at [www.nyc.gov/dep](http://www.nyc.gov/dep).

## MEMBERSHIP COUPON BE A FRIEND!!

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

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Please make check payable to *Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct*. Send it with this coupon and your name, address, and day and evening telephone numbers to the Friends at Overseer's House, 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109

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## For Your Gift List

The Friends' award-winning, full-color map/guide to the Aqueduct fits in a holiday stocking or envelope, easy to give at home or mail to a friend.



It can be purchased at the following stores:

**Cornelia Cotton Gallery**, 111 Grand Ave., Croton-on-Hudson

**Art Barn**, 211 North Highland Ave., Ossining

**Ossining Heritage Area Visitor Center**, Joseph G. Caputo Community Center, located next to the trail, Ossining

**Hudson Office Supply**, 21 Main St., Tarrytown

**Arcade Color Copy Center**, 22 Harwood Court, Scarsdale

**Becker's**, 57 Main St., Irvington

**River Gallery**, 39 Main St., Irvington

**Cary's Pharmacy**, 105 Main St., Dobbs Ferry

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

**Good Yarns**, 8 Main St., Hastings-on-Hudson

**Office Ink**, 572 Warburton Ave., Hastings-on-Hudson

**Hudson River Museum Shop**, 511 Warburton Ave., Yonkers

**Posman's Books**, Grand Central Terminal

If you wish to order the map/guide by mail, send a check for \$4.50 plus 75 cents shipping and handling for the first map and 50 cents for each additional map to Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct, Overseer's House, 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522 (tel. 914-693-4117).

### Newsletter Editor:

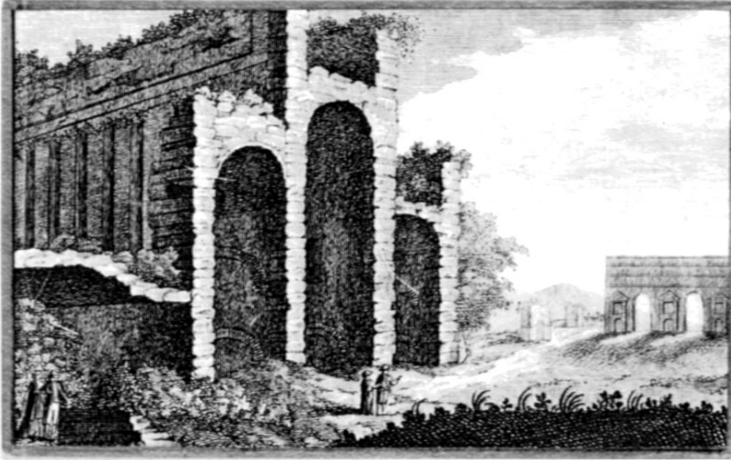
Charlotte Fahn, 914-478-3961

### Associate Editor:

Mavis Cain, 914-693-0529

*Please send in your news items, reminiscences, and historical tidbits.*

For information about the trail and Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park, call the **Historic Site Manager**, Brian Goodman, at 914-693-5259.



*Engraving showing ruins of Acqua Claudia near Porta Maggiore, Rome. Water ran in square-cut channel, originally stone-covered, at top. The Old Croton Aqueduct was modeled after the great Roman aqueducts. (Courtesy of C. Fahn)*

## Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

is a private, non-profit, volunteer organization formed to protect and preserve the Old Croton Aqueduct (Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park). The Aqueduct, completed in 1842, provided New York City with its first public supply of clean drinking water. It is a National Historic Landmark, one of the great engineering achievements of the 19th century. Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park encompasses the portion of the Aqueduct located in Westchester County. From the New Croton Dam to the New York City line it spans 26.2 miles, linking the Hudson River communities of Croton-on-Hudson, Cortlandt, Ossining, Briarcliff Manor, Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown, Irvington, Dobbs Ferry, Hastings-on-Hudson and Yonkers. 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.

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct  
Overseer's House  
15 Walnut Street  
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

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