

# Old Croton Aqueduct Walk

**2201 Aqueduct Avenue, Bronx, NY**  
**Tax Map Block 3210 Lots 1 and 7; Block 3211 Lot 1 in part;**  
**Block 3212 Lots 1, 67, 71; Block 3213 Lots 27, 48, 49, 70;**  
**Block 3214 Lot 33; Block 3215 Lot 31.**

**Built:** 1837-1842

**Designer/Engineer:** David B. Douglass & John B. Jervis

**Use:** Infrastructure, Public Park

**Proposed Action:** Calendared August 15, 2023, October 3, 2023;  
Public Hearing November 14, 2023.



Old Croton Aqueduct Walk, LPC, 2023

The Aqueduct Walk is a linear public park in the Bronx along Aqueduct Avenue between West Kingsbridge Road and Burnside Avenue. The public walkway is on top of the Old Croton Aqueduct, an engineering marvel constructed in 1842 that brought the first direct water supply to New York City. Almost immediately after its completion, the trail of the aqueduct became a beloved open space. In 1930 it came under the control of the New York City Parks Department, which created and has maintained it as a public park.

In the 1830s, New York City's population was growing rapidly. Wells and cisterns used by citizens were becoming depleted and polluted, and the lack of readily available water left the city vulnerable to fire and disease. After many failed attempts at establishing a water supply system, the 1832 cholera outbreak in New York City conclusively underscored to city officials the need for a direct water source. In 1833, the Water Commission of New York turned to the Croton River for water, but due to many complications, it would take another nine years for water to flow to the City.

In late 1836, the engineer John B. Jervis was appointed chief engineer to design an aqueduct system and its related structures, including the High Bridge, designated as a New York City landmark in 1970. Work began in the spring of 1837, and upon its completion in July of 1842, the 41-mile-long aqueduct carried 45 million gallons of water daily to the city from a reservoir in Croton, New York. The conduit was covered with earth and stone embankment walls still visible at certain points, depending on the topography of the area. The aqueduct sloped downwards along its length, using only gravity to carry the water; this innovative design allowed the city to use the vast water supply of the Croton River without relying on expensive hydraulic pumps.

Despite many challenges over the five years of construction, including labor uprisings, severe weather, pushback on design, and rising costs, the aqueduct was a success from its first day. It was so successful, in fact, the city's desire for water outpaced the aqueduct's ability beyond what anyone had predicted. The New Croton Aqueduct, completed in 1890, would carry three times the water of the Old Croton Aqueduct, which stayed in service alongside the new aqueduct until 1955. Once the New Croton Aqueduct carried most of the city's water supply, the Old Croton Aqueduct's main significance to New Yorkers was the path they had come to appreciate along its embankment, in particular in the Fordham and University Heights neighborhoods of the Bronx.

One of the earliest frequenters of the aqueduct walk was Edgar Allen Poe. In 1910, The Bronx Society of Arts and Sciences wrote, "In Poe's time, the aqueduct walk had been built only three or four years. It has hardly changed in three score years. No more delightful path can be imagined than the grassy turf above the aqueduct spring." The Bronx community fought to preserve this park twice in the early 20th Century. First, in 1903, the community stopped a trolley line from being constructed alongside the walkway, and again, in 1929, the community stopped the city's Sinking Fund Commission from selling this land for development. In 1930, the NYC Parks Department officially took control of the "shoestring" park, Aqueduct Walk.

Since the Parks Department took over the land, they have made several changes, including seating areas, playgrounds, lighting, and relief stations, which improve public access and amenities along the walk without diminishing its historic integrity. This park's connections to its neighborhoods, stewards, and New York City's infrastructure history make it a truly unique public space.



