History Fades to Fable: The Many Lives of the Croton Aqueduct

Abstract:
In 1830, New York City still had no stable or sufficient supply of potable water. As a direct result, crises in public health, threats of destructive fires, and concerns for slowed commerce reached a fever pitch early in the decade. From these intertwined, water-sprung concerns emerged the Croton Aqueduct, the first large-scale water supply system in the United States. The works came to transcend their practical function, serving as a locus of American myth-craft, whereby the ancient world became folded into an industrial present. Today the dry aqueduct serves as a recreational trail and continues to shape the cultural identity of New Yorkers—especially those who live among its urban ruins in the towns of Westchester County. Tracing the route along the modern aqueduct trail, this creative nonfiction essay taps a reservoir of 19th century existential anxieties, architectural aesthetics, and folk tales that lay dormant beneath the built landscape. Author Washing Irving's insight that "history fades to fable" prompts us to wonder what underlies the shift in the aqueduct's transformation from a symbol of industrial progress to one of quiet, suburban life. In this study of a seemingly simple aqueduct and its new life as a public trail, we uncover a messy reality of a young nation contending with its own sense of history, and the everlasting impulse to construct our own mythologies in the Hudson Valley.

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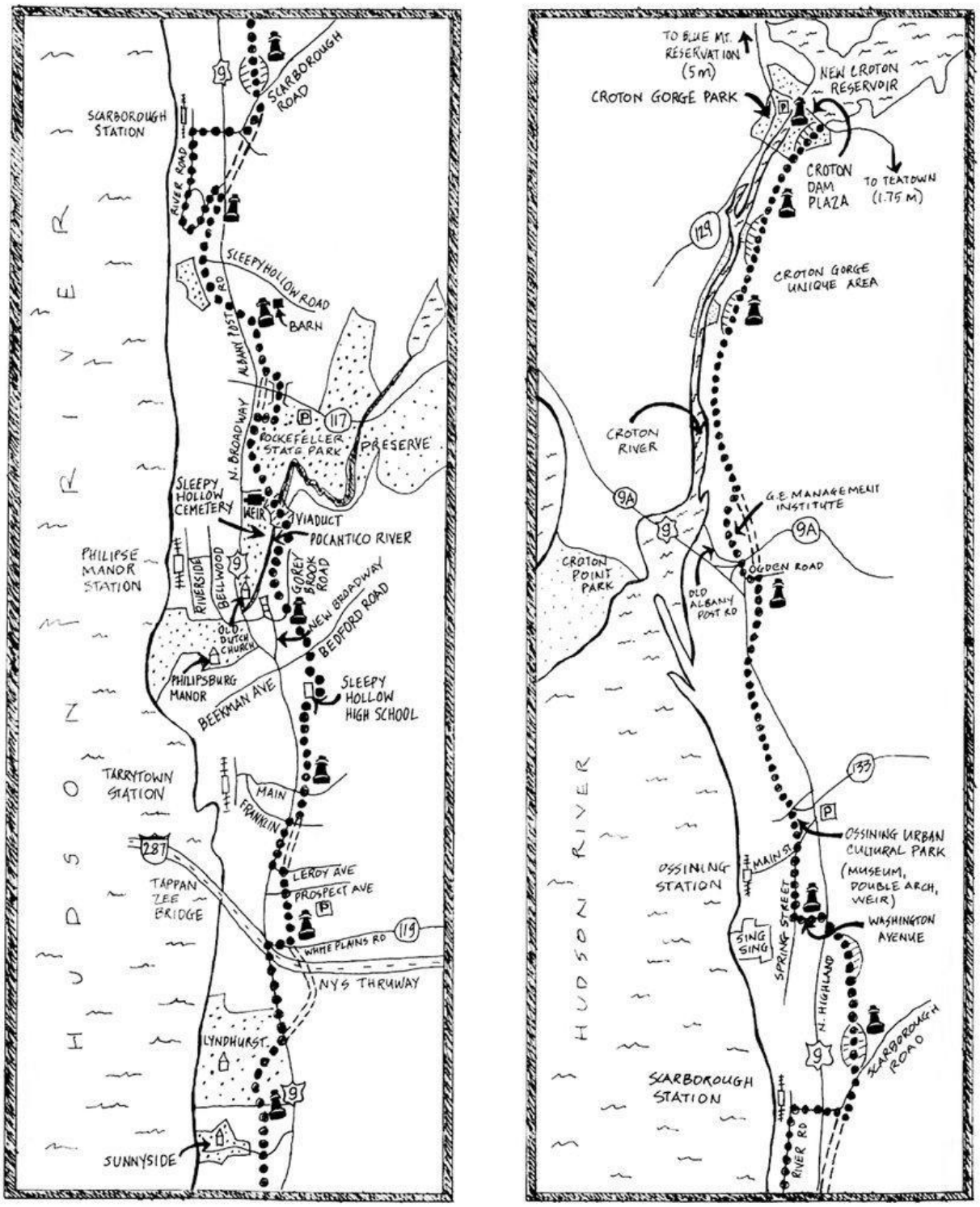

Figure 1. Map of Old Croton Aqueduct and Trail (right to left).

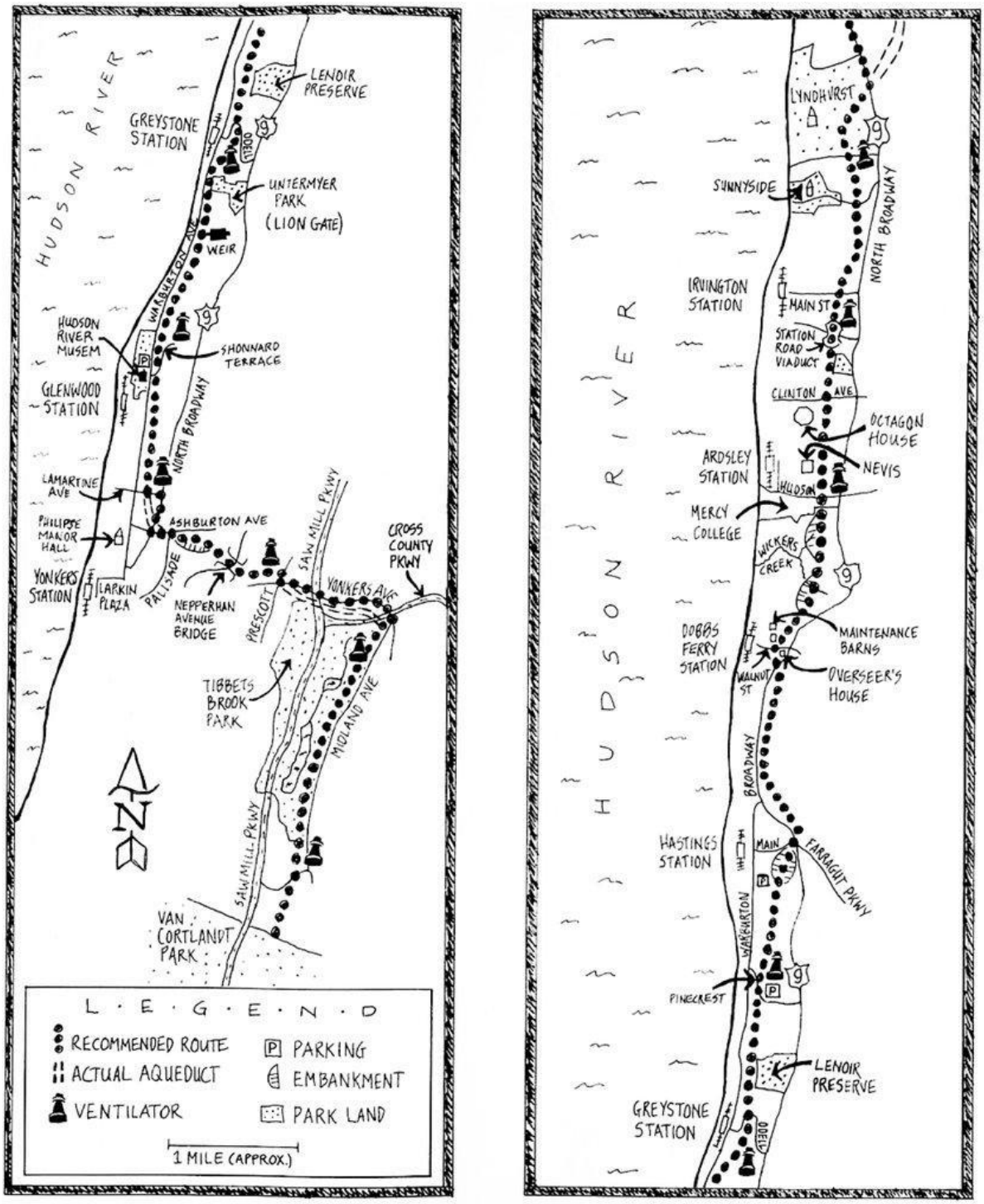

Figure 2. Map of the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail.[1]

[1] http://www.mobilemaplets.com/showplace/1735

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One Saturday in August 2013, when the sun was shockingly warm and the hums of cicadas filled the valley, I set out from my mother's house on a bike to pedal my way to my father's new apartment in Yonkers. I flew down the winding suburban roads towards the river, crossed Route 9, and turned left onto the Croton Aqueduct Trail at the edge of Mercy College campus.

Figure 3. The aqueduct just North of Piping Rock Drive.[2]

Throughout my freshman year of high school, I made this trip countless times, my thoughts wandering and reverberating through the wooded trail as the seasons passed. Since childhood, I had used the aqueduct trail as a sort of adolescent highway—to get into town, to reach my friends, or just as a place to bike and fill the time. Like any child would, I filled my head with lore for this peculiarly named yet unassuming trail, amassing disparate facts (what an aqueduct is, where this one leads to) and letting my imagination fill in the gaps. As a young man on the trail again, I began to wonder again about the history of the aqueduct and the meaning of those childhood fantasies.

This day's journey was like many others. As I merged onto the trail by Mercy College—at this particular point a humble dirt path crossing a grassy green field—I maneuvered around the tangled roots and jutting rocks that are endemic to this section of the aqueduct. The woods, which fill all the shadowy parts of Westchester, reclaim the trail after exiting the campus,

[2] Daniel Chazin. Special To The Record, https://www.northjersey.com/story/sports/outdoors/2017/04/26/hiking-old-croton-aqueduct-state-historic-park/100928100/.

where the aqueduct's ruggedness and manufactured height suddenly become very apparent. The sun through the trees casts a green glow on the trail, and you feel as if entombed in a wooded fairy land. In this stretch, both sides of the six- or seven-foot-wide trail drop precipitously down into patches of bramble. The usual markers of modernity—houses, the sounds of traffic—are invisible for a brief moment, making the place feel out of time. It's a rugged sort of beauty, as the cliff-like sides gave me a lurching feeling whenever I glanced down into the 20-foot drop.

I began to imagine my wheels catching on a pesky root, diverting my wobbly course away from Yonkers and towards a broken leg. I then thought of all the awful accidents that must have occurred centuries ago, in the days when horse-drawn wagons creaked down the trail all the way south from Albany to New York City. Horses leap and whinny, snapped saddle ropes whip in the wind, and a carriage car spews its contents of cabbages, pumpkins, and people, while plunging into the firs, raspberry brambles, and dandelions below the aqueduct. I can picture tranquil scenes, too: tired horses stamping the dirt, tethered to rusted iron rings, their owners hopping down the steep roads of the valley to tarry and drink at an unnamed Dutch tavern by the river (they didn't need to name them back then; there was only one of each store in town). Though the horses have been swapped for dogs and the taverns for pizza parlors, the ambulatory activity ties my imagined history to the present I know and my high school bike ride commute.

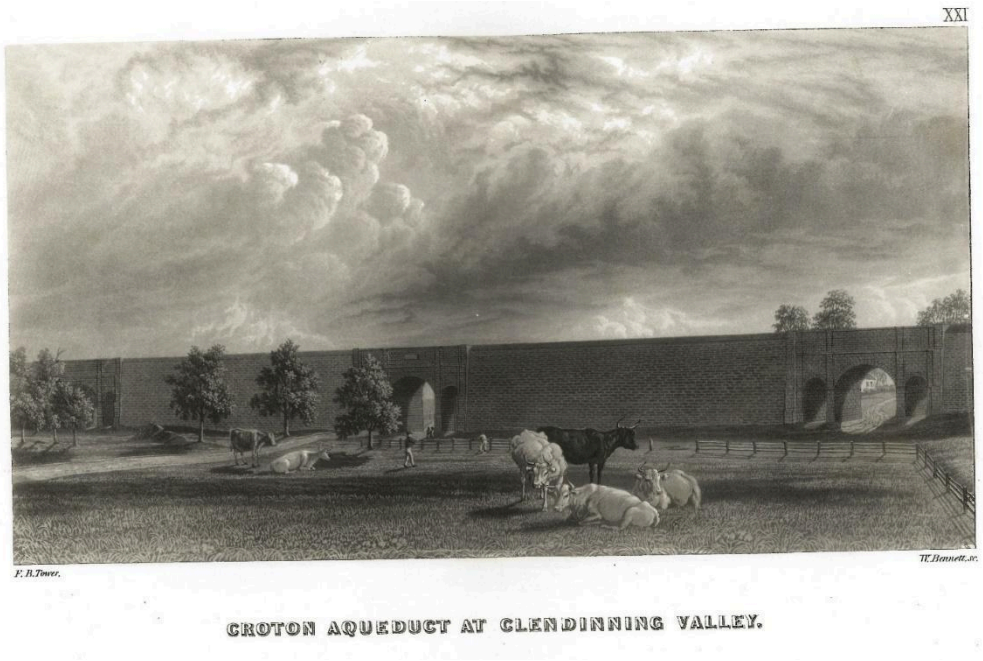

Figure 4. Croton Aqueduct at Clendinning Valley, 1843.[3]

The Croton Aqueduct looks over the Hudson from the east. Lofted on the valley above the awesome river, the aqueduct had delivered potable water from the Croton River to New York

[3] PR 220 William James Bennett Print Collection.

City for over a century since it opened in 1842. Beginning at the Croton Dam and Reservoir, the aqueduct pours water at a fifteen-degree slope through Westchester County for nearly 40 miles, pushing it over the Harlem High Bridge and then into Manhattan's urban confusion. The fifteen-degree figure is of subtle importance: the Croton Aqueduct was one of the first major civil engineering projects to make use of novel equations devised in France. For some, this marks it as a modernized, scientific incarnation of the ancient Roman aqueducts primitive engineering.[4] The daphoenix-like comparison in this interpretation is apt, when you comnsider the aqueduct's story. Once a pulsing artery that carried "pure and wholesome" water to the city, the aqueduct is now an empty tunnel hidden under a recreational trail.[5] It is no longer a scientific marvel, but a natural one, subsumed under the umbrella of nature preserves and scenic paths that define the suburbia of Westchester county. It performed its duty until 1954, when the gates to the aqueduct, by then submerged under the New Croton Dam and Reservoir, were finally shut. Soon after, it was turned into a recreational trail. If you wanted to, you could set out from the Croton Reservoir and walk or bike all the way to the city, riding on its spine the whole way down. The *Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct* might then award you a novelty pin for your accomplishment, though a chance to witness the suburban forests morphing into a concrete cityscape would be worth it in itself. Writing today, as the county quarantines during the COVID-19 pandemic, the meaning of these trails are reaffirmed as they come to be sites of liberation and socialization, blessedly set aside by the parks department nearly 100 years ago.

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I continued on the familiar path and reached Dobbs Ferry's Cedar Street. After walking my bike up the ramp, I waited at the busy intersection for a chance to cross. The denizens of Westchester tend to keep their aqueduct usage local, retreading short segments which they get to know intimately. The late Dante Puzzo, historian and resident of Dobbs Ferry, described this stretch of the aqueduct as a place plagued by pet dogs and sadistic, panting joggers—a cynical but accurate picture of American public recreation.[6] Yet in the same breath, he described the aqueduct a mile north near Irvington on Hudson's main street as a transcendent and beautiful sight "where a walker can still experience the sweet serenity of a country lane."[7] Despite his distaste for the new bourgeois, he is drawn day after day to solitary walks on the aqueduct which provoke in him "an inner striving, a kind of subconscious looking and searching."[8] Whatever forces moved Puzzo's historical subconscious, they were working on me that day as well, and they had worked on Westchesterians for centuries. Could they be what drove Washington Irving, the first famous author from the United States, to fill the Hudson Valley with his mystical

[4] Kemp, Emory L. "John Jervis and the Hydraulic Design of the Old Croton Aqueduct." *Essays On the History of Transportation and Technology*. First edition. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2014.
[5] Tower, Fayette Bartholomew. *Illustrations of the Croton Aqueduct*. Wiley and Putnam, 1843: 3.
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[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.: 9, 12.

histories? This spot, which is within a mile of Irving's Sunnyside estate, and this land as a whole has always lain in the shadow of a magical past, long before the author set his folk tales in these towns. Writing under one of his monikers, Irving—or rather, Geoffrey Crayon—noted the irresistible, dreamlike quality of the Sleepy Hollow of his youth: "the slumber of past ages apparently reigned over it."[9] The fantastical forces at work in the lower Hudson Valley have indeed been documented since the colonial era, prompting one to wonder about the precolonial myths and dreams that then were buried by the Dutch.

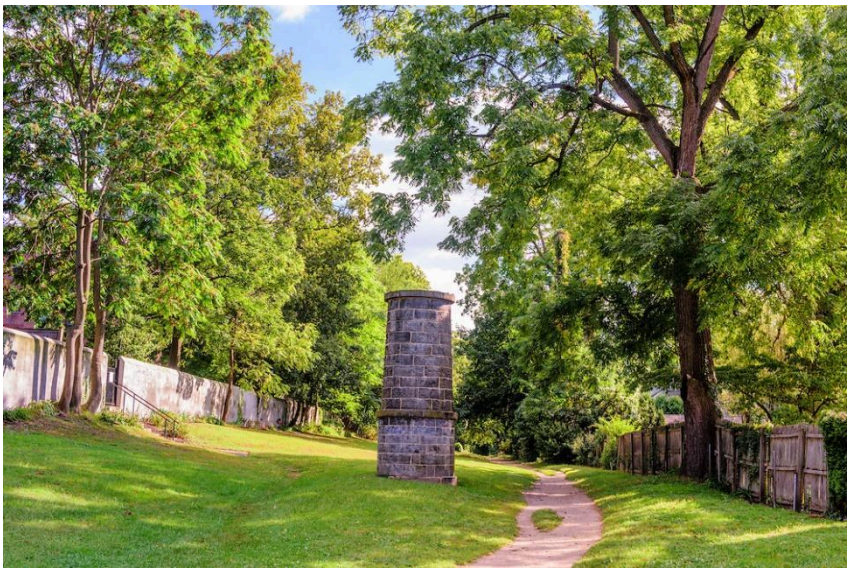

Figure 5. The aqueduct south of Main Street in Irvington.[10]

Growing up in Irvington, I had always imagined the aqueduct as an important ancient route. However, the traffic I imagined on the trail, and its function as a pre-industrial road, are an utter fiction. The aqueduct was until fairly recently, just an aqueduct. My personal mythology is likely a reflection of the new function it serves as a recreational trail, and the vague sense of antiquity exuded by urban ruins. Like much of the United States, the facts of the aqueduct stand in the full light of recorded history, bright enough to burn away most myths and tall tales faster than they can be spun. Still there remains a desire for myths in America, so powerful that the imagination cannot help itself when faced with the grand ruins of structures like the Croton Aqueduct. Soon after I began research to make sense of its mesmerizing quality, I found that the unseen has shaped the relationship of people to the aqueduct as much as the facts and realities. The aqueduct was just an aqueduct, but it was never merely an aqueduct.

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[9] Irving, Washington. *Writings of Washington Irving* /. Book lover's new Sunnyside ed. New York, 1915. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uva.x000180437: 173.
[10] Jake Rajs. Jake Rajs Photography, https://www.jakerajs.com/.

As I imagine a history of some feudalistic suburbia, many 19th century New Yorkers dreamt up a similar picture of the Croton Aqueduct while it was still being planned in 1835 and ‘36. Speculative drawings that appeared in newspapers depict polite, anonymous ladies and gentlemen taking their promenades along the Croton Dam, or up on the Harlem High Bridge.[11] Mundane activities of leisure, travel, and farming continue in a natural setting enhanced by the Romanesque architecture of the aqueduct and dam. These images promise grand infrastructure integrating with the people it serves as well as an elegant synergy between the built and natural landscape. The shadowy figures provide a sense of scale to structures characterized by grandeur—only a project as idyllic in size and aesthetics as the Croton works could bring enough water to quench the new Rome.

Figure 6. Speculative depiction of the Croton Dam's Spillway (Lithograph).[12]

After completion in 1842, similar motifs repeated in the drawings of the aqueduct and dam, always bringing attention to the classical architecture and the integration of daily life and industrial engineering. However, early etchings tended to forgo accuracy to promote the idea that the aqueduct and dam were an unobtrusive, interesting addition to the romantic forests under the Croton Lake. Westchester County was still an untamed and rugged place, and the Croton project required the clearing of massive swaths of land. Surely the dam spilled out on the bare landscape of a former construction site, not a lush grove. But the artists and officials, projected their hopes into the visual depictions they concocted, casting the harsh environment of Westchester as a grotto fit for Sleeping Beauty.

[11] Tompkins, Christopher. *The Croton Dams and Aqueduct*. Arcadia Publishing, 2000: 6.
[12] Ibid.

Figure 7. Rare photograph of the Old Dam and Reservoir ca. 1902.[13]

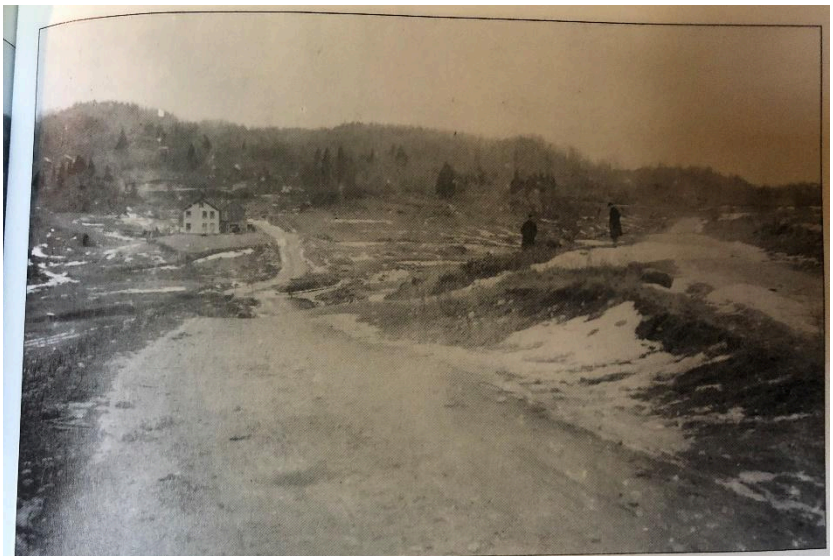

Figure 8. Speculators at working on the New Croton Aqueduct.[14]

Images of the New Croton Dam's construction in the 1890s provide a better sense of what the Old Dam was like at its infancy. The rugged terrain of Westchester was in flux, and the alien presence of city surveyors is captured well in these photographs. Their presence was indeed alien for the citizens of Westchester, who lived a world apart from the city. The majority of Westchesterians were Dutch-descended farmers, dressed in the same home-spun fabrics and practicing the same Dutch Protestantism as their ancestors. Their vocation made them intimate

[13] Croton Friends of History Blog, https://crotonhistory.org/2015/08/27/new-croton-dam-construction-circa-1902/.
[14] Ibid.: 85.

with a landscape that was as unchanging as their way of life. By contrast, the city folk worked with immaterial markets and constantly rebuilt their surroundings beyond recognition—their way of life was change, growth, destruction and creation. Until recently, the only connection between the towns and the metropolis was the news that arrived once every two weeks on a merchant ship, the *Farmer's Daughter*.[15] Now they had to cope with the acquisition of their land for the sake of city water and grapple with their enthusiasm for a project that would literally cut their towns in half (as was the fate of Irvington, Dobbs Ferry—all of the "River towns," really). At the same time, we can only imagine the hostile and craggy hills of lower Westchester when the surveyors first hiked through them. Fayette Bartholemew Tower, an ambitious young engineer who worked an assistantship during construction of the aqueduct, describes "the *meanest country* that I ever met with…[whose] inhabitants have generally corresponded with the face of the country."[16] But the young man, who like many of the Croton engineers cut his teeth on the Erie Canal, was able to imagine a transformation of the wild into the picturesque. Adding his own drops to the aqueduct's reservoir of meanings, Tower writes his mother:

> This work when completed will compare with anything of the kind in this country or Europe, and I think it will be visited by foreigners not only as a model but as an illustration of what the ingenuity of man led on by the pure light of science can accomplish, and they will admire the gigantic undertaking and the boldness of conception.[17]

Tower went on to publish *Illustrations of the Croton Aqueduct* in 1843, in which he further articulates his belief that hydraulic science is a noble practice, and that the Croton Aqueduct is a superior heir to the Roman and Biblical aqueducts of the Old World.[18] The success story Tower tells of the Croton project seems to me intermingled with his ambitions for fame in the newly scientific field of civil engineering. He saw in the conflict between the engineers and the landscape—between those for and against Croton water—a fight between reason and irrationality. The land itself, mean, unwelcoming, unyielding, was to be the proving ground of American destruction and creativity (in *Illustrations*, nature is cast similarly as an obstacle, "covering and concealing" the ruins men ought to study[19]). Perhaps the "pure light of science" illuminated the stakes for Tower, so that he saw in the project a fight to colonize these lands a second time, once again in the name of civilizing intellect. In 1835, a few years before Tower's letter, Crayon a.k.a. Irving observed how the "boasted march of intellect" was wreaking havoc on the once stable and ignorant Dutch culture, erasing its charming, provincial comforts.[20] As the

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[15] Bacon, Edgar Mayhew. *Chronicles of Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1897.
[16] Qtd. in Koeppel, Gerard T. *Water for Gotham: A History*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000: 206.
[17] Qtd. in ibid.: 207. FBT to mother, Aug. 20, 1837, Tower Letters.
[18] Tower, *Illustrations*: 10.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Irving, Washington. *Writings of Washington Irving*. Book lover's new Sunnyside ed. New York :, 1915. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uva.x000180437: 189-90.

surveyors filled their notebooks with information, wishing to know the region and lay its facts bare, the sleepy land was caught up in the inevitable flow of all industrialized things. But the water was not the only resource tapped; indeed, the masters of the Croton project found a way to utilize beauty. If the land was an unintelligent source of fairy tales and tranquility, the aqueduct could conduct this energy, like it did Croton waters, channeling it into a grand American mythology.

As I lug my bike over Cedar Street and through the mercilessly unshaded parking lot, I am living the integration of aqueduct and nature, town and country. And what I principally feel is the urge to daydream, to imbue the aqueduct with importance on par with Tower's dream, even though I, a high school freshman just a few years younger than Towers was, am still ignorant of its real function.

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Though the drawings at the time promise serenity and fecundity, they stand in stark contrast not only to the real conditions upstream, but to the major disasters that directly preceded the project. Croton Water was not delivered by the good will of politicians. At the onset of the decade, New York City's water supply was astoundingly poor. Manhattan, taunted by undrinkable brackish water on all sides, was still quenching herself primarily from wells, some having been sunk by the early Dutch of New Amsterdam. Aaron Burr's Manhattan Company, eventually Manhattan Chase Bank, still held the rights to all city water and used these rights as a pretext for banking practices. Formerly sufficient reservoirs such as Collect Pond had become filled with foul, polluted water as soon as 1800. In the case of Collect Pond, it was hastily filled in to later become the impoverished Five Points neighborhood. Whatever clean wells remained required one to travel far and wait long hours for a turn at the pump.

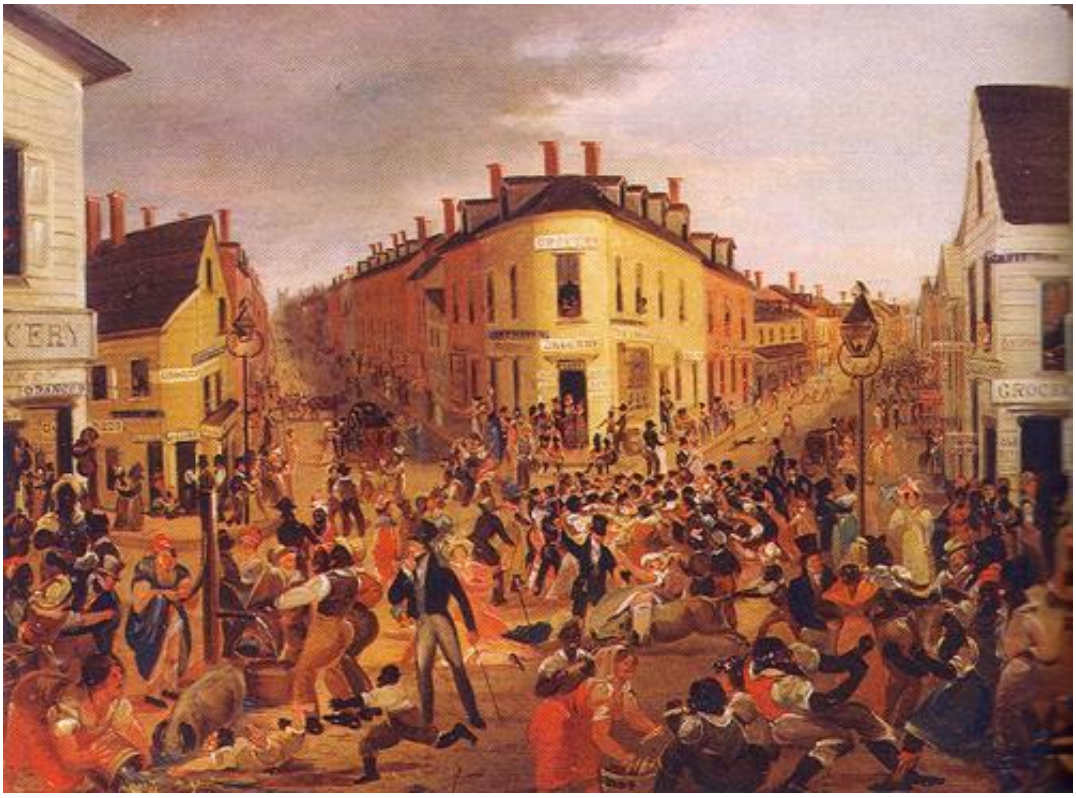

Figure 9. The Five Points neighborhood.[21]

However, the magnitude of the crisis could be safely ignored by the powerful and influential, so long as they were able to keep the struggles out of sight. Many paid roving vendors to retrieve well water for them, and a fortunate few did have plumbing installed by Burr's Manhattan Company. But New Yorkers from all strata sensed the precarity of the situation; the success of the Erie Canal had more or less solidified the city as the financial capital of the country. New York was growing, and it would get bigger yet; the population was nearly 250,000

[21] Catlin, George. Five Points, 1827, Public Domain Image.

by 1830, and the countryside of northern Manhattan was being rapidly digested by new buildings.[22] The absurdity of the water situation and all around filth was unbefitting of the young nation's urban pride. The urgency grew with each passing year, each passing decade, and New York urban design began to fall behind that of Philadelphia. And yet the only thing that could bring the farce to its final act was the tragedy of an abject devastation.

The frigid, grey winter of 1831 brought news of a new, violent cholera that was tearing through cities along the St. Lawrence River. When the sickness landed that summer, most of the devastation was borne by the Irish Catholic and African American poor of the Lower East Side. The city's upper class largely adopted a cruel theory from the temperance movement—the protestant movement that demonized liquor and poverty as the sources of sin. They believed that the coming disease expressed God's ire with the working poor's impiety, poverty, intemperance, and idleness.[23] Unfortunately, their predictions came true—not so much because the disease targeted poverty as much as it targeted impoverished infrastructure. See, the outbreak emanated from the Five Points neighborhood. The streets at Five Points, usually covered in a foot-deep mire of mud, polluted water, and excrement were now dotted with convulsing people sinking into the sludge. Entire families succumbed together, their squalid apartments transforming overnight (the bacterium acted so quickly) into cramped, foul-smelling mausoleums. The city itself became a place for the dead; bodies, too many for burial, piled in the streets and nearly 100,000 of the living fled for the country,[24] leaving New York for the dying, the Catholics, and the poor.

"The roads, in all directions, were lined with well-filled stagecoaches, livery coaches, private vehicles and equestrians, all panic-struck, fleeing the city, as we may suppose the inhabitants of Pompeii fled when the red lava showered down upon their houses," reports the *New York Evening Post*.[25] This disaster, now on the scale of ancient calamity, killed 3,500 people that summer. The inequal effects prompted the wealthy observer Mrs. P. Roosevelt to remark "No one notices the poor…only on occasions such as this is the true extent of the misery of the City known."[26] As the great exodus went on and private hospitals shut their doors, it was largely the Catholic nuns and priests who stayed behind to take care of the ailing poor. As clergy, doctors, and nurses applied mercurial ointments, sulfur washes, administered opium enemas, and comforted the sick and dying, they could do little but wait for patients to recover or pass away. Their medical ignorance provided none of the warmth that Irving had found in Westchester's provincial ignorance. No one knew how to treat cholera, and no one knew how it spread; the mystery surrounding cholera only sustained the cruel myth that the victims had brought it upon themselves. Nevertheless, the 1832 epidemic is a critical point on the journey to Croton Water.

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[22] Rosenwaike, Ira, *Population History of New York City (*Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972): 33.
[23] Qtd. in Burrows, Edwin G., and Mike Wallace. *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/3452428: 592-93.
[24] Ibid.
[25] *New York Evening Post* qtd. in ibid.: 591.
[26] Qtd. in Burrows, *Gotham*: 592.

Perhaps because the crisis provided such a vibrant image of loss, perhaps because people of all social castes were affected by the tragedy, or perhaps because New York's been damaged, the link between clean water and public health was suddenly an urgent concern. The connection was not found by science, observation, or deduction; it was the delirious calls of the dying, who cried out "an almost universal demand for drink. Cold water, cold water, give us cold water."[27]

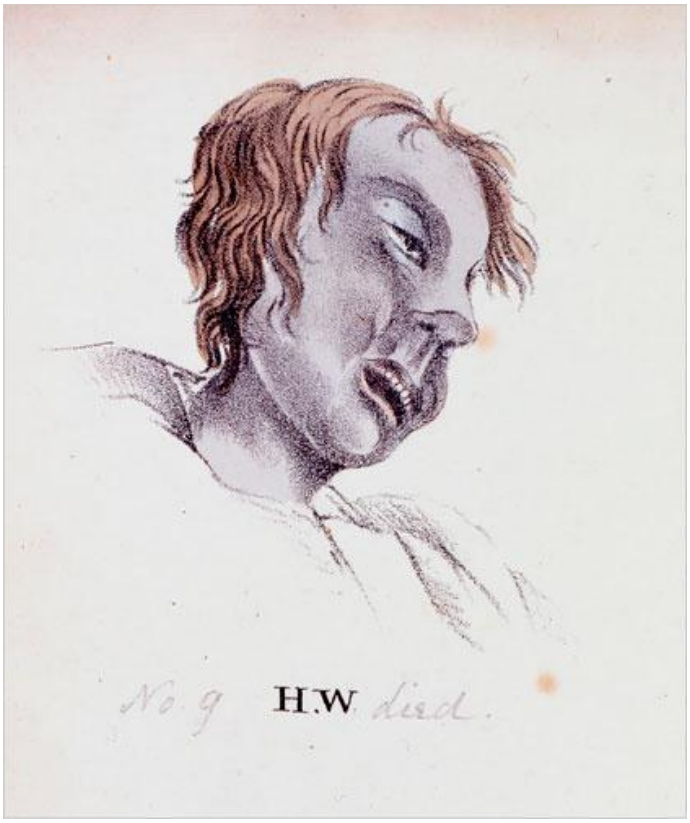

Figure 10. Sketch of a 56-year-old cholera patient brought to a hospital on Rivington Street. [28]

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The shady path resumes just above the Dobbs Ferry Fire Station. I clambered back onto my bike and noted the swelling sounds of the cicadas, invisible and ubiquitous. I passed by a large, stone structure, a lean gray tower with a smattering of graffiti and no entrance. The cross-country coach called them "mile markers," and I never really understood their purpose except that they no longer had one. Once they were ventilation shafts, meant to provide free circulation of air in the tunnel below. Now they are strange openings to ruins that run hidden under the county. The vaguely palatial structures, which do appear about every mile along the aqueduct, reinforce the antique aura of the trail. A fire truck approached, sirens blaring. I stopped

[27] Qtd. in Koeppel, *Water*: 5.
[28] Horatio Bartley, *Illustrations of Cholera Asphyxia in its Different Stages*, 1832 (New York Historical Society).

to let it pass before crossing the road to continue on my way, nervously watching it crawl up a hill nearly perpendicular to the ground.

Figure 11. A ventilator shaft in autumn.[29]

It was not a simple step from the 1832 epidemic to potable Croton water. Despite the popularity of the Temperance theory of divine intervention, there was general agreement after the summer of '32 that New York City needed clean water and fast: not only for public hygiene, but for fire protection, as well as distilleries, brewhouses, tanners, dyers, soap-makers—an industrial thirst needed to be quenched. The New York State Water Commission, headed by former mayor Stephen Allen, was born from the state's Common Council the next year. By 1834, they had determined that the Croton River was the best source for a large water supply and surveys were underway in Westchester county. The pieces of the political puzzle began to come together as the alderman ousted the neglectful Manhattan Company and submitted the project for a popular referendum in the spring of 1835. The project was estimated to cost as much as $5.5 million, a steep price that would only become more worrying as an economic depression set in by the end of the 30s.[30]

[29] Wills, Matthew. Backyad And Beyond Blog, https://matthewwills.com/2014/04/01/jackie/.
[30] Koeppel, *Water*: 140-50.

The votes were cast, and the project passed: 17,330 for and 5,963 against. At long last, the people had been given a say, and their desires would be heeded: clean water was a right not for the few, but for all. Opposition came mainly from the Manhattan Company, uptown real estate owners who feared universal access would diminish property values, and poorer districts who believed they would be priced out of access. Much of the lingering doubt, though of course always present, would be deflated by the end of the year, as a new catastrophe shook the city, this time underscoring the other main motives for water reform: the need for ceaseless production and the danger of fire.

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The evening of December 16, 1835 was cold, windy and dry. In a five-story warehouse on the corner of Exchange and Pearl street, gas leaked quietly from a ruptured line, until it mysteriously ignited. A watchman noticed the smoke by 9 p.m., but within 15 minutes the building was already completely in flames. The wind quickly carried the fire from building to building, claiming the Post Office, the Merchant's Exchange, the Stock Exchange, and dozens of factories and warehouses. The exhausted fire fighters simply did not have enough water; the supply in the shallow cisterns had been exhausted by a fire the day before and none of the wells provided enough pressure to spray water past the second story of the buildings. The efforts of the firefighters cannot be overstated; understaffed and physically exhausted, they did everything in their power to fight the flames, even drilling into the ice of the frozen Hudson to feed their hoses then stomping on them when the hoses themselves froze. But no hero could have stopped the destruction; it was a matter of insufficient water, a lack of fire proofing, and vicious weather. Eventually, they found that the only way to stop the flames from moving further into Manhattan was to demolish buildings before they could burn. After a 16-hour fight, the flames subsided having destroyed nearly 16 blocks of lower Manhattan. Only two lives were lost, and the main casualty was structural; hundreds of buildings, most of them factories and warehouses, were destroyed, resembling exploded furnaces.

Reportedly, the Great Fire's glow could be seen from as far as Philadelphia. Indeed, the world's eyes were on New York as property owners began the task of rebuilding $20 million dollars of destroyed property in what had become an important nexus in the global market. Newspapers across the country and in Europe speculated on how New York would recover, and whether it would remain the financial capital of the United States. Banks acted swiftly to finance construction, and 23 of the 26 New York fire insurance companies went bankrupt from the number of claims filed. Nevertheless, the financial district was rapidly rebuilt, as much to reaffirm the city's status as a financial capital as to rebuild a community. Unlike the cholera-racked poor who could remain reasonably invisible to the elite with the most power to enact change, the latest and greatest failure of New York water had to be buried, and the new buildings should mark progress rather than gravesites. Like the 1832 epidemic, this catastrophe

inspired comparisons to Pompeii. New Yorkers embraced the Roman comparison not only to put themselves in league with classical grandeur, but to surpass it in a display of resilience. In the wake of the Great Fire, there began an accelerated use of neo-classical architectural styles in New York City which would set the tone for the aesthetics of the Croton Aqueduct. The Croton Project, itself an engineering work inherently associated with the Roman world, came to signify the achievements of New York urbanism, as well as the successes of democracy and the capitalist economy. Given the context, this classical architectural motif amounts to a mythology: a reading of history into the present that condenses themes and ideas too powerful to be unsettled by the chaos of reality into stories, structures, and emblems.[31]

Figure 12. Depiction of the Great Fire. On December 17th, the New York Herald became the first US newspaper to print an image. The media frenzy cemented the event as a national tragedy.[32]

In the year after the fire, 500 new buildings rose from the destruction, the majority in the Greek Revival style. Developers and planners saw the recovery period as a good opportunity to adapt the narrow, crowded colonial streets for 19th century business practices. Blocks were widened to help with crowding. The new buildings incorporated more sophisticated fire protection than before: double brick walls and wider gaps between buildings to slow any

[31] I borrow this notion of mythology from the introduction to Park and Daston's *Cambridge History of Science Vol III.*
Park, Katharine, and Lorraine Daston. *The Cambridge History of Science.* Cambridge Histories Online. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/8359822.

[32] The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. "The Great Fire of the City of New York, 16 December 1835" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed September 7, 2020. http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/5e66b3e8-c60c-d471-e040-e00a180654d7

potential blazes. Offices began to outnumber dry goods warehouses, reflecting the economic shift from manufacturing to finance and investment. However, even the new warehouses were now granite-columned affairs. 1836 New York City likely had the greatest concentration of classical columns since the fall of Rome a millennium ago.[33] Amusingly, the new building for Delmonico's, the famed restaurant which served New York's elites into the 20th century, incorporated real ancient columns literally transplanted from Pompeii. The architectural and economic growth after the fire made a physical statement and indeed a demonstration on the strength of the mercantile economy and potency of the real-estate boom.

The obvious need for the public works quieted conservative fears that the aqueduct was too expensive or would bring down property values. The fire hammered home the need for Croton Water, and the speedy recovery transmuted vibrant loss into a symbol of New York resilience. Rome wasn't built in a day, but New York's financial district had been rebuilt—indeed, improved—in just a year. The function of the buildings was recovery—not just from the rubble, but from any breaks in the stream of New York commerce (indeed, stocks were being traded in hotel rooms as soon as two days after the fire). There is an element of the sublime at play here; the classical architecture was not so much considered beautiful by the public, but awesome, grand, breath-taking and enormous. However, the mythology cut into the stone columns of the new Merchant's Exchange or the J. P. Morgan building was not a static myth of past ages; it was a myth about the present which mobilized an ambiguous antiquity to paint a bright American future.

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Myths have an element of loss about them. The loss is inherent in the act of mythologizing, of crafting images and stories that subdue the inscrutable complexity of history. Such manipulated reality is an important character in the story of New York City water: mid-century hygiene practices couldn't prevent the deaths of the most vulnerable New Yorkers, and allowed for an erasing and redrawing of the causal chains to shift the blame for the disease to the victims; the buildings razed in the Great Fire gave an opportunity to revise physical space, to make a site more lucrative to commerce and profit-making; and the aqueduct itself, though portrayed as a picturesque addition to a romantic landscape, really constituted a dramatic overturning of the rugged countryside's natural order, overhauling the landscape and diverting the flow of resources to a distant city. Though the scope and value of the project was known to most New Yorkers, nevertheless the tensions that preceded it and its unprecedented scale provided plentiful grist for the cultural mill.

The granite ventilation tower behind me, I rode into Hastings on Hudson, where the aqueduct trail gives picturesque views of the palisades on the opposing riverbank. Far behind, a

[33] Burrows, *Gotham*: 600.

grand reservoir funnels through a grander dam. Miles ahead, an enormous bridge carries the dry aqueduct from the Bronx over the river into Harlem and Manhattan, where the old destinations of Croton water, long buried, can be gleamed only by those who know where to find the clues in damp basements and subway tunnels. These invisible facts hide old meanings as well as long-forgotten functions. The waters once filled a grand Distributing Reservoir at 5th Avenue and 42nd street, now the site of the New York Public Library and Bryant Park. Both the Harlem High Bridge and the Croton Distributing Reservoir (not to mention the aqueduct itself) were built in the classical style. The High Bridge was decidedly Roman, with 15 stone masonry arches at a height of 140 feet, using the Roman technique of an inverted syphon for transporting water and massive stone arches to support its weight. The Distributing Reservoir had an "Egyptian" style façade and could hold an astounding 20 million gallons of water. Interestingly, government documents from the 20th century indicate that at least some of the aesthetic choices for the Croton Dam were made not only "for considerations 'architectural and aesthetic harmony'" with the surrounding forests, but also for "the 'general feeling of security in the public mind."[34] Architecture was considered an active force in quelling the anxieties of citizens in Westchester and New York, and here it was directed towards a mythology of industrial progress.

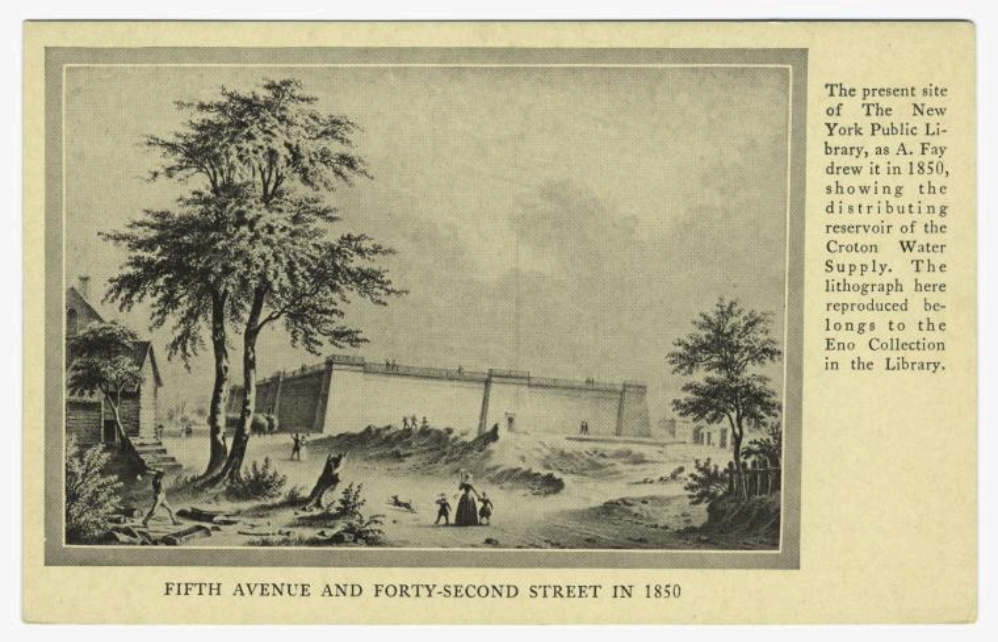

Figure 13. Depiction of the Distributing Reservoir.[35]

[34]Application for Placing the Old and New Croton Dams on the National Register of Historic Sites. April 27, 1973. Item #: 90NR02430_10399, Westchester County Historical Society Collections, Westchester, New York, United Sates.

[35] The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. "Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street in 1850" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed September 17, 2020. http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-8d15-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99

The aqueduct, the bridge, and the reservoir were all engineering marvels, amalgams of ancient and modern technologies and aesthetics, which evoked the ancient past to accentuate their grandeur. But in the Croton Aqueduct, the main ingredients of the emerging industrial mythology made contact: the natural beauty of the valley, a Greco-Roman historical identity, and 19th century technology and engineering intertwined to constitute a social-mythological historical force. The aqueduct solved the practical problems of the water crisis, and in so doing it fulfilled certain wishes about New York and the nation's need for a collective identity—wishes that were in turn formed and articulated through the water-related crises and responses to them. Just as the young engineer Fayette Tower had wanted, the aqueduct constituted an American chapter in the annals of mankind's achievement, a testament to "the ingenuity of man led on by the pure light of science."[36]

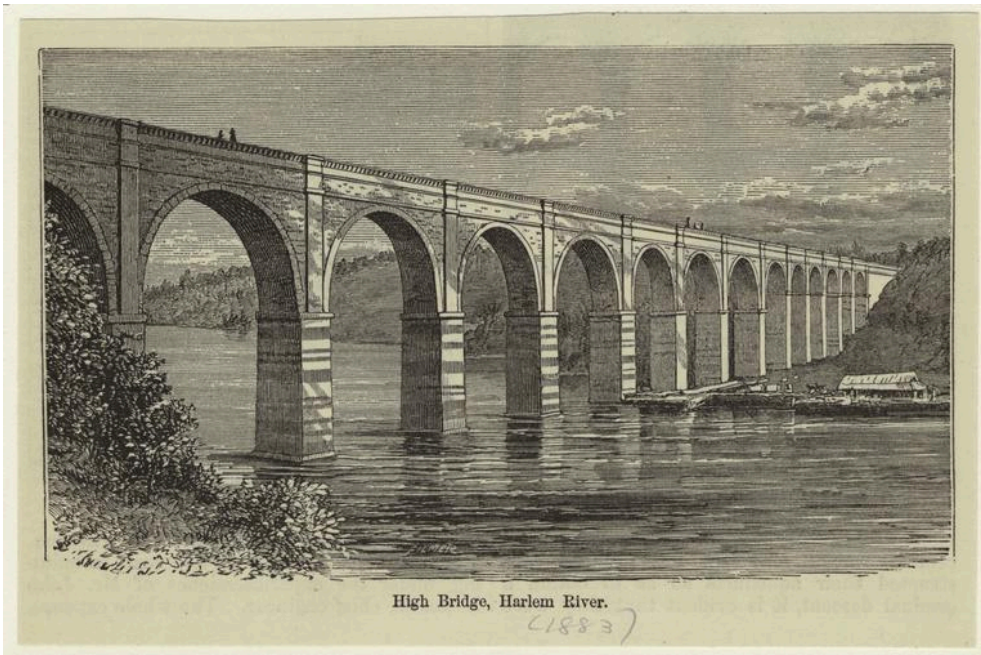

Figure 14. 1883 wood engraving of the Harlem High Bridge.[37]

The success was articulated in the "Croton Celebration" on October 14th of 1842. On that sunny fall day, a quarter of a million people, some coming from Westchester and the other surrounding counties, marched down Broadway in the largest parade New York had ever seen. Speeches from government officials outlined a history of Croton water, officially inaugurating the horrors and absurdities of the old water systems into the past. The end of the celebration was marked by the singing of the "Croton Ode." The ode encapsulates the fears that were being put to rest, celebrating the distant water source as "the Goddess of the Mountain," extending her grace "from the nooks of fairy-land" into the city. The mythologized Croton casts out the enemies of

[36] Qtd. in Koeppel, *Water*: 207. FBT to mother, Aug. 20, 1837, Tower Letters.
[37] The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. "High Bridge, Harlem River." New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed September 17, 2020.

old New York, contagious cholera and destructive fire, as the crowd and the choir sang all together:

> Water leaps as if delighted
> While her conquered foes retire!
> Pale Contagion flies affrighted
> With the baffled demon Fire![38]

A future full of plentiful, clean, and free public wells lay ahead, and quickly the whole city was drunk on Croton water. "Oh, who that has not been shut up in the great prison-cell of a city, and made to drink of its brackish springs, can estimate the blessings of the Croton Aqueduct?" remarked former mayor Philip Hone, who had often criticized the endeavor.[39] The following day, *The Weekly Herald*'s front page article placed "our modern American aqueduct" as the latest and most grand item in a list of aqueducts extending back to prehistory.[40] Echoing the sublime feelings invoked by the rebuilt financial district, there are repeated references to the size of the aqueduct—it is the largest, the longest, and carries more water than any of the ancient and fabled ones could. Some experts believe that the sublime associated with great American civil projects provides a sense of unity that transcends social strata. The usually public structures provide a way to wordlessly instill a unified identity in the hearts of Americans.[41] The story of the Croton Aqueduct is good evidence for that theory, as well as the idea that psychological forces are vital to shaping American identity.

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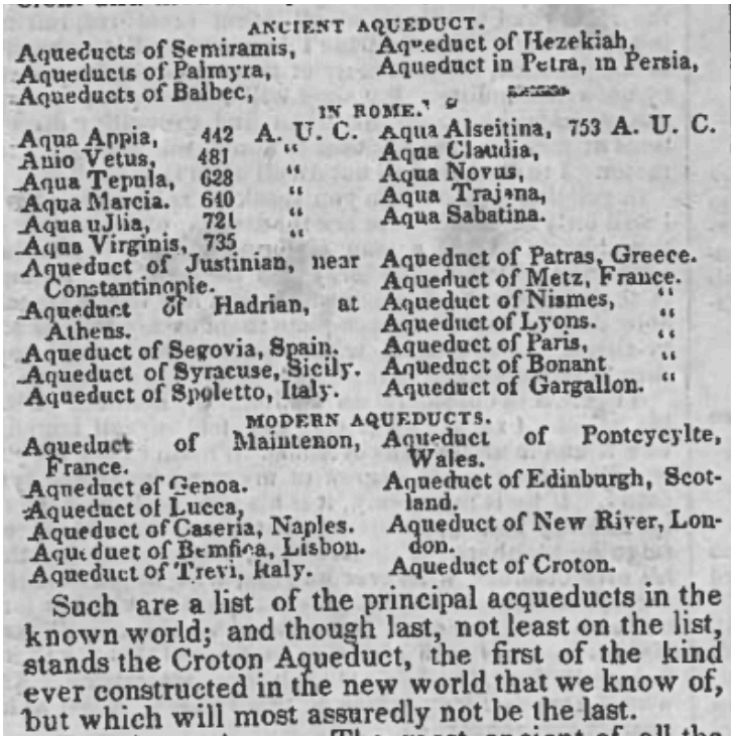
[38] Pamphlet with Lyrics to the Croton Ode, "The Croton Ode," October 14, 1842, item # Ephemera 1109. Westchester County Historical Society Collections, Westchester, New York, United Sates.
[39] Koeppel, *Water*: 280-284.
[40] *The Weekly Herald* October 15th Edition, 1842, Newspaper box 7, folder 11. Westchester County Historical Society Collections, Westchester, New York, United Sates.
[41] See David P. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* and Anthony J. Fassi, "Industrial Ruins, Urban Exploring, and the Postindustrial Picturesque."



ANCIENT AQUEDUCT.

Aqueducts of Semiramis,
Aqueducts of Palmyra,
Aqueducts of Balbec,
Aqueduct of Hezekiah,
Aqueduct in Petra, in Persia,

IN ROME.

Aqua Appia, 442 A. U. C.
Anio Vetus, 481 "
Aqua Tepula, 628 "
Aqua Marcia. 640 "
Aqua uJlia, 721 "
Aqua Virginis, 735 "
Aqua Alseitina, 753 A. U. C.
Aqua Claudia,
Aqua Novus,
Aqua Trajana,
Aqua Sabatina.

Aqueduct of Justinian, near Constantinople.
Aqueduct of Hadrian, at Athens.
Aqueduct of Segovia, Spain.
Aqueduct of Syracuse, Sicily.
Aqueduct of Spoletto, Italy.
Aqueduct of Patras, Greece.
Aqueduct of Metz, France.
Aqueduct of Nismes, "
Aqueduct of Lyons. "
Aqueduct of Paris, "
Aqueduct of Bonant "
Aqueduct of Gargallon. "

MODERN AQUEDUCTS.

Aqueduct of Maintenon, France.
Aqueduct of Genoa.
Aqueduct of Lucca,
Aqueduct of Caseria, Naples.
Aqueduct of Bemfica, Lisbon.
Aqueduct of Trevi, Italy.
Aqueduct of Pontcycylte, Wales.
Aqueduct of Edinburgh, Scotland.
Aqueduct of New River, London.
Aqueduct of Croton.

Such are a list of the principal acqueducts in the known world; and though last, not least on the list, stands the Croton Aqueduct, the first of the kind ever constructed in the new world that we know of, but which will most assuredly not be the last.

Figure 15. Snippet from The Weekly Herald*, showing ""all that is known of conjectured in relation to the origin of the aqueducts." The list of aqueducts they deemed important starts with ancient aqueducts and ends with Croton.* [42]

The built environment that would serve as a canvas for expressing American identity in the late-18th and early 19th centuries was a jumble of architectural styles. The stylistic inconsistency of the neoclassical ensemble of a Roman aqueduct, Greek revival buildings, and an Egyptian reservoir might reflect the confused or glossed-over notion of American identity in the early nation, which nearly overflowed with contradictions to its founding claim that "all men are created equal." It may well be a sign of the confusion with which much of humanity handles its desire for an ancient past that can legitimize the present. This confusion is the result of the immaturity of a young country born on a new land and from an amalgam of peoples, where the sheer quantity of documentation surrounding its emergence and the Enlightenment worldview that scrutinized its birth hamper the chance for an organic mythic beginning (or at least, a founding myth that could be received as such). These motifs that constituted the emerging mythos gather up disparate imagery of the ancient world and mobilize it into the making of a modern identity. The effort may have been as much to juxtapose the productive capacity of industrialized future with an agrarian past, as to lend legitimacy to the democratic experiment. That the desire is confused is fitting, because the ethos of New York, especially in the mid-19th century, was one of continual change and growth. With each passing decade, the city skyline would be unrecognizable from the last. Such are the physical signs of the urge to grow, to industrialize, to reorganize the city to be more accommodating to the flow of resources in,

[42] *The Weekly Herald*, October 15th, 1842.

manufactured goods out, to the alchemy of finance, to the influx of immigrants. This was the dramatized identity of New York City, and the Croton Project spread that myth to Westchester, where the provincials could transmute it into something their own—though still in line with the larger mythology of American progress.

Figure 16. Print of the Croton Water Celebration – October 14, 1842.[43]

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Not everyone endorsed an American mythology of progress through technology and industry. The original New York mythmaker, Washington Irving, had promoted a contrasting vision of his sleepy American life since his first major publication in 1800. Famous for tales such as “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip van Winkel,” the Manhattan-born author had found the Hudson Valley a refuge from the stresses of urban life. But Irving was not merely opposed to the Croton works because he opposed industrialization. In 1835, Irving purchased and renovated a riverfront manor, which he named Sunnyside. From the pulpits of local Tarrytown porches and the pages of literary magazines, he vocalized his distaste for the construction of the aqueduct and other ongoing projects in the county, particularly the railroad. The grounds for his opposition were characteristically suburban—or perhaps, proto-suburban—ranging from mundane concerns for privacy and disturbing noises to bitter nativism.

[43] The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art. Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library"Croton Water Celebration 1842" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed September, 2020..

From 1838 to ’42, nearly all the unskilled laborers hired by the contractors of the Croton Aqueduct, Dam, and Harlem High Bridge were Irish-Catholic immigrants. Shut out from other work due to anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic labor practices (the aforementioned “nativism”), the Irish workers earned less than a dollar a day and lived in temporary tent communities—or, “shantees”—throughout the county. Irving complained in the literary *Knickerbocker Magazine* of “a Colony of Patlanders [who] have been encamped about this place all winter.” Observing a slowing of the work, he blamed it on a lacking supply of whiskey, taking the Temperance-era racist trope more than half-seriously.[44] Other citizens, many the descendants of the oldest Dutch families in the country, claimed the theft of wood and crops as well as “noises, riots and drunken revels” were making the area unsafe for women. However, they had little evidence that aqueduct workers were behind any such disturbances.[45] For Irving and the others, this nativism was rooted in economic theories about wage competition and hatred for both the Irish and the industrial America for which they labored to build.

In any case, this attitude made the oppression of the Irish invisible (or rather, ignorable) to someone like Washington Irving. The slowing work he had reported (and blamed liquor for) in the *Knickerbocker*, was in reality the stirrings of a labor movement among the Irish. Tensions between contractors and the Irish, who were namely demanding a wage increase from 75 cents to one dollar a day, reached a climax in the Spring of 1840. Thousands of workers walked out of the job in protest that April. The activity was centered around the Harlem High Bridge site, where groups of Irish armed with pipes and union-rhetoric occupied the space to prevent any work being done until the close-fisted contractors met their demands. The strike ended when militias were called in to disperse the Irish for destroying property and threatening scabs. The presses almost unilaterally mocked the event, having for months pushed the idea that, especially in a depression, pro-labor demonstration was bad for business and therefore anti-American. The *New York Herald* named it the “Bloodless Croton War.”[46] None of the laborers’ demands were met.

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[44] Koeppel, *Water*: 250-51.
[45] Koeppel, *Water*: 208.
[46] Bernhardt, Mark. “Taking Sides in the ‘Bloodless Croton War’: The Coverage of the Croton Aqueduct Strike and Labor’s Relationship with the Penny Press.” *New York History* 97, no. 1 (2016): 9–33. https://doi.org/10.1353/nyh.2016.0002: 25.

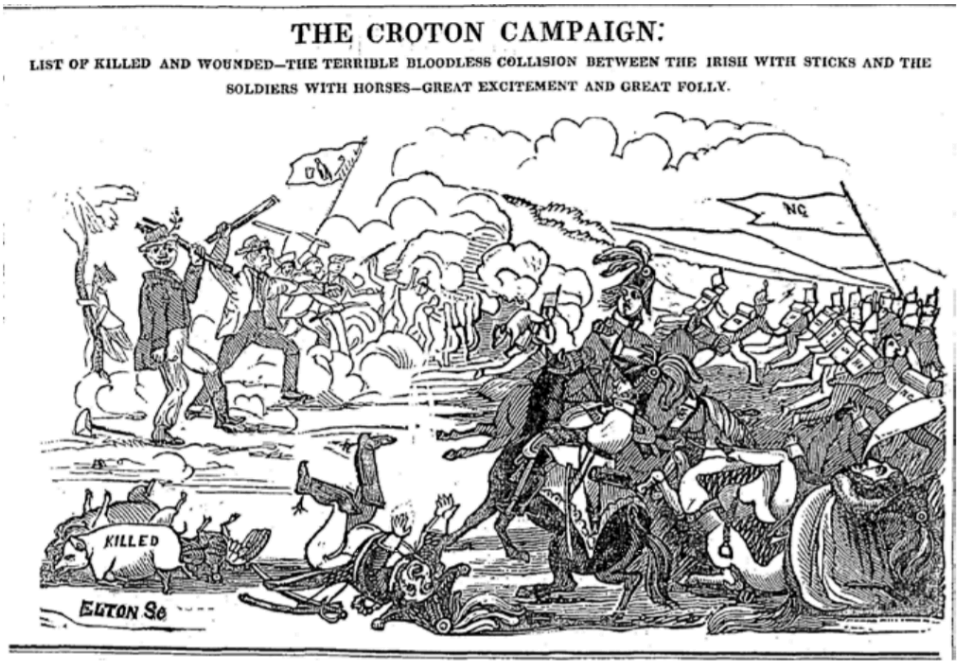

Figure 17. Cartoon satirizing the April strikes. The "List of killed and wounded" consists of some farm animals and the Irish fly a flag with a bottle of whiskey on it. Printed in the New York Herald.[47]

There was also some political opposition to the project. A good number of landowners complained that the government was abusing its citizens by seizing land for construction with poor compensation. Many petitioned the Albany legislature for better compensation and the retention of land rights, opposing generally the authority of the government to acquisition property private property in the first place. The Water Commission decided to honor two of the demands: if unused, acquired land could be bought back by the previous owner and the aqueduct must be built with convenient ways for passing over and under it.[48] Such concessions likely won over the support and trust of Westchester. The two local newspapers at the time failed to report on any opposition to the project at all, indicating that such sentiments, though extent, were not widespread and likely simmered down during the course of construction. Though Irving was almost certainly sympathetic to their reluctance to relinquish their property; he himself had turned away from the ever-changing city's middle class, and settled among Westchester's landed aristocracy.

Irving and others' opposition provided a counter-myth for the Croton project. They emphasized different facts about the aqueduct's construction to spin a narrative of rural resistance to urban influences. Although the rhetoric around the October 14th celebration may wash over the social, economic, and medical issues that persisted during and after the building of the aqueduct, its omissions also reveal a deliberate effort to sanitize the history of New York water with its

[47] "The Croton Campaign." *New York Herald*, April 11, 1840.
[48] Koeppel, *Water*: 180-81.

message of unity. The episode underscores the difficulty of assessing the convictions of past people, and the myopic dangers of taking official historical accounts at face-value. What is important to observe, too, is that in neither of the above narratives—the suburban anti-Croton fear or the modern pro-Croton dream—are the pro-labor perspectives of the Irish population given a positive, honest voice. In the former they are antagonized, and in the latter, they are reduced to automata, building the projects without complaint. The dreams and anxieties of the immigrant laborers are given outlet only in their own labor movement, which was harshly silenced. Unfortunately, the money, influence, and popularity of the pro-Croton proponents erase evidence of competing narratives to promote the official story, physically asserted by the aqueduct and its marvels. Once again, as with cholera, the poor are rendered historically invisible.

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The sun had just begun to set as I biked out of Hastings and began the last mile of my trip. Here the trail is much wider and much quieter, as there are a couple of miles before the aqueduct reaches the denser part of Yonkers. The trail is quite shady and surreally quiet, even the family that bikes past me, seem to be muffled. The only noise comes from the humming cicadas, the soundtrack to humid New York summers. The ancient-looking critters are famous for their decades-long hibernations, returning each generation to mate, die, and slumber again.

Irving's larger ideology—and indeed mythology—had always been apposed to the pro-Croton notion of urban progress. Early in his literary career, Irving had made a reputation of ridiculing Jeffersonian Republicanism and for articulating his disinterest in living in a Republic obsessed with law and order. At the turn of the 19th century, Washington Irving was a young New Yorker studying to become an attorney. Irving found the lawyer lifestyle suffocating and exhausting, and he came to believe that the widespread infatuation with legislation and markets in America inhibited a good, honest lifestyle. Indeed, the frustrating political history of New York City water lends credence to his attitude. Writing while taking refuge during the cholera epidemic of '32, Irving expressed sarcastic shock "that so rich and luxurious a city which lavishes countless thousands upon curious wines, cannot afford itself wholesome water."[49] Through his satire, he sought to demonstrate the foolishness of the Republican mythology which would echo in the rhetoric and aesthetics of the Croton project. His critique came in its most scathing and angsty form in his 1809 *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty by Diedrich Knickerbocker*.

The *History* is a satiric account of the history of New York focusing on the colonial era. The young Irving is a pretty stark contrast to the popular image of a kindly, easy-going man of the people. Legal and literary scholar Robert A. Ferguson describes Irving at the turn of the

[49] Koeppel, *Water*: 140.

century: “In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Irving was a historian rejecting a progressive view of the country, a citizen questioning republican virtue, and, above all, an unhappy lawyer spurning a nation of laws.”[50] An early explorer of the borderlands between myth and reality, even the authority invoked by calling his *History* a history picks at the idea of a stable historical record. Irving mocks the notion and goes on to blame societal ills on the Enlightenment era practice of using historical analysis to theorize about the present. In his depiction of Dutch New York, it is over-legislation, the capitalistic call for incessant production, and the influx of pedantic ‘intellectual’ lawyers which “reduce the harmony of Dutch civilization to factionalism and then chaos through ‘the bitterness of litigation.’”[51] By contrast, the provincial Westchesterians “enjoy life precisely because they are satisfied with obscurity and lack all interest in vocational activity, public honor, and civic service.”[52] Of course, we know from Irving’s lamentations on the “march of intellect” that he was only to see this fabled Dutch lifestyle become even more of a dream as he grew to old age.

Figure 18. The fictional historian Diedrich Knickerbocker depicted in an illustrated edition of Irving's History of New-York.[53]

[50] Ferguson, Robert A. “‘Hunting Down a Nation’: Irving’s A History of New York.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction 36*, no. 1 (1981): 22–46. https://doi.org/10.2307/3044549: 25.
[51] Ibid.: 27.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Parrish, Maxfield (illustrator). https://www.davidbrassrarebooks.com/pages/books/02940/maxfield-parrish-washington-irving/history-of-new-york-a.

What we observe here is yet another rearrangement of certain facts to subvert mainstream historical-political interpretations, much like Irving and others had done to protest the Croton Aqueduct. Here, the historical analysis builds a counter-narrative to the usual account of 19th century American growth. Rather than invoking an ancient European past, Irving reaches towards a more recent, colonial or even pre-colonial one. Irving believes that the enforcement of European mercantilism and laws by the colonial governors led to the oppression of indigenous people through violence and theft. He belived that legal systems favored the rich at the expense of the poor and ignorant, a point he concluded from the New England witch trials, where the most vulnerable were ensnared in a puritanical web of self-serving lies spun by legal authorities. Worse still, these Republicans legitimated themselves by recasting their destructive wake as evidence of law and order, a trend we can see in common historical narrative of European powers 'civilizing' the American continent. By pursuing idealistic theories of governance while ignoring the cruel realities of colonialism, the colonists and in turn the Republicans doomed their societies to an ugly, destructive existence.[54] Irving was able to re-account for these facts, and supplement them with what survives of the real ancient America—folk tales passed down orally from the now long-gone native tribes and initial colonial settlers, who likely did have a relatively symbiotic relationship in the early days of Dutch New York.

However, we should not paint Irving as a subversive political progressive; his preferred mythology is equally a misogynistic temper-tantrum crying for a return to patriarchy in the home as it is a critique of Jeffersonian Republicanism. In this vain, Irving's career records the same crimes he had lambasted the Republicans for: holding ideals over reality. His mythology—including its problematic sides—are present in one of Irving's most famous stories, "Rip van Winkle." In the tale, the eponymous Rip lives a pleasant life of idleness during the late colonial period in the Catskill region of New York. Tired of his wife's nagging, he heads out to hunt on the mountains one day, where he encounters a group of silent stout men dressed in traditional Dutch clothing drinking and playing nine-pins (a 19th century precursor to bowling). Drunk on their mysterious liquor, Rip falls into a deep sleep. Waking up to find his hunting rifle rusted-over and his home town abuzz with unintelligible talk about an election, Rip comes to realize he had fallen asleep in a colony and woken up 20 years later in a young United States, and that nearly everyone and everything he knew were now gone. Missing his friends but relived to be free of his nagging wife, Rip moves in with his granddaughter and returns to his usual idleness, eventually fading into local legend.

[54] Ferguson, "Hunting:" 29.

Figure 19. Rip falls asleep in the Kaatskills, illustrated by Arthur Rackham[55]

The story is emblematic of Irving's mythology, in that the tale of Rip van Winkle documents him as one of the last artifacts in a rapidly disappearing tradition. His virtues—idleness, contentment, a good-nature—were already at odds with new social and economic expectations before the revolution, epitomized by his relationship with his wife. The world that valued these virtues becomes a legend, known only in the local oral histories that preserved Rip's story up until Irving wrote it down. Indeed, Rip's story only makes sense in the context and logic of such histories, which allege to preserve the magical wisdom of both the now absent native inhabitants and the fleeting early Dutch ancestors and expand on the contact between those worlds. The townsfolk explain Rips experience by appealing not to a scientific perspective, but to a local historian's claim "that the Kaatskill mountains had always been haunted by strange beings." Specifically, the story implies that ancient mountain sprites had called the ghosts of Hendrick Hudson's crew back to the woods they had 'discovered' centuries ago and the river which took his name, where they encountered and bewitched Rip van Winkle.[56] In this way, Irving, who was a city dweller, a travelling writer, and then a lovable Westchester

[55] Rackham, Arthur, *Untitled*, Print Illustration, 1905, Nocloo Illustrations Gallery, https://www.nocloo.com/arthur-rackham-rip-van-winkle-1905/

[56] Irving, Washington. "Rip Van Winkle," *American Short Fiction*, Lit2Go Edition, (1820), accessed September 21, 2020, https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/171/american-short-fiction/3461/rip-van-winkle/.

local, was nostalgic for a past that was already a myth by the time he first visited the Hudson Valley.

Finally, in the story of Rip van Winkle, we can gleam the personal anxieties that shaped Irving's Westchester mythology. During the time when Irving was still studying to become a lawyer, he had begun a courtship with the daughter of the lawyer who had been training Irving at his practice. Feeling the pressure to succeed as a lawyer, and the need to demonstrate himself to secure the hand of the lawyer's daughter, Irving was stuck "in a wretched state of doubt and self distrust."[57] However, the young lady suddenly and tragically died of consumption in 1809, leaving Irving all at once free from the responsibilities of both the bar and matrimony. Able to write full time, he released *The History of New-York* eight months later.[58] Given the context of Ivring's young adulthood, it becomes plausible that his experiences studying law and nearly marrying a fellow urbanite were passed into the attitudes he adopts in his folk histories on the foolishness of rule of law and the oppression of modern husbands. What matters to Irving is not so much schemes of governance, but the domestic life these schemes produce; Rip is by nature uninterested in the politics of his story—his civic mutation from British subject to free American—but does bask in his new freedom from "the tyranny of Dame Van Winkle."[59]

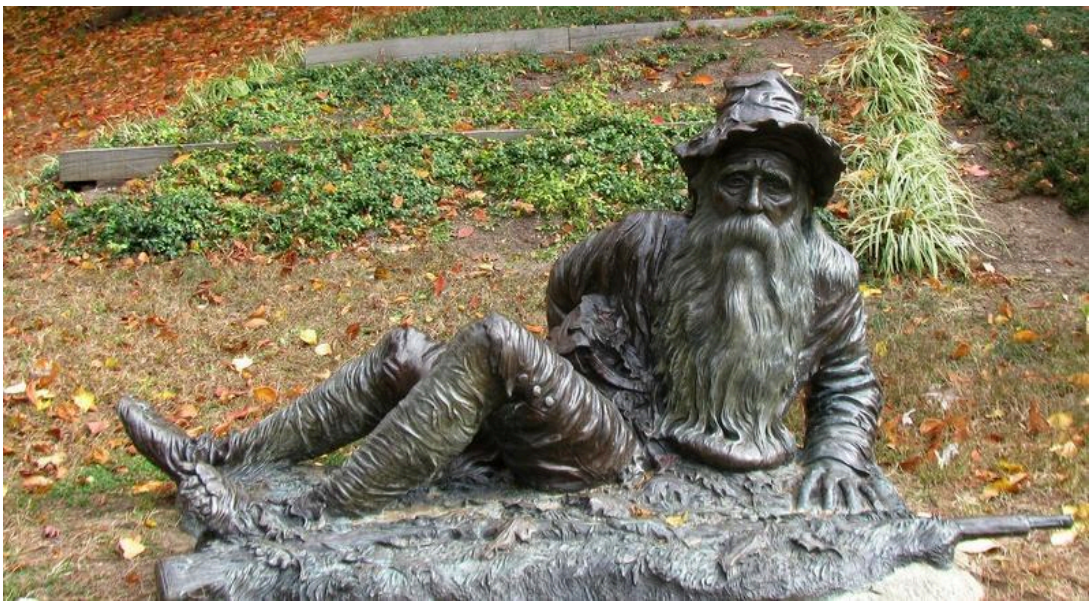

Figure 20. Statue of Rip van Winkle in Irvington.[60]

It is worth mentioning the shortcomings of Irving's faux-historical analysis. His criticism of the social pressures under American economic and legal systems is clumsily concentrated in

[57] Qtd. in Ferguson, "Hunting": 25.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Irving, *Rip*.
[60] Kayleigh DeMace, Industrial Outpost: http://www.industrialoutpost.com/science-time-travel-possible/statue-of-rip-van-winkle-in-irvington-new-york/.

the character of the pathologically severe housewife, confusing the material causes for their domestic effects. And the sleepy colonial culture he portrays as peaceful, up until economic incentives led the New England colonial elite to wage war on the native population, was in reality driven by those same incentives, and thus was always capable of such horror; the early Dutch only tolerated the Native Americans so far as the natives were useful to their survival. But again, it seems unnecessary to press what I cannot help but consider—perhaps anachronistically—historiographic sins. However, it does make apparent that what drives one to construct mythologies is something more than a simple desire for understanding the past, or for locating one's place in history. Rather, the act of mythmaking is part of what makes necessitates historical analysis in meeting such questions of identity and place.

Irving once observed, "History fades into fable; fact becomes clouded with doubt and controversy," and yet even faded, dried up fantasies are often treated as fact.[61] An apt example: the tenuously grounded myth that Manhattan Island was bought for $23. This "fun fact" was printed in my primary school textbooks, despite first appearing, unsubstantiated, in late 19th century popular histories.[62] Thus, the story is both origin myth and historical fact, epitomizing the problems which stem from that already murky phenomenon that is the force of ideas in history. If historians wish to uncloud the fables and hit the truth of past ages, they ought to be aware that history does not merely deal with facts, but facts put through the wringer of present concerns, distorted and twisted, laying around, in no particular order, the archives and collections (which catch only the smallest fraction of facts, anyways), waiting to be assembled, in no particular way. What is a historian, but a neurotic mythmaker? The line between myth and history relies on this self-awareness, yet even then, all accounts, and all their requisite facts, become fables in time.

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[61] Canning, Jeff, and Wally Buxton. 1975. *History of the Tarrytowns, Westchester County, New York, from Ancient Times to the Present*. 2nd ed. Harbor Hill Books: 254.
[62] Francis, Peter. "The Beads That Did 'Not' Buy Manhattan Island," 2020, 19.

Figure 21. An early 1800s print gives the view of the palisades from the eastern shore of the Hudson near Yonkers.[63]

I crossed the street and entered the last stretch of my journey. A few hundred yards away is the side path that leads to the back of my father's apartment complex. The trail is nearly hidden under the tall grass and reeds. On the left, looming apartment buildings cling to the valley wall, their entrances locked behind tall gates strangled by vines and weeds. On the right, a mound of lush, tall grass bobs in the wind, and behind it a grand vista looks out towards the west side of the river. You can see Warburton Avenue below, the train tracks further down by the shore, the shimmering Hudson River, and then the towering marble palisades. As the sun drops below the palisades, it drapes purple and orange clouds over the horizon. I leaned my bike up against a tree and climbed the overgrown mound to catch a better view of the sunset.

When I think about the childhood lore I had constructed for the aqueduct, I wonder whether the same Hudson Valley magic that Washington Irving wrote of had captivated me as well. In 2013, I was around the same age as Irving when he first spent a summer in Sleepy Hollow, the town just north of Irvington and Tarrytown. On days much like that one in August, Irving had wandered in the same woods, gazed at the same river, and listened to the same droning cicadas that I have. The young Irving was drawn to the local folktales of ancient spirits and haunted woods, which he would eventually build into an American mythology that favored the old Dutch families and the simplicity he found in provincial life. But soon he was going against the grain, as the other, industrial vision of American identity came to eclipse his colonial

[63] John Hill after William Guy Wall, *Palisades (No.19, Hudson River Portfolio)*. The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps and Pictures, Bequest of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954.

world by becoming in many respects a reality. His search for a historically situated identity was a microcosm of the major cultural project of early 19th century America: the project of building an American identity, and of articulating what an American democracy looks like.

Though Irving's sleepy vision may have been discordant with the industrial power of the city and the furious expansion of the nation's frontier in the mid-19th century, it was and is still a mythology that resonates with many Americans. Both the America depicted in Irving's folklore and the America seen in the Croton celebration have the same contours: they both invoke a historical narrative that situates their vision, appeal to the aesthetics of their environments, and address pressing social and political concerns. Irving located himself in the legacy of the Dutch colonies, while the Croton engineers and architects invoked the ancient world. Irving described the bewitching power of Sleepy Hollow's woods, while the Croton Aqueduct delivered glorious water across a built, romantic landscape. And finally, Irving's mythology, at least initially, articulated his frustrating attempts to enter both the legal world and matrimony, while the aqueduct was expected to significantly quell the dangers of disease and fire. These mythologies tell us something about psychology and social change: I do not think the aqueduct could have been built without an industrial narrative simultaneously emerging, super-imposed on top of it, nor do I think that so powerful a narrative could have arisen without the aqueduct to legitimize it, to act as a vehicle for solving the problems of urbanity. It is no wonder that Rip van Winkle's indifference to the things he cannot change (such as governments and the time he lost in his sleep) must be a virtue, or else his twilight years spent recounting old tales, now just memories of dreams, would be too tragic. The mythologies I uncovered in my research seems to me artifacts of a struggle within all 19th century Americans, the struggle to build an identity in a land that was constantly redefining itself—its democratic principles, its culture, its borders, and its city skylines.

I walked my bike carefully down the side path and swung upon the gate. In the trees above my head, a cicada clangs its chitin legs producing an alien song. It had been asleep in the ground near the aqueduct trail for my entire life.

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