

2.0 CROTON-ON-HUDSON HISTORY AND PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

2.1 Croton-on-Hudson History

Croton-on-Hudson was formally incorporated as a village in the Town of Cortlandt in 1898, but its history begins much earlier than that. Croton-on-Hudson's colonial-era history dates back to the 17th century, and archaeological evidence indicates that it was populated by Native American Indians as early as 4950 BC. The Kitchawanc tribe, part of the Wappinger Confederacy of the Algonquin Nation, was native to the area and was responsible for several of the place names known in Croton-on-Hudson today. The Kitchawanc called the marsh separating Croton Point from Croton Neck "Senasqua," a name later used for the park further north. Croton itself is believed to be named for the Indian chief of the Kitchawanc tribe, Kenoten, which means "wild wind."

A plaque on a rock at Croton Point Park marks the spot where a peace treaty was signed in 1645 between the Dutch and the Kitchawanc, under an old oak tree. More Dutch arrived in the following decades, at first to trade and then, by the 1660s, to settle in the area. In 1677, Stephanus Van Cortlandt, who later became the first native-born mayor of New York City, began acquiring land to create a manor and in 1697, a Royal Patent was issued designating the estate as the Manor of Cortlandt.

The Village of Croton-on-Hudson thus evolved as an enclave of the Van Cortlandt Manor. Originally known as Croton Landing, its early Dutch residents were involved with agriculture and trade. A 1718 census counted 91 inhabitants in the Manor, including the Dutch settlers and English Quakers, who settled around Mount Airy and the Croton Valley. Many of Croton-on-Hudson's early settlers were farmers or worked on the mills that were developing along the Croton River. By the 19th century, farming, shipping, ship-building and flour and brick manufacturing had become the predominant industries, along with work on the railroad and construction of the Croton and New Croton Dams and the New Croton Aqueduct.

These major public works projects in the 19th century – the railroad, the dams and the aqueduct - played a pivotal role in shaping Croton-on-Hudson's demographic development and cemented its importance in the region. The construction of these projects brought an influx of German, Irish and Italian immigrants, who came to work and then settled with their families in the area. The influx of immigrants significantly increased the population of the Village and the surrounding areas so that by the time of its incorporation in 1898, the Village's population had grown to 1,000 and to over 1,700 in the early 1900s.

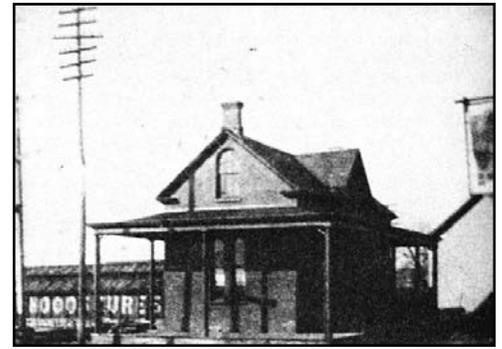


Etching of Croton Bay and environs, circa 1760, by T. Cornu; Source: [History of Croton-on-Hudson](#)



Van Cortlandt Manor
Source: [History of Croton-on-Hudson](#)

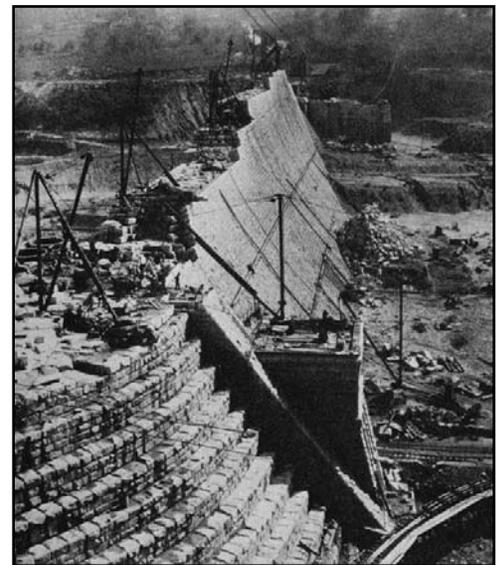
The advent of the railroad had a tremendous impact on the growth of Croton-on-Hudson and served as an economic engine for northern Westchester. Construction of a rail line to Poughkeepsie via Croton-on-Hudson began in 1846, when Poughkeepsie merchants advocated for an improved link to their city from New York City. In 1903, electric trains began operating out of the old Grand Central Terminal and construction began on a steam terminal at Croton Point where trains would switch over from electric to steam power to continue north past Croton-on-Hudson. Most of the land acquired for the engine terminal was purchased from Clifford Harmon, a real estate developer, who took title to the Van Cortlandt family farm when electrification plans were announced in 1903. He stipulated in the deed to the property to NY Central Railroad that the station on Croton Point must always bear his name, hence the Croton-Harmon Station.



Croton Railroad Station, Riverside Avenue, 1849; Source: [History of Croton-on-Hudson](#)

The terminal for steam locomotives was completed in 1913, heralding a new era for Croton-on-Hudson as a railroad town. Since the New York Central rail line stopped in Harmon to change engines, it became a destination point for metropolitan area travelers. A shopping district developed around the railroad, creating a railroad village that became a focal point and source of employment in northern Westchester. In addition, once the engine terminal and repair facilities were completed, Croton-on-Hudson became home to many employees of the New York Central railroad. It is unofficially estimated that after World War II, one-third of the paychecks in the Village came from New York Central Railroad.

Like the railroad, the construction of the Croton and New Croton Dams and the New Croton Aqueduct played an important role in shaping Croton-on-Hudson's development. Construction began on the Croton Dam in 1837 after several water crises in New York City made clear the need for a steady supply of potable water. The project provided many jobs for Irish immigrants who had emigrated to escape the potato famines and it is estimated that at one point 10,000 laborers were working on the project. The New Croton Aqueduct was completed in 1890 and the New Croton Dam, designed to meet the ever-increasing demands for fresh water from New York City, was completed in 1907 after 15 years of construction.



Construction of New Croton Dam, 1901 Source: [History of Croton-on-Hudson](#)

In 1932, two separate communities, Mount Airy and Harmon, were incorporated into the Village. Each area had a distinct identity that contributed to the cultural richness of the Croton-on-Hudson community. Mount Airy had remained a Quaker enclave into the 1800s but evolved in the early 1900s into a summer colony that attracted many Greenwich Village artists and writers. Poet Edna St. Vincent Millay and actress Gloria Swanson both resided in Croton-

on-Hudson, and Elizabeth Duncan, sister of Isadora Duncan, founded a dance school there, using two homes along Glengary Road as studios. Many noted members of the American Communist party lived and organized there as well. The area continued to attract writers and artists through the mid-1900s.

Harmon was founded in 1903 by real estate developer Clifford Harmon with the goal of developing a rural enclave for artists, writers and musicians. The developer constructed a playhouse on Truesdale Drive, where ballets and concerts were performed, and also the Nikko Inn, which became a fashionable place for stage and government notables. Both are now private residences. Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks both lived in Harmon as did writers, journalists, teachers and college professors. By the 1920s, as the railroad expanded its services, Harmon had become a residential neighborhood for railroad workers and commuters to New York City.

Following World War II, Croton-on-Hudson's importance as a railroad town diminished as diesel replaced steam engines and long-distance passenger service was gradually discontinued. However, it continued to expand in size and population as American servicemen returned from the war and settled in the community. An area known as "GI Valley" developed below Grand Street around 1945 and Wolf Road was developed in 1947. Many homes in the Harmon area were also constructed around this time. After World War II, the Village became more of a commuter suburb, with many residents commuting to workplaces in New York City and other employment centers outside of Croton-on-Hudson.

In 1976, when the Village published *The History of Croton-on-Hudson*, the recorded population was 7,500 residents. Although by 1990 its population had declined slightly to 7,018, the Village has grown to 7,606 residents as of the 2000 Census. Croton-on-Hudson has continued to evolve as a suburban village with a thriving artistic community and has retained the rich cultural diversity that dates back to its early settlement.

2.2 Summary of Previous Planning Studies: 1977-2000

a. 1977 Master Plan

The first comprehensive planning document for the Village, the 1977 Master Plan, is a short (70 page) document that reviewed existing land use patterns and trends and recommended zoning changes for the Village. The Village was not fully built out at that time, with over half of the land area undeveloped. The population was concentrated in the central and southern parts of the Village, while the area north of Grand Street, which constituted two-thirds of



Croton Point Beach, 1910

Source: [History of Croton-on-Hudson](#)



1911 Westchester County Map, showing Harmon and Croton-on-Hudson; Source: [History of Croton-on-Hudson](#)

the total land area, was largely undeveloped. Recognizing the likelihood of future population growth and development, the 1977 Master Plan focused on ways to manage this growth so that the Village's character and density could be preserved. The central vision of the Master Plan is found in its emphasis on the Central Village (the "core"), which the plan describes as "the keystone to the master plan" (page 11), as well as the avoidance of sprawl and regional shopping facilities, which "would be destructive of the essential elements of the character of the Village" (page 12).

Noting that the park and recreation areas in Croton-on-Hudson were then inadequate for the entire population, the Master Plan recommended the preservation of the entire Croton River Gorge for park and water-oriented recreation, with scenic easements over privately owned lands. Small recreational areas and clustering were recommended for housing developments in the north end of the Village. The preservation and enhancement of the Hudson River waterfront were described as "essential to the maintenance of the character and distinct life pattern of our Village." The plan also stressed protection of the Hudson River and its shallow bays (Croton Bay at the mouth of the Croton River, and Haverstraw Bay), as key elements in the ecology of the Hudson River Valley. Protection of lands underwater, limitation (through zoning) of the types of industrial uses "consistent with the welfare and tranquility of our Village," provision of recreation-conservation areas, as well as public access to the shoreline, were the waterfront recommendations.

The Introduction to the Master Plan outlined general objectives (described as "value judgments") to guide the future development of the Village, and noted that while the Master Plan was "not completely free of contradictions, it does in the opinion of the Planning Board express an overall vision of the sort of community that our Village is, or ought to strive to become." The stated objectives of this vision are summarized as follows:

Preserve low-density residential character. The Master Plan maintained that essential single-family residential character of Croton-on-Hudson should be preserved, although with some flexibility in permitting modest increase in townhouses, attached dwellings, and small apartments. It was estimated that when fully developed the Village could support a population of 15,000 residents. The Master Plan's zoning recommendations for residential areas therefore focused on ways to limit the projected growth in population to this estimate.

The Village should have an identifiable "core," containing the greatest density of commercial and residential uses. The Master Plan defined the Upper Village and the Riverside Avenue shopping

area as the two ends of this core, which together formed the larger Central Village. This area was to be preserved and enhanced as the focal point of Croton-on-Hudson identity, characterized by commercial and office uses, municipal facilities, and higher density residential structures. In its emphasis on the core, the Master Plan sought to avoid sprawl and scattering of uses in unrelated parts of the Village.

Preserve areas of open woodland through clustering of residential units.

Protect waterfront assets. Control the development of Hudson River waterfront, and preserve as essentially undeveloped the Croton River waterfront.

Encourage commercial/industrial development to increase tax base. The Master Plan noted that it “does not envision Croton-on-Hudson becoming a regional or semi-regional shopping center, and does not encourage the proliferation and scattering of retail stores throughout the Village, at the possible expense of the economic survival of the Central Village.”

***b. Preliminary Market Analysis and Design Study,
Upper Village, June 1981***

Raymond, Parish, Pine & Weiner, Inc. was retained to prepare an economic market study of the Upper Village area to analyze how this area functions, its trade area, its strengths and weaknesses, and to identify opportunities for public and private actions to preserve and build upon the charm, scale, and atmosphere of the area. The primary goal defined in the study, is “to preserve and build upon the special scale, charm, and atmosphere of the Upper Village.” The recommendations of the study included stabilizing existing businesses and attracting a limited number of compatible new ones, especially specialty stores, boutiques, personal services, and small offices. Improvements to the streetscape, façades, and to the overall image of the Upper Village (e.g. through the use of a logo), would help achieve these goals.

***c. Croton-on-Hudson Local Waterfront Revitalization
Program (LWRP), 1992***

The Croton-on-Hudson LWRP was adopted in March 1992 by the Village’s Board of Trustees, and later approved by the NYS Secretary of State (June 1992) and the U.S. Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (August 1992). The coastal zone in Croton-on-Hudson extends to the eastern boundary of the Village, because the LWRP “considers the entire Village of Croton-on-Hudson to have a direct and significant relationship with both the Croton and

Hudson Rivers...the topography of the Village is such that inland areas contain primary viewsheds of the Rivers and waterfront and provide an important visual identity of the Village with the River." (LWRP, page I-3). Since all of Croton-on-Hudson lies within the Coastal Zone, the land use policies set forth in the LWRP apply to the entire Village. In addition to the 44 statewide and 49 local coastal zone policies described in detail, the LWRP outlines a series of local objectives including linking parks and waterfront areas, improving waterfront access, expanding existing recreational areas, protecting scenic views, and updating the Village's master plan for consistency with the LWRP and the development goals for the Village. (See Section 3.2g for a more detailed description of these policies).

Several projects are listed in the LWRP to implement the above objectives, including trail improvement, waterfront improvement, and additional environmental and traffic studies, as well as the "amendment of the 1977 Master Plan to ensure consistency with LWRP." (see Section 3.2.g. of this Plan).

The LWRP specifically notes that the creation of an updated Master Plan or Comprehensive Plan (which itself will be consistent with LWRP policies) will help "ensure that the planning and development guidelines and documents for the Village are consistent."

d. *Trailway Master Plan, Croton Trails Committee, 1993*

This plan, adopted by the Board of Trustees as an addendum to the Village's Master Plan, establishes and maps an interconnected Village-wide network of existing and proposed trails that link open space sites.

e. *Open Space Inventory, Conservation Advisory Council, November 1996*

This inventory of all open space (public parks, nature preserves, institutions and private recreation, vacant undeveloped lands, and utility sites) outlines specific Conservation Advisory Council strategies for vacant parcels and other key open space areas. It also identifies sites that are critical to providing the necessary linkages to complete the Village's trailway system.

Recommendations in the Inventory include specific strategies for resource protection, conservation easements, maintenance and minor improvements for all open space parcels, private and public. Recommendations for the larger public open space parcels include:

Village waterfront property: Recommends development for passive recreation and educational uses, with waterfront trail along the Hudson River, as per the Trailway Master Plan, with provisions to ultimately link it along the shoreline north to Oscawana Island County Park in Cortlandt. Trail easements or other access should be obtained from Metro North (with fencing to separate trail from tracks) to facilitate these shoreline connections.

Croton River waterfront. Establish a Croton Gorge Park to ensure future protection of the public lands along the north bank of the Croton River; these form a Croton Gorge “greenbelt” which extends from Black Rock Park to Silver Park.

Other general recommendations include improving access to the waterfront and other open space resources, with signage, improved linkages, circulation of the Open Space map, and limited parking improvements in specific areas.

f. Environmental Conservation Policy, Conservation Advisory Committee, 1997

The overall objective of the Village’s environmental conservation policy, as developed by the Conservation Advisory Commission and adopted by the Village, seeks to “conserve, improve and protect its natural resources and environment, and to control water, land and air pollution, in order to enhance the health, safety, and welfare of the people of the Village and their overall economic and social well being.” To accomplish these goals, the policy recommends coordination of various environmental plans and programs of the Village (described in detail in Section 3.2(g) of this Plan), in coordination with other government entities, public and private organizations, and concerned citizens.

g. Greenway Vision Plan for the Croton-on-Hudson Waterfront, 1997

As part of the Greenway Program established under the 1991 Hudson River Valley Greenway Act, Croton-on-Hudson established a Greenway Committee and prepared a Greenway Vision Plan. This study provided an overview of existing conditions, uses, and constraints along the Hudson River waterfront, and established goals and objectives for vacant waterfront land. Conceptual land use plans and general design guidelines were developed for the waterfront area. Design recommendations included improvements to a main access road along Half Moon Bay parcel, to the Senasqua tunnel for pedestrian and bike use, renovation of Senasqua Park, improvements to Croton Yacht Club and Croton Bay boat launch, including improvements of roadway connecting Senasqua Park to the yacht club, and permanent closure at at-grade railroad crossing.

Other design alternatives included developing esplanades and plazas for outdoor dining, and public viewing, small-scale water dependent uses, expanding mass transportation options including a small ferry dock and terminal, additional pedestrian overpass connections and additional parking for restaurant use.

Several alternative development scenarios were studied for the Village Parcel, including the New Netherland Museum and Interpretive Arts Center. Both schemes incorporated proposed North Cove facilities for passive recreation, including a fishing dock and small boat launch, with beach restoration, scenic overlooks and nature trail. Buffer planting between trail and train tracks.

The Greenway Vision Plan was formally adopted as an amendment to the 1977 Village Master Plan in December 1997.

h. Croton-on-Hudson Feasibility Study, Village Waterfront Property, Imbiano Quigley Landscape Architects LLP, AKRF, 2000-2001.

The first draft of this study (March 2000) considered four alternative scenarios for the 13.4-acre Hudson waterfront study area. The March 2000 draft presented four alternative scenarios: Passive Recreation; Passive Recreation with water dependent uses (barge restaurant, marina, boat launch); Waterfront Recreation with land-based restaurant, cultural center, and marina development; Active Recreation (ballfields, tennis courts, children's play area, trails).

The final version of the study, dated September 2001, describes a preferred alternative, which incorporated recommended features from the original four alternatives. Section 3.8 describes these waterfront planning efforts in more detail.

i. Aquifer and Hydrogeology Studies

Several reports have been prepared assessing the capacity of the Village well fields, and reviewing protection of the aquifer providing the Village's ground water. These include three recent studies by Geraghty & Miller: ***Availability of ground-water resources at the Croton-on-Hudson well field, 1988; Aquifer protection plan, Croton-on-Hudson well field, 1989; Installation of Well 4, Croton-on-Hudson well field, 1992.***

j. Traffic Studies

Traffic Calming Study, Various Roadways, February 2000, Pennoni Associates Inc., evaluated traffic issues along four roadway segments, and a multiple leg intersection, and identified specific

problems at intersections and roadways. To address these, the report provided traffic calming recommendations, including: curb bulb outs, chokers, realignments, traffic islands, as well as supplementary signage.

k. Stormwater Management Studies

The Village has authorized the consulting engineers, Dvirka and Bartilucci to undertake the development of a phased stormwater plan to address drainage, flooding, and stormwater runoff/hydrology conditions in priority areas of the Village. This study is slated for completion in 2003.