

## The History of L'Hirondelle

### *From Boat Paddles to Paddle Tennis*

by Bliss McCord

For over 100 years, L'Hirondelle Club has been a fixture in the Ruxton community. Tucked away on L'Hirondelle Club Road, it is primarily known today as a family social club centered on popular activities – tennis, paddle tennis and swimming. But L'Hirondelle actually started in the late 1800s as the L'Hirondelle Boat Club. Back then groups of men, on teams with romantic names like Undine and Ariel, would row competitively six- or eight-oared shells on the Lower Branch of the Patapsco River.

The first official notice of L'Hirondelle's existence was an 1872 regatta invitation that listed the boat club as one

of the competitors. Although no one knows for sure how L'Hirondelle (French for the bird species 'swallow') got its name, it seems reasonable to compare that darting bird with the quick boats that zipped across the water like so many water bugs. Competition between clubs was stiff and the weekend regattas drew excited spectators. Boats were stored in boathouses at Winans Shipyard near the Patapsco peninsula known as Ferry Bar, where young oarsmen would take the streetcar to get to early morning practice in the hours before work.

John Redwood, the coach of the L'Hirondelle team, eventually oversaw the transition of the boat club to a country club. Redwood became the Club's first president, a position he held for 47 years. In 1890 L'Hirondelle Boat Club moved to the banks of Lake Roland, which had been created in 1861 to provide the City with water. In the latter part of the 19th century Ruxton was still a sleepy hamlet. All of that began to change in 1885 when the North Central Railroad opened stations near the bottom of the

Bellona Avenue hill (Lake Station) and a little farther north near the intersection of Bellona and Ruxton Roads (Ruxton Station), introducing the area to commuters.



*Before the days of rowing machines...*

Photo courtesy L'Hirondelle Club

workouts on the lake would often remain overnight at the private homes of friends.

By 1911, Club members, who by now wanted a base for social purposes as well as rowing, were able to build a true clubhouse. The original structure was small, with a main lounge, office, tiny kitchen and, interestingly, duckpin bowling lanes below. (This variation of standard bowling, very popular at the time, was said to have originated around 1900 in Baltimore at a bowling, billiards and pool hall owned by Orioles players John McGraw and Wilbert Robinson. This claim, however, has since been disproved; there are records of duckpin bowling as early as 1894 in Lowell, Massachusetts.) The lounge, with a stage at one end and a facing fireplace, was large enough for performances by amateur acting groups and was often used by the Church of the Good Shepherd for gatherings and benefits. French doors opened onto a tiled porch, allowing for an airy interior that could serve many purposes. That little

The new L'Hirondelle Boat Club built a clumsy-looking structure near the site of today's tennis house to store the team boats. Two wings jutted from the sides of the building that was crowned with an observation deck for viewing races on the lake. A runway led from the boathouse down to a dock at the mouth of Roland Run. In early summer, young rowers who rode the train from the City to get in

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# Winter Birds

by Peter Lev

Winter is a good time to look for birds in Maryland. Many species of waterfowl are on area lakes: Mallard, Black Duck, Canada Goose, Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck and Pied-billed Grebe, to name a few. White-throated and other sparrows are in brushy and marshy areas – the boardwalk at Robert E. Lee Park is a good vantage point for spotting them. Sparrows may also be at backyard feeders. Some of Maryland's biggest and most beautiful bird species, including Bald Eagle, Pileated Woodpecker and Barred Owl, are easier to see in winter because deciduous trees are bare. The best spot for sighting eagles is Conowingo Dam in Harford County, but they can also appear in local parks, at Loch Raven Reservoir or flying over your neighborhood. In fact, a pair of Bald



*Pileated Woodpeckers on tree in Robert E. Lee Park*

Photo courtesy Bart Viguers

Eagles has been hanging around Lake Roland for the last few years.

Once every several years we find large numbers of Northern songbirds wintering in Maryland because food is lacking in their more typical habitat, Canadian forests. This year Red-breasted Nuthatch and Pine Siskin are already here (early October); look for them at your feeders. The Red Crossbill, a less common visitor, has also been reported; look for Crossbills in stands of pine or hemlock where they feed on pine cones.

Winter is rarely dull for birders. So get out your field guide and have fun!

*Peter Lev is a longtime member of the Baltimore Bird Club. For information about the club, visit their website at [www.baltimorebirdclub.org](http://www.baltimorebirdclub.org).*

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# Robert E. Lee Park Needs YOU

Many of you have enjoyed the recently upgraded facilities and trails in Robert E. Lee Park, the result of a long-term partnership between Baltimore County and nearby residents. But, after years of neglect, the Park still needs all the help it can get to continue with improvements and upgrades. How can you help? Here is a list of items needed for programs, trail maintenance and so on. You may have some of these items on hand and be willing to donate them for staff and volunteer use. Note that items must be in good condition. Please call Donna at 410-887-8572 regarding any donations.

## Tools:

shovels and spades  
small garden trowels  
snow shovels  
rakes

ladders  
loppers  
axes  
hatchets  
bow saws  
pruners  
post hole digger  
log lifter  
digging bar  
bolt cutters  
hammers



## Office Materials:

hole punches  
child sized scissors



## Miscellaneous:

aquarium tanks  
small portable electric  
burner  
shop vac  
clean five gallon buckets

## Thank You, Patrons!

RRLRAIA appreciates the support of our Patrons every year and we encourage you to support these good neighbors:

Brightwood Club Association, Inc.	L'Hirondelle Club
Brown Memorial Woodbrook Presbyterian Church	The Mitre Box, Inc.
Burdette, Koehler, Murphy & Associates, Inc.	Needles and Threads of Ruxton
Church of the Good Shepherd	Pickersgill Retirement Community
Delbert Adams Construction	Pro Lawn Plus, Inc.
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Eddie's of Roland Park	Ruxton Animal Hospital
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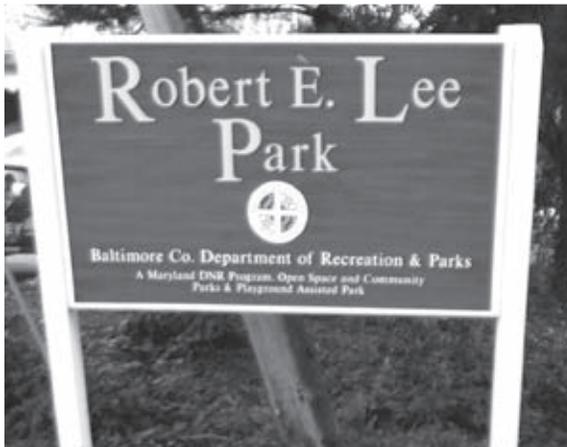
# See What You May Have Missed

One year after re-opening, Robert E. Lee Park is flourishing with a new pavilion, a rebuilt trestle bridge and almost 50 acres added to its area. Nature council volunteers such as Howdy Knipp and Jeffrey Budnitz and their group of dedicated trail maintenance workers wield chain saws, loppers and other tools to keep the many trails in the Park clear of fallen trees and vines.

Eagle Scout Kevin Turner and Boy Scout troop #711 built steps from Paw Point dog park to the lake. Student Conservation Corps members removed overgrown and invasive plants near the dam in preparation for the Guilford Garden Club replanting the area with native species. Children from Scott's Branch Police Athletic League planted turtlehead plants for the Baltimore Checkerspot Butterfly (*Euphydryas phaeton*) and painted wooden butterflies for the caterpillar enclosure near the future site of Acorn Hill. December programs include Kids' Night Out at the Park on December 20 and Winter Solstice Campfire on December 21. Programs planned for 2013 include a Winter Campfire in January, a Bird Extravaganza in February, and Woodland Egg Hunt in March. For details about age group, time and cost (if any), visit <http://relpnc.org/events>. To sign up for an event or to rent a pavilion contact Donna at 410-887-4156. Each pavilion accommodates up to 60 people and rents for \$75.



## Volunteers



Photos courtesy Shannon Davis, Nancy Worden Horst, Bart Viguers and Nettie Washburn





Summer fun and games in the Park. Rangers Shannon Davis and Bart Viguers, working with Master Naturalists and volunteers, provide a variety of imaginative programs for all ages: bird watching, mud day, kayaking, native plant and history walks, bike rodeo, fairies and elves, cane pole fishing, kayaking and nature scouts. Visit <http://relpnc.org> for a list of winter activities.



# Fun and Games

