

I Remember . . .

. . . When Ruxton Was Very Young

By Robert Hooper

IT was in 1882, when I was 14, that my father moved the family to Ruxton. Only it wasn't called Ruxton then. It wasn't called anything, because there was nothing there but two farms and a handful of houses.

We moved out for one of the reasons people do today—we wanted space and fresh air. The good railroad service was another reason. We caught the trains at Lake station, then right at the lake level. Bellona avenue, a dirt road, did not parallel the tracks as it does today. It twisted and curved, and it crossed the tracks three times. Why didn't we board the train at Ruxton station? It didn't exist. Neither did the Ruxton road bridge. There was no crossing at that point at all.

The railroad was our only link with the outside world. That's one reason service was so good. Another was the proximity of Lutherville, then a summer resort town filled in June, July and August with Baltimoreans of adventurous spirit. No one ever went to Towson, little more than a crossroads village. And the 8-mile buggy ride to the city was out of the question.

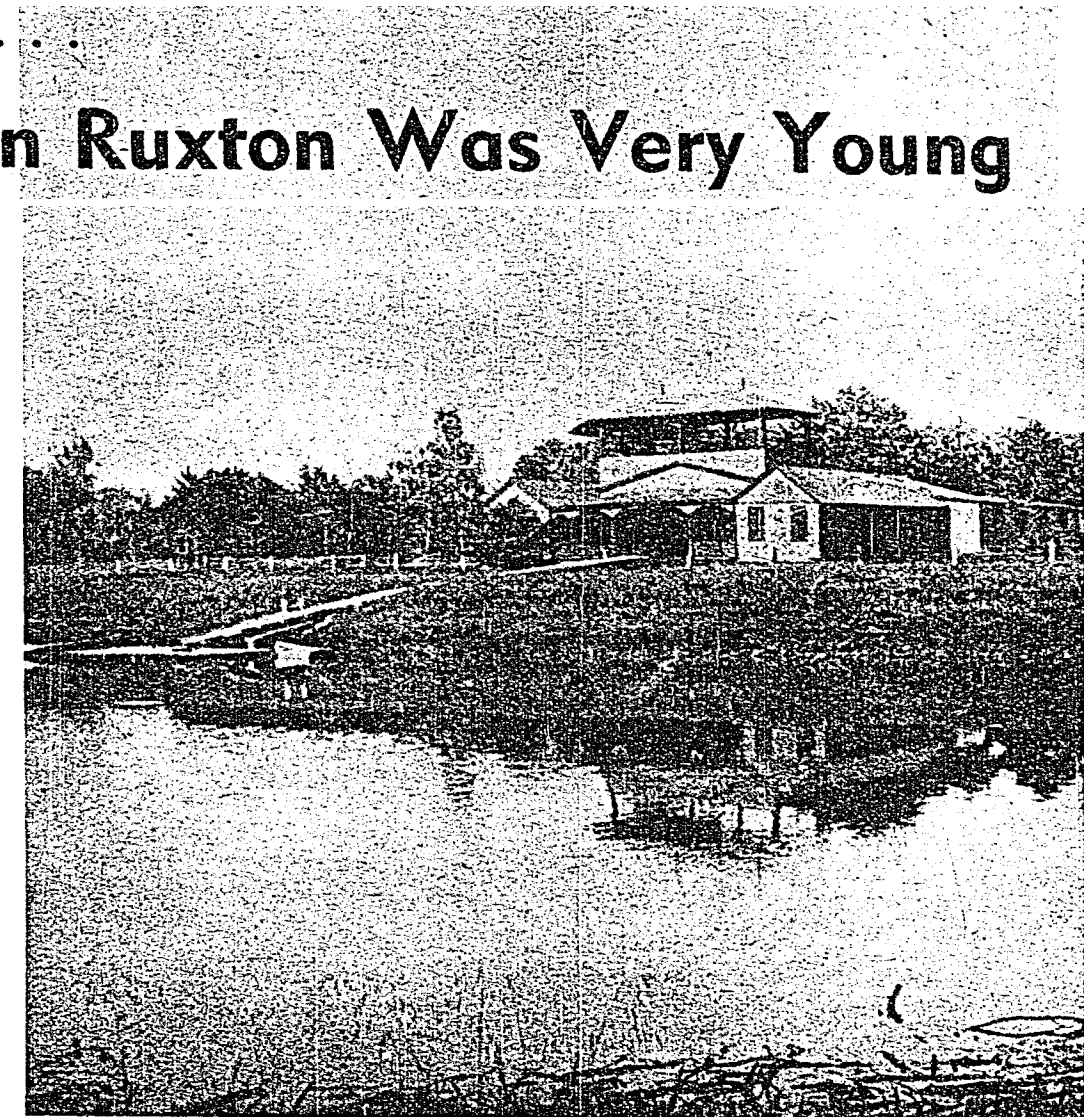
The railroad accounted for the area's most famous historical happening. That was the great train wreck of July 4, 1854. It took place on the curve just before you approach Lake Roland going south.

IN the fifties, as in my youth, it was a great thing for city people to come out on special trains for picnics and outings in the area. When I was a boy the favorite spot was Lake Roland; the trains brought car after car of skaters in the winter, and car after car of picnickers and fishermen in the summer. In 1854, though, Roland Run hadn't been dammed to make Lake Roland. That didn't come until 1865. So the favorite picnic spot was a grove on the site of the present Riderwood school.

The trains stopped at a small station located about where the Riderwood post office stands. When I was a boy the place was called Riders Switch, being named for John Rider, the local landowner, who gave his name to Riderwood.

About the tragedy. A large Sunday-school group had enjoyed a picnic in the grove, and had boarded the train for the trip home. When the train reached the curve I mentioned, an express plowed into it head-on; there was only a single track in those days. They say 50 women and children were killed.

Most of the excursionists debarked at Hollins station, where the Green Spring Valley line met the Northern Central tracks. There were ten trains each way daily on the Valley line, the tracks of which



This was L'Hirondelle Boat Club, at the junction of Roland Run and Lake Roland, 50 years ago. Photo by Mr. Hooper, author of the accompanying article.

still exist. Incidentally, the famous Bellona powder mill stood west of the line near the present lake; the mill gave the avenue its name.

The majority of the land west of the tracks was owned by the Heiser family. They ran a 215-acre farm. Other west-side landowners were the Burnhams and the Lordens. East of the tracks was Edward Rider's farm, the farmhouse being at the end of Locust avenue. Other east-side families in the early eighties were the Ellicotts, Finns, Kapps, Meyerses, Haslups, Coales and Hoopers. Our home stood between Bellona and the tracks near Malvern.

IN '35, the Northern Central bought a strip of land off the Heiser farm and built a small, wooden Ruxton station. The idea was undoubtedly Hosiab W. Kapp's. He was superintendent of the railroad and he saw the advantage of the area as a place for a development.

The next year, 1886, Judge William A. Fisher and his brother Charles purchased the Heiser farm for development. One of the farm's previous owners had been Nicholas Ruxton Moore, a Revolutionary officer and a Maryland congress-

man, who is supposed to be buried in a long-lost cemetery off Circle road. The community was supposedly named for him.

THE east side opened for development at the same time. I believe two men named Shay and Morgan were the developers. They laid off the lots and streets and put down wooden sidewalks. That area was called Ruxton Heights, while the land west of tracks was known as Ruxton Park.

In '38 the bridge crossing the tracks was constructed, and at about the same time the present stone station. Fourteen north and south-bound trains stopped every day. The 10.53 from Baltimore was the market train. It charged a nickel to bring a householder's box of groceries out from town.

You bought other groceries and got your mail at J. W. Hodinott's store, on the site of the present bakery. You met your neighbors there, and talked over the water problem—wells, at first, and later a water works driven by a water wheel in Roland Run, this being superseded by city-laid pipes made of wood because of war shortages—and the lack of electricity. There was

a pioneering aspect about the place.

Early west-side names were Fisher, Maroney, Hertel, Hoffman, Wilmer, Lucas, Hall, Redwood, Darnell, Dietrick, Finney, Binford, Frazier, Brown, Davis, Carroll, Wyatt, Stother, Evans, Hiss, George, Bonsal, Hooper, Mason, Webb, Poe, Huey, Boykin, Thomas. Ex-Senator Bruce was an early resident; so was ex-Governor William Pinkney Whyte.

STILL other names were Matthews, Vaile, Carter, Bryan, Clotworthy, Tunsall, Rosenthal, Hawks, Allison, Fried, Dinning, Mowbray, Bell, Shea, Rev. William O. Smith, Dabney, Olivier, Lee, Levering, Harrington and Merryman.

There wasn't much excitement in the early days; there isn't much now. The biggest activity was the L'Hirondelle Boat Club, which had its boathouse on the lake at the mouth of Roland Run. Baseball was another community sport, and skating. The entire atmosphere was pleasant and relaxed, with everyone knowing everyone else. Amazingly, something of the same atmosphere still exists, although Ruxton is not the tiny, tucked-away place of my youth.