

# Neighborhood NEWS

Winter 2009-2010

Ruxton-Riderwood-Lake Roland Area Improvement Association

## County Unveils Plan for Robert E. Lee Park

By Barbara Guarnieri

It's amazing how many people use Robert E. Lee Park! Hikers, cyclists, birders, naturalists, walkers, and dog owners were among dozens of residents who attended the unveiling of the multi-phased improvement project planned for the Park by Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks on November 17th.

Rec and Parks Director Bob Barrett said Baltimore County plans to clean up the Park, make it safe, and bring it up to County standards. This will be accomplished by hiring park rangers and maintenance staff. The County considers the Park to be a nature center where a variety of activities will be available to many different users.



...and the bridge comes tumbling down. Photo courtesy Siobhan O'Brien Photography, obrienseye.com

Bud Chrismer, Deputy Director of Rec and Parks; George Klunk, Chief Engineer; and John Rohde, of the design firm of Human & Rohde gave more detailed information about the

Phase I improvements. Charts and maps provided helpful visual references.

One of the project highlights includes replacing the bridge over the sluiceway into the Park. The old bridge has been demolished and work on its \$2.8 million replacement is scheduled to begin in March 2010. Until the project is completed in September 2010, pedestrian access is limited.

Erosion along trails and lakeside will be abated with an ecological top soil designed to better absorb and filter run off. Dispensers for plastic bags for collecting dog waste will be available in the Park.

A fenced dog park of more than an acre will be created on the peninsula. Pet owners will be allowed to let their dogs off leash in this area. Dogs must be leashed elsewhere in the Park. Construction of the dog park should be completed by May 2011. This project and the erosion control component is budgeted at \$2 million.

The transfer of stewardship of the Park from Baltimore City to the County has been in the making for more than 20 years, Barrett noted. He said the transfer is the result of the work of many interested parties, including state, county, and city elected officials and agencies and the participation of community members and private citizens, and that the future of the Park will require a like commitment from stakeholders.

Barrett cited Phase I as an example of this coalition at work. The state allocated \$3 million in construction funds, the County matched this appropriation with \$3.2 million, the City signed off on a long term lease of the Park and resident associations helped to prioritize the Park's most pressing needs. As a result, Phase I of the "take-over" has begun. Future phases are still in development and have not yet been funded. Barrett cautioned that though Phase I is well underway, enhancements of the long-neglected Park will require a monumental investment of time, talent, and resources.

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# The Dam History

by Bliss McCord

To many, the restorative value of Lake Roland is a given but did you know that it also has historical significance? The culmination of dedication, hard work, and historical research by many individuals, the Lake Roland Historic District was listed as a National Historic District on October 15, 1992.

This designation was awarded for its having met two criteria. First, it was associated with an important event in Baltimore history—its 19th century establishment as the City's first municipal water supply. Second, the design and construction features of the dam and Valve House also qualified it as an important example of a major Maryland public engineering work. Today we will concentrate on stone and mortar, but first, understanding some historical context should help bring those cold materials to life.

As early as 1797, Baltimore leaders recognized the need for a dependable water supply. In 1799, the City Council directed that pipe be laid from Carroll Run, and soon after, it announced it was accepting proposals for the establishment of a permanent water supply for the city. In response, the privately owned Baltimore Water Company was formed in 1804, and within three years had established a waterworks on the Jones Falls. For the next half century, Baltimore continued to grow while the water system expanded. By 1850, however, it was clear that the system was inadequate for a city of Baltimore's size. Only fifty-seven miles of pipe had been laid, an amount significantly less than that of comparably sized cities. In 1852, a Water Commission was formed and consulting engineers were hired to survey the area for the best sources of water. The resultant Report upon a Supply of Water for the City of Baltimore by T. Sickles (1854) recommended the Gunpowder River. The next year, the Baltimore Water Supply was purchased for \$1,350,000 by the City, which set about solving the water problem.

In spite of the Sickles recommendation, the Water Commission chose a plan by James Slade, a noted 19th century engineer from Boston. Slade's plan, which ignored the Gunpowder in favor of reworking the old Jones Falls water system, had one advantage: it was complete and ready to implement. In hindsight, that "easy" solution was probably not the wise one, but happily it produced Lake Roland for our enjoyment today.

Slade's plan consisted of an interconnecting water system composed of three reservoirs and the conduits between them. It

called for 1) the damming of Jones Falls to create a reservoir, Lake Roland (originally called Swann Lake for Thomas Swann, mayor from 1856-60), 2) a conduit from Swann Lake to Hampden Reservoir, 3) Hampden Reservoir, 4) a pipeline from Hampden Reservoir to Mt. Royal Reservoir, 5) Mt. Royal Reservoir, and 6) and the distribution network to city residents.

Construction began on the Lake Roland dam in 1858. Spanning the Jones Falls at a rocky, narrow ravine at what is now the south end of the lake, the original plan called for a dam of "wooden cribs" and earth. Timber crib dams were usually found where wood was plentiful and the transport of cement was costly or difficult. The good thing about wooden dams was that they could be built quickly. The bad thing was that wood rots unless it is kept constantly wet. Fortunately, this plan was scuttled when it was decided that the dam needed to be "indestructible" (perhaps

in part because of the pre-Civil War political climate?), another decision from which we benefit today.

Dam contractors J. H. Hoblitzell, J. Hoblitzell, W. L. Hoblitzell, and T.S. Crowley got right down to business. The all-masonry structure first was set on "full beds of fresh hydraulic cement mortar." The "rough gigantic stone of the neighboring hillsides" was crushed to rubble and used for the heavy interior

fill that measured 60 feet from the toe of the dam to its rear base. The back wall of the dam was perpendicular; the front was slanted into a spillway which, when the lake was high and water flowed over the dam, was quite picturesque. The exterior facing was made of rusticated Texas (MD) marble ashlar (or square stone) – limestone – with the slanted spillway measuring 125 feet wide at the top of the dam. The interior chambers under the Valve House were made of limestone as well. The dam was 40' high, with 6' tall wing walls enclosed in earth embankments. Once operational, water from the Valve House flowed into an underground brick conduit to Hampden Reservoir.

The Greek Revival Valve House sits at the top of the dam and to its southeast. It contains the controls for the dam beneath its floor and was built by J.B. and T.F. Connolly of the same materials. A. & W. Denmead provided the ironwork, along with the fittings to the gate chambers and the curved and branch



Marker designating site as a project of the Baltimore Water Works



pipes of the pipeline. The Dunmeads, who operated the well-known Monumental Iron Works at the corner of Monument Street and Guilford Avenue, had been making boilers and locomotives since 1847. The City's Chief Water Engineer, Charles P. Manning, who oversaw construction of the Lake Roland project, described how the dam's flow control system worked:

"The gate chambers consist of two distinct apartments, the floors of which are at the respective heights of 201 and 210 feet above tide—or respectively 24 and 15 feet below the crest of the dam, the usual surface of the lake. The lower chamber is provided with gates which regulate the discharge of water through the waste flume, and by means of which the lake can be drained to the bottom. The higher chamber is provided with gates by which the flow of water into the conduit is regulated; and another gate for occasional use, when a connection between the waste and conduit chambers may be needed. The gate chambers are enclosed by a substantial stone house, upon the floor of which are placed the screw stands of the several gates."

The first water flowed over the top of the dam in mid-July and a few days later, the same day as the Battle of First Bull Run, July 21, 1861, a proud Baltimore turned out for the dedication. According to Louis F. Gorr, writing for Baltimore Engineer in 1976, "Baltimore somehow had been transformed into a civilized city, ranking with the ancients, and symbolized by the classical temples that served as gate houses and waste weirs." The Valve House was completed in mid-October. Construction cost overruns are nothing new, and City fathers were probably not that shocked that the dam and lake excavation cost more than expected. Still, the \$112,752.55 price tag for the excavation and clearing of 50 acres for the lake and \$152,190.65 for the dam and Valve House were worth it: by 1862, the Lake Roland – Hampden – Mt. Royal Reservoir water system supplied the entire city's water.

Unfortunately, one problem Slade apparently did not foresee was silting. Almost from inception, and long before the days of the Baltimore Beltway and suburban construction run amok, silting of the lake bottom was a serious problem and dredging had to be conducted numerous times. Murky, contaminated waters sometimes plagued Lake Roland, to the point that it is said that local Towsonites routinely passed up drinking water when dining with friends in the city. Finally in 1915, Lake Roland was deemed obsolete and was abandoned as a source of city water.

So the next time you are in the Park, why not take an extra few minutes to stroll up Lakeside Drive and take a closer look at these engineering marvels of the 19th century? Although the lake has shrunk, much remains unchanged since Civil War days. The Valve House still stands squarely as it always has and the "indestructible" dam's spillway still charms when water courses down its face. Alert observers may even be rewarded by a blue heron's patient search for dinner at its base.

Thanks to Robert Macht, who was instrumental in securing the lake's historic designation and is one of the Park's most devoted friends, and for source information he provided, specifically John McGrain's fine article, "Historical Aspects of Lake Roland" (*Maryland Historical Magazine*, December 1979), liberally paraphrased here.

## Dumpster Day

Fall means many things to many people: crisp days, Ravens football, leaves to rake...and everybody's favorite, Dumpster Day! This year's premier fall event took place November 14th at Riderwood Elementary School. There were the usual piles of junk – old lamps, broken toys – but wise volunteers always know to keep one eye open as that junk could actually be 'junque' in disguise.

One improvement over previous years was the addition of a Goodwill donation truck area where useful items were donated and will be distributed to those who need them rather than going into a landfill. Great idea!

Thanks as always to the Board and other volunteers who routinely brave cold fingers and splinters to help the community clean up.



*Dumpster Day coordinator Beth Purvis with her much-appreciated volunteers.*



# Plans for Robert E. Lee Park

Continued from page 1

The old parking lot and access road will be refurbished and off road parking will be discouraged by a new edge design. The old concession stand will be razed to make way for more parking. Most importantly, Park users will be encouraged to use the expanded MTA light rail parking lot which will be connected to the Park by a new 'boardwalk' which will end at the Pavilion. The improved roadway and parking lot will be completed within a year and are budgeted at \$1.2 million.

A park council will be created to give input to future phases of Park improvement. The group will help develop a master plan for the Park, anticipating decades of improvement.

A lively Q & A session followed the presentation and revealed that:

- bathrooms will be provided and maintained;
- the loop trail will be retained as is and fully maintained after years of neglect;

- there are no current plans to dredge the lake or control up stream sedimentation;
- there will be no asphalt walkways and all surfacing materials will be 'green';
- there are no plans to construct a stairway to alleviate the sharp height differential along the peninsula walkway;
- there are plans to protect and promote the bounty of flora and fauna within the park through its designation as a 'nature center';
- the old park ranger residence will be razed;
- the pavilion will be restored as a destination for picnickers.

Bob Barrett concluded the evening by reminding the crowd that Baltimore County's Parks Department has a celebrated 60 year history marked by many award winning projects. Robert E. Lee Park will be no different, he said; in fact, it has the potential to be the best yet.

If you are interested in assuring the success of this County effort, please contact the Rec & Parks Department: 410-887-3871.

# Home Sales in Ruxton / Riderwood / Lake Roland

## Sold Properties from June, 2009 – October, 2009

Courtesy of the Whit Harvey Group,  
Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage

ADDRESS	SETTLE DATE	LIST PRICE	SOLD PRICE
1616 Alston Road	7/17/09	329,979	340,000
7111 Bellona Avenue	6/25/09	599,000	599,500
8005 Bellona Avenue	6/30/09	325,000	300,000
8204 Bellona Avenue	5/15/09	489,000	475,000
803 Boyce Avenue	10/1/09	799,000	750,000
1215 Boyce Avenue	8/25/09	765,000	750,000
512 Brightwood Club Drive	6/30/09	385,000	375,000
8225 Burnley Road	7/29/09		467,500
6320 Canter Way	9/4/09	699,990	649,990
1507 Carrollton Avenue	9/1/09	499,900	480,000
18 Charles Lane	9/30/09	500,000	500,000
7105 Charles Spring Way	9/22/09	639,900	610,000
621 Charles Street Avenue	9/1/09	389,900	381,000
6620 Charlesway	9/25/09	449,900	370,000
15 Devon Hill Road	5/20/09	439,000	390,000
1502 Dunlora Road	7/1/09	650,000	605,000
1507 Dunlora Road	7/7/09	575,000	550,000
530 Greenwood Road	7/30/09		2,050,000
6003 Hollins Avenue	6/16/09	1,149,000	1,100,000
1429 Jeffers Road	10/9/09		359,876
1611 Jeffers Road	10/2/09		485,000
1428B W. Joppa Road	6/19/09	975,000	905,000
1622 W. Joppa Road	9/17/09		510,000
1716 Killington Road	10/30/09		475,000
1722 Killington Road	10/30/09		475,000
1724 Killington Road	6/16/09		585,000
1221 Lake Avenue	9/25/09		269,990
6003 Lakehurst Avenue	7/20/09	239,900	235,000
6003 Lakehurst Avenue	10/21/09		130,000
829 Loyola Drive	8/31/09	327,000	327,000
1 Malibu Court	7/15/09	489,000	455,000
4 Malibu Court	7/31/09	450,000	428,000
10 Malvern Court	6/30/09	1,945,000	2,005,000
1008 Malvern Avenue	7/29/09		650,000
1504 Maywood Avenue	7/24/09	949,500	995,000
6801 Newstead Lane	9/8/09	749,900	700,000
304 North Wind Road	9/9/09		690,000
1914 Old Court Road	6/29/09		1,300,000
511 Piccadilly Road	8/24/09	435,000	420,000
514 Piccadilly Road	9/11/09		330,000
1016 Rolandvue Road	10/15/09	665,000	625,000
1514 Ruxton Road	10/20/09	445,000	430,000
1934 Ruxton Road	10/9/09	749,900	700,000
6011 Stanton Avenue	5/11/09		416,670
407 Terrace Way	7/17/09		314,900
8219 Thornton Road	6/19/09	335,000	317,500
207 Woodbrook Lane	8/25/09	1,399,000	1,250,000
8205 Yarborough Road	6/23/09		375,000