

ROLAND PARK NEWS

Roland Park Presbyterian Church: Past, Present and Future

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By Mark Hanna, Pastor, Roland Park Presbyterian Church

Editor's Note: Roland Park's architectural landmarks guide visitors and residents through the neighborhood as effectively as street signs. From the Italianate octagonal Roland Water Tower in adjacent Hoes Heights to the stucco and half timber Roland Shopping Center, this National Register Historic District encompasses an astonishing range of notable buildings. Standing among the gracious homes on Roland Avenue, the Romanesque tower of Roland Park Presbyterian Church on the corner of Roland and Upland Road is conspicuous in its simplicity, almost seeming to predate the surrounding neighborhood. The church's role within the community, however, belies its plain exterior.



An early undated photo of Roland Park Presbyterian Church (RPPC). Photo courtesy of RPPC

Roland Parkers are likely to know us as the church across from Petit Louis, the church with the garden in the front yard or the church that hosts the spring Strawberry Festival. It pleases me that people who are not otherwise familiar with the congregation identify us by our Strawberry Festival. The festival, which dates back to the 1950s when it was known as the May Festival, is truly not only a church event, but a community one. Somehow it captures what many of us love about our community: a sense of tradition, connection and fun wrapped into one.

Roland Park Presbyterian Church has been part of the neighborhood for more than a century. On May 8, 1900, eleven men and ten women met in the home of John T. Hill to discuss the idea of forming a Presbyterian church in the then-new Roland Park neighborhood of Baltimore. A committee of five was formed to look into this matter and seven weeks later, on Thursday, June 29, a business and social meeting of local Presbyterians was held in the Woman's Club Room on the second floor of the Roland Park Shopping Center. The committee

reported that arrangements could be made for use of the Woman's Club Room for morning and evening services at a cost of \$3 per Sunday, including use of the piano, organ and lights. It was felt that a minister



Children of RPPC stand at the door, greeting worshipers on "Gifts of Children" Sunday. Photo courtesy of RPPC

could be secured for an annual salary of \$1,000 and a building lot could be obtained at a discount from the Roland Park Company. Plans were presented for a stone structure that could be built for \$10,000-\$12,000 and on April 10, 1901, the new church decided to proceed immediately with the purchase of a lot on which to erect a stone structure at Roland Avenue and Upland Road. The cornerstone of the church building was laid on July 10, 1902, and seventeen months later on December 6, 1902, dedication services were held.

The original sanctuary of the church was in an auditorium style with a sloping floor and no central aisle. There was a central pulpit behind which stood the choir area and the organ console. The church's first organ was water-powered and many an early youngster could recall floating tiny sailboats as water flowed out to Roland Avenue, since the organ was started when Sunday School concluded just prior to the morning service.

Called to serve the congregation as pastor in 2008, I am only the seventh installed senior pastor in over a century. When I arrived six years ago, I encountered a congregation in the midst of transition. Facing many of the challenges that churches in the 21st century face, Roland Park Presbyterian has several things working in its favor: a rich and meaningful history, past members who planned well for

Trail Blazers

By Nancy Worden Horst

The Habitat and Trail team is a group of dedicated volunteers who keep the trails and pathways of Robert E. Lee Park clear and free of debris so that visitors can enjoy the park more easily. On the second Saturday morning of each month, these hardy volunteers help clear fallen trees and brush and cut back invasive plants, such as multi-flora rose and porcelain berry vine, to allow sunlight into wet, muddy areas. Grooming the park's many trails is a never-ending process, but it is good, dirty fun.

As volunteers clear the pathways, they are also painting 'blazes' on trees in red, green or yellow to mark the route of each main trail, using a combination of high-tech Global Positioning System (GPS) technology and old-fashioned maps. These agreed-upon pathways correspond to a map being developed by Baltimore County and the Nature Council.

John Goodrich, a twenty-something who grew up riding his bike on the trails through the park, recently adopted the L'Hirondelle Trail. Both John and Jeffrey Budnitz, a Nature Council board



A Habitat and Trails volunteer cuts 'cookies' from 108" diameter poplar tree on the L'Hirondelle Trail that can be placed on muddy portions of a hiking trail. Photo: Jeffrey Budnitz

member, have groomed the trail from L'Hirondelle Club Road to the trestle, removing the encroaching green brier and multi-flora rose that made it almost impossible to hike. John also plans to enlist members of the Young Defenders group from the Maryland Historical Society to work on the trail.

An added benefit to this project is that the L'Hirondelle Trail and the nearby Lake Roland meadow are now accessible to both the park 'gator and the fire department should an emergency arise.

Other volunteers and groups have been busy in different areas of the park. Mary and Frank Emerson, for example, have toiled on trails in the

fragile Serpentine area near the Home & Hospital School, while several Eagle Scouts have cleared and stabilized trails in the interior of the park.

Thrive On!

PARK
CAMPS
and Summer Programs

For campers ages 3 1/2 and up, summer experiences in the tradition of The Park School of Baltimore • Led by Park faculty on our 100-acre wooded campus • Learn more about the Park Camps of 2014 at www.parkcamps.com and *Thrive On!*



There's no telling what you'll find on Cleanup Day at Lake Roland! Photo: Howdy Knipp

As part of the 2013 International Coastal Cleanup, sponsored by the Ocean Conservancy, 13 volunteers in kayaks and canoes collected bags of trash, tires, furniture and miscellaneous detritus. The Conservancy's educational effort stresses that "trash travels; no matter where you live trash can travel from your hands out to sea and...everyone must be part of the solution to trash pollution."

Robert E. Lee park has some of the best trails in Baltimore, but they require constant upkeep. So if you like to work outside, get your hands dirty and do a good deed, join a ranger and the Habitat and Trail team on the second Saturday of every month from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. to help maintain the park's beauty. Be sure to wear closed-toe shoes and bring water. Please note that volunteers who cut trees, cookies and log benches have been trained and certified to handle chain saws and other equipment. ❖