

The Carroll House of Runnymede Park

By Barbara Glakas

Runnymede Park, one of nine parks in the Town of Herndon, is a heavily wooded natural park of 58 acres which boasts over 450 native plants, diverse wildlife habitats, the Sugarland Run stream, and Native American artifacts that date back hundreds of years.

If you have ever travelled along the eastern portion of Herndon Parkway, you have noticed the entrance into Runnymede Park, marked by a small parking lot, a picnic shelter and a two-story brick home, known as the Atkin's House, built in 1956 and named after the family who built it. That house is currently occupied by residential tenants – the Alger family -- who keep a watchful eye over the property.

But if you have never walked deeper into Runnymede Park, you may not have yet discovered another little jewel, an old stone house built c. 1909, referred to as the Carroll House or the Carroll Cabin.

Since the 1800s, the land that encompasses Runnymede Park has been owned by a variety of well-known Herndon residents and property owners, from Richard Coleman (son of Colonel John Coleman, a Revolutionary War veteran who built the first house in Herndon), Charles Ratcliffe (relative of Civil War spy, Laura Ratcliffe whose house still remains on Centreville Road), William Barker (after which the Barker Hill area was named) and his daughter Catherine Poole.

According to the Friends of Runnymede Park (FRP) website, J.H. Bicksler purchased 130 acres of what is now Runnymede Park from Catherine Poole in 1905. The Bickslers sold 50 acres of their land to Harry E. Van Duessen of Washington. This land included the area where the Carroll house now stands, but in 1907 there were no records of any buildings on this lot. The Van Duessens sold 30 acres of their lot to J. Albert Hawkins for \$300.

No personal property tax records were recorded for Mr. Hawkins in 1909, but the 1910 tax records show that Mr. Hawkins paid property tax on 20 acres of land and 1 cattle @ \$25, 1 watch @ \$25, 1 musical instrument @ \$5, 1 firearm @ \$1, household/kitchen furniture @ \$100, all other @ \$15, and a building valued at \$600. This is the first mention of a building within the park's current boundaries that includes the Carroll House. Later that year the land was purchased by W.F. Middleton. That deed noted that the land had been "improved by a stone dwelling."

Notes from the Friends of Runnymede Park said that, "It is possible that Hawkins built this cabin to enjoy on a part time basis. It was not uncommon at the turn of the 19th century for people to 'escape' the city by traveling to a weekend home along one of the westerly railroads such as the W&OD station which opened in 1859." That was a reasonable assumption, given that many Washingtonians often travelled to Herndon for the summer.

However, with further research we learned that James A. Hawkins was born in New York and was a banker and farmer. He purchased 20 acres of land in what is now Runnymede Park in 1908 and a stone cabin was built. He is found on Herndon's 1910 census along with his French wife, Georgette, and his stepson, Marcel. The cabin is of unique design and there are several heraldic markings on the door and window lintels, which show the Royal Arms of France.

The Hawkins moved around, going from Herndon, to New York, to Mexico and eventually landing in California in about 1920, where they stayed. Marcel went to Yale for undergraduate and graduate schools, did some motion picture and banking business and became a master French teacher. His father, James, also eventually got into the arts and motion picture business.

Before leaving Herndon the Hawkins sold the stone cabin and property to C. F. Martz. Mrs. Sarah Martz, who had owned part of this lot in 1912, had lived alone in the cabin after her husband died. People did not see her for a week or so and went looking for her. In 1952 she was found drowned in the cistern next to the house. It was never clear if she fell in the cistern by accident or if she was murdered, as some thought. The Martz's had the house up until 1953 when it was sold to the Carrolls.

In the 1950s, Franklin L. Carroll and his family, including his son, Franklin Jr., were living in this stone cabin that had been built in 1909. In around 1956 Mr. Carroll borrowed \$4,000 to build a cinder block addition to the house, on its southern side, to create more room for his family.

According to John DeNoyer and Ann Csonka, long-time Herndon residents, who knew Frank Carroll Jr. lived in the cabin full time. Frank Jr. tended to be quiet and somewhat reclusive. He befriended fox families who denned near his house. Frank Jr., along with other volunteers and naturalists, helped take people on discovery walks around the property that is now Runnymede Park. When people trespassed on his property without permission, however, Frank Jr. was known to run them off with his gun in hand.

Frank Carroll Jr. sold his property in 1986 to the Rehabilitation and Development Corporation, with the provision that he be allowed to continue living in the Carroll House until they built him a new home. The Corporation had intended to build a multi-home development on this property.

In 1987 a bond referendum was approved for the Town of Herndon to create the aquatic facility at the Community Center and to create a park to help preserve open space. In 1988 the Town purchased the land where both the Carroll and Atkins houses sit, which was then referred to as the Northeast Herndon Park. Later that year it was renamed Runnymede Park, in honor of Herndon's Sister City, Runnymede, England.

In 1995 C. Richard Bierce completed a historical assessment of the Carroll House for the Town of Herndon. In his report he hypothesized that the original stone portion of the house may have been constructed as a "summer house away from the city" because it is "atypical in its basic configuration, plan and scale" for full-year use. He felt the house was "cottage style and

form...consistent with some of the more romantic ideals of the Arts & Crafts movement.” Mr. Bierce photographed and documented the floor plan of the house as well as a wood shed that appeared to have been built at about the same time as the stone cottage. The shed had once been used as a carriage house for horse and carriage. That shed, however, was removed a short time after Mr. Bierce’s report was completed.

DeNoyer and Csonka recall that the cabin was made with stones found in the park. The cabin had a fireplace, a bathroom, a kitchen, a living room and a bedroom. The living room was later divided to make a second bedroom. The house had a cellar which measured about six by eight feet, with a boiler for steam heating the house. The cabin had oak floors and a low-hanging ceiling which was finished in oak. The interior walls were plaster, measuring about 18 inches thick. The house included artful details, such as colored glass panes in door windows and a heraldic shield design marked above doors and windows.

A small brick addition was added to the northeast side of the cabin while the Carroll family was there, prior to Frank Jr. becoming the primary occupant. The exact year it was built is unknown. This addition was used as a laundry room.

In 2007 Runnymede Park improvements were completed by the Town, which included a covered picnic shelter on the west side of the Carroll House.

The next time you visit Runnymede, park your car or bike by the Atkins House and walk northward about 150 meters on a gravel trail that will eventually open up into a picturesque grassy area which surrounds the stone Carroll House. Seeing the house is like peaking back into time.

About this column: “Remembering Herndon’s History” is a regular Herndon Patch feature offering stories and anecdotes about Herndon’s past. The articles are written by members of the Herndon Historical Society. Barbara Glakas is a member. A complete list of “Remembering Herndon’s History” columns is available on the Historical Society website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org.

The Herndon Historical Society operates a small museum that focuses on local history. It is housed in the Herndon Depot in downtown Herndon on Lynn Street and is open every Sunday from noon until 3:00. Visit the Society’s website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org, and the Historical Society’s Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HerndonHistory> for more information.

Note: The Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday. If you have an interest in local history and would like to help, contact HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com.