

HISTORY OF GLENCARLYN PARK AND LONG BRANCH NATURE CENTER

By

Susan Gilpin

With pleasure now the Poet Sings
The beauty of the "*Carlin Springs*" --
Nature there lends her fairest charms.
There quiet reigns without alarms,
The waters flow in limpid streams,
The good there rest in peaceful dreams.
Thither are bending a thriving throng --
As birds flock singing joyous Song.
There *Home* is truly a thing of joy
There Sylvan pleasures never cloy.

by J. W. Ray
inscribed to Dr. Backus
May 21, 1894

Carlin Springs, twin springs south of Four Mile Run in what is now Glencarlyn Park, have attracted nature lovers for over a century. After the Civil War outing parties came from Washington, D.C., by train, and now bicyclists approach the springs along the old Washington & Old Dominion railroad right of way, now a Northern Virginia Regional Park.

Admiring the beauty of the springs and the adjacent stream, however, has been easier than figuring out a way to preserve them. Glencarlyn Park exists because of far-sighted individuals who persisted even when other concerns robbed some officials of the vision of the parkland. Citizen initiatives started the park, and citizen vigilance helps to preserve it.

Geology And Prehistory

Geologically, Glencarlyn Park sits astride the fall line which divides the piedmont from the coastal plain. A waterfall known as Huffman's White Water on Four Mile Run at the south end of the park marks the end of the sedimented flatlands which stretch across the Chesapeake to the Atlantic.

Four Mile Run was named in early colonial days -- the name first appears on a land grant map of 1694. It is four miles up the Potomac River from Great Hunting Creek in Alexandria, which was a major reference point at the time. Four Mile Run used to carry more water than it does now. One hundred years ago, the whole water table was higher than it is now.

Tulip poplars and oak trees have soared over the run for 500 years or more. Beneath them deer and elk used to graze. Fish swam in the run, and native turkeys foraged in the understory.

Indians camped along Four Mile Run in many places. Near the Moses Ball Spring, which is on the hill overlooking Long Branch from the north, tiny serrated dart points called Lecroy points have been found. These relics are 8500

years old. They suggest that small bands of not more than 30 Indians camped along Long Branch in the early archaic period. They used the points, which may have been poisoned, for spearheads.

Early Landholders

Several early land grants came together in Glencarlynn Park, at the point where Long Branch flows into Four Mile Run. This point is marked now by a marble pillar, erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution, on the spot where a white oak tree 18 inches in diameter once served as a survey marker. A slice of the oak tree can be seen in Glencarlynn Library.

The original landowners whose tracts came together at the oak tree included John Ball, Moses Ball, John Colville, Stephen Gray, and Robert Bates. A map of their holdings is in the appendix. John Ball was a yeoman farmer who built what is now the Ball-Sellers House at 5620 Third Street South, the oldest standing house in the county. Moses Ball owned the land across Long Branch where Glencarlynn School is now. John Colville's land ran along Lubber Run. Stephen Gray's land passed into George Washington's hands in 1774.

Water must have flowed plentifully through Glencarlynn Park in the colonial period, because its streams powered three mills. John Ball had a mill for grinding corn and wheat where Lubber Run meets Four Mile Run, and one of his millstones is in the Hume School Museum belonging to the Arlington Historical Society. Moses Ball had a mill where Long Branch joins Four Mile Run, and Colville was granted permission to build a water grist mill on Lubber Run in 1754. The mills generated so much traffic that one of the earliest roads in Arlington county ran along what is now Fifth Road South, also called Glencarlynn Road, which connected the mills with the Leesburg Pike, now Route 7, at Culmore. In 1836 George Washington Parke Custis also built a mill on Four Mile Run, but Arlington Mill was beyond the boundaries of the present park, where Four Mile Run crosses Columbia Pike.

George Washington was interested in Four Mile Run for the timber which grew along its banks. He bought what he called his Four Mile Run tract in 1774 from Stephen Gray, along with an adjacent tract belonging to Gabriel Adams. After the Revolutionary War, in 1785 and 1786, Washington finally surveyed the tract, recording "some part is pretty well timbered, and generally speaking, it is level." Moses Ball accompanied Washington when he surveyed the 1150-acre tract, which extended along Four Mile Run from the survey oak tree to what is now the Shirley Highway. Washington was unable to finish the survey in 1785 because one of his chain carriers, a servant named William, fell and broke the pan of his knee. Washington had to find a sled to carry William home, and it was not until the following spring that Washington returned to finish the survey.

The Four Mile Run area remains one of the most heavily wooded areas in Arlington, which as recently as 1930 was still 30 percent forest.

The Railroad

The Carlin Springs area first became accessible from Alexandria City in 1858, when steam-powered trains came out the rail lines laid by the Alexandria,

Loudoun, and Hampshire Railway from Alexandria to Bluemont. Two stations served the Carlin Springs area, Arlington on Columbia Pike and Glencarlynn on what is now South Kensington Street.

During the Civil War, the railroad carried Union troops and supplies through Glencarlynn, and during the Spanish American War, soldiers passed through on their way to Camp Alger in Dunn Loring. But most of the passengers who got on and off "The Virginia Creeper" at Glencarlynn between 1859 and 1951 were commuters working in the District, teenagers attending high school in Georgetown before Arlington opened Washington-Lee High School in 1925, and Washington, D.C. residents seeking pleasure at the springs between 1872 and 1893.

John Carlin capitalized on accessibility by building two pavilions at Carlin Springs in 1872. He had inherited the springs from his grandfather William Carlin, who had bought them from John Ball's estate in 1772. One pavilion was for dances, and the other served ice cream and meals for 250 people. The *Evening Star* reported in 1871 on "an agreeable affair" at the springs. Other attractions were a swimming hole and a bar, which was respectfully closed during church parties. The resort flourished about 20 years, but it closed in 1893 and the pavilions fell into disrepair.

Swimming holes along Four Mile Run remained an attraction for generations, until the course of the stream changed and the holes disappeared. Two old-timers remember the swimming holes fondly. Mary Louise Shafer wrote in "Recreation in Arlington County, 1870-1920," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, as follows:

It was the best swimming hole in Arlington. In places the water was seven or eight feet deep. There was a mill with a large wheel there, and the children would crawl over the sluiceway, grab the top of the wheel, and ride it down to the water.

Carl Porter, who grew up in Clarendon in the 1920s, recorded his memories for the library oral history project:

There was a path along the edge of the Lubber Run, leading from the old barn down across what is now Arlington Blvd., down to the intersection of Lubber Run and Four-Mile Run, a place we used to call Round Hole, and this was the gathering place for all of us youngsters where we could swim. I'm sure it wasn't very much of a swimming place, but we thought it was a regular lake in those days.

Becoming A Public Park

Carlin Springs first became part of a park in 1892, when Samuel S. Burdett deeded 19 acres of land for the use of the residents of Glencarlynn Subdivision. Along with George Curtis, Burdett had laid out the Carlin Springs Subdivision in 1888.

The heart of today's Glencarlynn Park is the original Burdett park, but ironically, it was not the first part of the park to be acquired by the county. Arlington County did not have a Department of Parks and Recreation until 1944. Until then, most parks were school playgrounds and small tot lots, under

the supervision of the School Board.

The first land which the county bought specifically as parkland was 28 acres along Four Mile Run, purchased in 1936. Four acres of this land are in Glencarlynn Park and 13 acres are in Lubber Run Park. The first bits of Glencarlynn Park to be acquired by the county were 4 acres along Lubber Run and 7 acres near Ninth Street South at the southern tip of the park. Developer Thomas H. Pickford of Arlington Forest donated the land along Lubber Run in 1936, and B. F. Perrow sold the land between Park Glen Apartments and Four Mile Run to the County for \$2,000 the same year.

The Carlin Springs and the surrounding park set aside by Burdett did not come under county ownership until 1944, when the Virginia Conservation Commission gave them to the county, along with 6 adjoining acres. The County had refused a previous offer of the park in 1923, with the result that the land was given to the state in 1935.

The three scattered sites acquired between 1936 and 1944 -- Park Glen, Arlington Forest, and Carlin Springs -- form the edges of today's Glencarlynn Park. The acres in between were assembled after 1951, when the voters of Arlington County approved a bond referendum of \$882,000. By this time the population of the county had increased more than five-fold over the level in 1930, and vacant land could no longer be relied upon for recreation.

The biggest addition to Glencarlynn Park since the three original sites was the 18-acre triangle where Four Mile Run meets Long Branch, where George Washington's boundary marker stood. The county bought this land from Russell L. Scheele in 1953 for \$48,000.

Justing behind the nature center is the meadowland, 1.6 acres which narrowly escaped subdivision in 1970. When the owners of the meadow, William and Jane Terry, decided to sell their back lot to a developer, 86 citizens of Glencarlynn got together and raised about \$17,000 in 48 hours. The Glencarlynn Citizens Recreation Partnership held the land until the county bought it in 1971.

Glencarlynn citizens also organized to improve their park in 1968, when the Moses Ball Spring between Northern Virginia Doctors Hospital and Long Branch was threatened, first by hospital expansion and then by the Arlington County Transportation Department. Citizens and environmentalists saved the spring by proposing a swap, which finally took place in 1974. Two acres along Sixth Road South were exchanged to the hospital for two acres 200 feet back from the road. In addition, Northern Virginia Doctors Hospital dedicated a scenic easement of .63 acres to the county. Plans to fill in the spring were cancelled. Runoff from the spring now flows into Long Branch through a culvert under an arched stone bridge which is part of the entrance road to the nature center.

Long Branch Nature Center

Long Branch Nature Center was dedicated in November, 1972, as a result of the efforts of many local people, particularly the members of the Woman's Club of Arlington. At the height of the conservation movement this small unspoiled spot was chosen to be used by the county park system for education and

preservation of the natural environment. A wilderness area, it was the home for 27 years of William and Mae Hickman. Mrs. Hickman developed a hospital for birds and small animals. Her first patients were two baby starlings which she raised and released. When the Hickmans moved to Marshall, Virginia, in 1966, they left an enduring legacy: the number and variety of birds which stop along the land they preserved on Four Mile Run have made the area a mecca for bird watchers.

The county bought six acres from the Hickmans in four lots between 1963 and 1966. In 1971, the County Board appropriated about \$30,000 to renovate and enlarge the Hickmans' house as a nature center building. County Board member Joseph Wholey cut the ribbon at the building dedication a year later.

The popularity of Long Branch Nature Center with Arlington residents is shown by the attendance figures: 13,000 people in fiscal 1973, growing to 36,000 in fiscal 1985. Programs in fiscal 1985 include the following:

1. summer nature camp, in its 13th year
2. neighborhood activities for Columbia Heights mothers and tots
3. family hikes
4. school programs
5. seasonal programs
6. wildlife information and assistance
7. films on Sunday afternoons
8. interpretative trail walks
9. van tours
10. trail maintenance and other stewardship activities
11. monitoring air and water quality
12. provision of meeting space for the Northern Virginia Chapter of the Virginia Society of Ornithology, the Northern Virginia Mineral Club, and the Fossil Club.

Staff at Long Branch Nature Center works in cooperation with Gulf Branch Nature Center, which was founded in 1966. Combined staff includes one supervisor, two directors, three park naturalists, one exhibit specialist, and part-time and seasonal workers. Long Branch Nature Center directors have been the following:

- November 1972 Bud Hermann
- 1973 Linda Smith
- 1974-1978 Paul Burke
- 1978-February 1985 Terry Boykie
- July 1985 Greg Zell

Glencarlynn Park now includes 97 acres which were acquired by the county in 32 separate transactions, 10 of them rights-of-way and other parcels of a half acre or less. A great complement to the park is the W. & O.D. Regional Trail, maintained by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. Like Glencarlynn Park, it runs along Four Mile Run, but its length is much greater -- 42 miles from the Potomac to the Blue Ridge. The "Sylvan pleasures" of Glencarlynn appeal as much to Arlington residents now as they did a century ago.

Sources — Besides *AHS Magazines* and Cornelia Rose's *Arlington County, Virginia*, this article draws on the following: Stetson, *Four Mile Run Land Grants*; the Glencarlynn Scrapbooks; an interview with Florence Back and another with Scott Silsby; and the files of the Department of Public Works Real Property Section and Long Branch Nature Center. Particular thanks go to county employees Paul Senk and Nancy Roisum for their assistance.

8	James Brechin (795)	1716
9	John Todd & Ervan Thomas (1,215)	1719
10	Thomas Lee (232)	1719
11	Stephen Gray (378)	1724
12	Charles Broadwater (151)	1724
13	George Mason (250)	1724
14	James Robertson (662)	1724
15	James Robertson (432)	1724
16	Richard Taylor (280)	1725
17	Robert Bates (525)	1725
18	Richard Taylor (283)	1725
19	James Robertson (800)	1729
20	William Gunnell (400)	1729
21	William Gunnell (250)	1729
22	John Tammel (248)	1729
23	Simon Pearson (330)	1729
24	Simon Pearson (195)	1729
25	Francis Awbrey (1,261)	1729
26	Gabriel Adams (790)	1730
27	James Robertson (629)	1730
28	Simon Pearson & James Going (652)	1730
29	James Robertson (338)	1731
30	Gabriel Adams (338)	1731
31	Simon Pearson & Gabriel Adams (708)	1731
32	Robert Carter, Jr. (200)	1731
33	George Turberville (200)	1731
34	John Awbrey (86)	1739
35	John Colville (1,246)	1739
36	Daniel Jennings (12)	1740
37	George Harrison (208)	1742
38	John Ball (166)	1742
39	William Gladin (119)	1744
40	Daniel Jennings (50)	1744
41	Moses Ball (91)	1748
42	John Colville (75)	1744
43	James Robertson (419)	1766
44	John Carlyle & John Dalton (95)	1770
45	Richard Arrell (15)	1778
46	George Mason (109½)	1767
47	George Minor (12)	1788
48	John Ball (Ensign) (12¼)	1796

(Dashed lines indicate
boundary conflicts.)

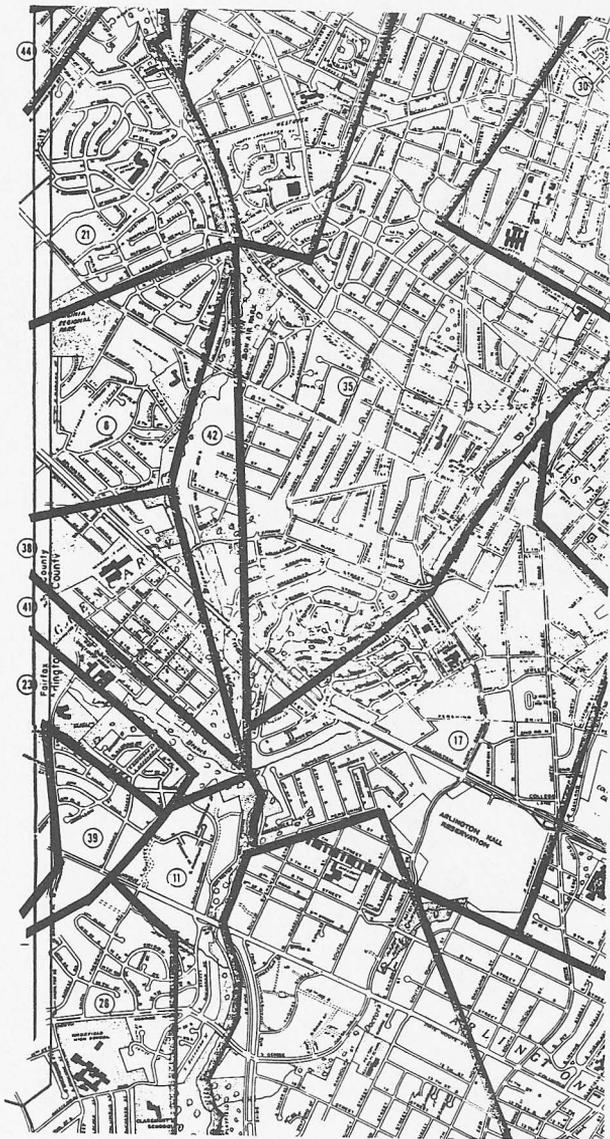
Early land grants

**ARLINGTON COUNTY .
VIRGINIA**

**Researched by
Donald A. Wise**

Arlington Historical Society

c 1976



Birds of Long Branch Nature Center

HERON, Great Blue Green	FLYCATCHER, Great Crested Acadian Least	Magnolia Cape May Black-throated Blue Yellow-rumped	GRACKLE, Common
GOOSE, Canada	PEWEE, Eastern Wood	Black-throated Green Cerulean Blackburnian	COWBIRD, Brown-headed
MALLARD Common	SWALLOW, Barn	Chestnut-sided Bay-breasted Blackpoll	FINCH, Purple House
VULTURE, Turkey	MARTIN, Purple	Pine Prairie Palm	REDPOLL, Common
OSPREY	JAY, Blue	Black-and-white	SISKIN, Pine
HAWK, Cooper's Sharp-shinned Red-shouldered Broad-winged Red-tailed	CROW, Common Fish	REDSTART, American	GOLDFINCH, American
MERLIN	CHICKADEE, Carolina	WARBLER, Worm-eating	GROSBACK, Evening
KESTREL, American	TITMOUSE, Tufted	OVENBIRD	SPARROW, House
BOBWHITE	NUTHATCH, White-breasted Red-breasted	WATERTHRUSH, Northern Louisiana	
KILLDEER	CREEPER, Brown	WARBLER, Kentucky Connecticut	
YELLOWLEGS, Lesser	WREN, House Winter Carolina	YELLOWTHROAT, Common	
SANDPIPER, Solitary Spotted	MOCKINGBIRD	WARBLER, Hooded Wilson's Canada	
GULL, Herring Ring-billed	CATBIRD, Gray	TANAGER, Scarlet Summer	
DOVE, Rock Mourning	THRASHER, Brown	CARDINAL, Northern	
CUCKOO, Yellow-billed Black-billed	ROBIN, American	GROSBACK, Rose-breasted	
OWL, Great Horned Barred	THRUSH, Wood Hermit Swainson's Gray-Cheeked	BUNTING, Indigo	
NIGHTHAWK, Common	VEERY	TOWHEE, Rufous-sided	
SWIFT, Chimney	GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray	SPARROW, Tree Chipping Field White-crowned White-throated Fox Swamp Song	
HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated	KINGLET, Golden-crowned Ruby-crowned	JUNCO, Dark-eyed	
KINGFISHER, Belted	WAXWING, Cedar	BLACKBIRD, Red-winged	
FLICKER, Common	STARLING	MEADOWLARK, Eastern	
WOODPECKER, Pileated Red-bellied Hairy Downy	VIREO, Solitary White-eyed Yellow-throated Red-eyed Philadelphia	ORIOLE, Northern	
SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied	WARBLER, Blue-winged Brewster's Tennessee Orange-crowned Nashville Northern Parula Yellow		
KINGBIRD, Eastern			
FLYCATCHER, Great Crested			
PHOEBE, Eastern			