

## Contacts

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Friends of Lake Accotink Park Website  
<https://www.flapaccotink.org>

Lake Accotink Park  
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/lake-accotink/>

## Resources

<http://www.belvoir.army.mil/history/20C.asp>

<http://vaaccotink.weebly.com/>

<http://ravensworthhistory.org/>

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/lake-accotink/>

<http://www.nvcc.edu/home/csiegel/>

<http://www.belvoir.army.mil/history/Humphreys.htm>

***"Fort Belvoir to Open Reservoir to Public". The Washington Post. 4 September 1959.***

***"Fairfax Wants Fort's Reservoir for Park". The Washington Post. 2 October 1958.***

***"Fairfax Wins Belvoir Park". The Washington Post. 1 April 1960.***



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If ADA/ reasonable accommodations are needed, please call (703) 324-8563. TTY (703) 803-3354

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# Lake Accotink Park: Witness to History



7500 ACCOTINK PARK ROAD  
SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA 22150

**In 2016, the Friends of Lake Accotink Park (FLAP) initiated a project to update the brochure, Lake Accotink Park: Witness to History.**

**The research team relied heavily on previous studies, public records, and collections. A great deal of appreciation goes to the members of the Friends of Lake Accotink Park research committee for their contributions to content and formatting.**

**Many thanks to the Lake Accotink Park staff who developed the original brochure and to those who assisted in the editing of the current document**



### **Fun in the Park**

From its beginning as a fishing and picnic spot for Fairfax County residents, Lake Accotink has evolved into a park rich in a variety of activities.

The 26-horse antique carousel has been a favorite of area children. Built between 1937 and 1945 by the Allan Hershell Company, the carousel was purchased by the Park Authority in 1978 from Fairhill Farm antiques. The horses are hand carved and constructed of wood and cast aluminum. The horses are painted in whimsical colors and designs that appeal to both children and adults.

Each season brings different activities to the park and different uses to the facilities. The park contains a four-mile, natural surface hiking/biking trail loop. Just over two miles of the Gerry Connolly Cross County Trail (CCT) traverses the park. The scenic trail is perfect for biking and hiking.

Visitors can ride bikes, or rent kayaks, canoes or paddle boats. A nine-hole miniature golf course, a playground, a sand volleyball court and an outdoor basketball court add to the activities offered.

The Lake Accotink Yacht Club, founded by Springfield resident Ernest (Buddy) Belote, sailed and competed on Lake Accotink between 1972 and 1982. Members raced according to the rules of the International Yacht Racing Association and applied the rules of the America's Cup to the eight-foot dinghies on Accotink waters.

Not the same in form, but perhaps in the spirit of the Lake Accotink Yacht Club, the Cardboard Boat Regatta each spring brings together people who paddle on the lake in boats made of cardboard. While not all the boats make it to the end, everyone enjoys the fun.

## Fairfax County Park Authority and the Acquiring of the Land

The area that is now Lake Accotink Park was owned by the federal government for decades. The lake served as a reservoir for Fort Belvoir for a number of years. Once modern water and sewage systems began meeting the needs of Fort Belvoir, the Army sought ways to dispose of the land. In 1960 the Fairfax County Park Authority entered into a 25-year lease agreement with the Army for the lake and a portion of the park's current acreage. Additional neighboring land was purchased from developers during the early 1960s. During this time, an active marina and concession stand were operated. As additional land was acquired, picnic areas, covered shelters, trails, and a playground were added.

In 1964, the land was declared surplus by the Army and became available for purchase. The Fairfax County Park Authority's bid of \$88,250 was accepted in 1965. In 1968, the county purchased 265 additional acres via a grant under the Open Space Land program.



April 27, 1965 Northern Virginia Sun

Located in Springfield, Virginia, Lake Accotink Park is nestled in the heart of Fairfax County. Once a rural, agrarian region, the land surrounding the park is now a bustling metropolis. Times have changed greatly since the first Americans camped here. The area that is now Lake Accotink Park bore witness too many events that brought about those changes.

In addition to enjoying the many natural wonders that abound at Lake Accotink Park, we invite you to explore the park's rich historical heritage and to imagine what the park land would have meant to those in whose footsteps we follow.

## Indigenous Peoples

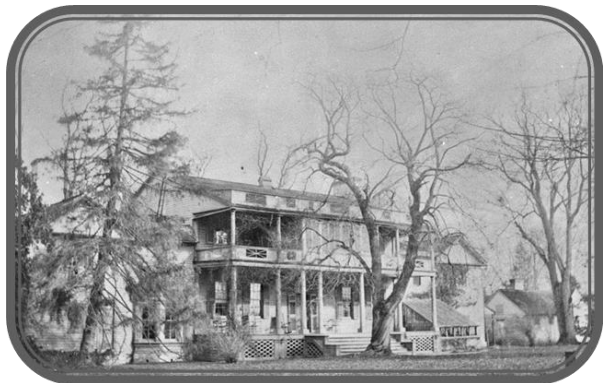
The original inhabitants of the lands around Accotink Creek lived as semi-sedentary hunters and gatherers who moved seasonally to follow game. These people spoke varying forms of the Algonquin language and included members of the Dogue, Piscataway, and Patawomeck tribes. These tribes represented the northernmost boundary of the Powhatan Confederation. The river system provided them with a wealth of resources as well as a means of transportation. The freshwater Accotink Stream that teemed with fish also attracted deer and other animals. In addition to hunting and fishing, gathering and farming were important to their way of life. "Succotash," a combination of corn and beans, comprised half of their diet, which they supplemented with wild berries and nuts. Early peoples also were drawn to the area by the prolific amount of quartz and other materials, from which they could make tools, including projectile points and stone scrapers. European advancement along the waterways beginning in the early 17th century slowly pushed the Native Americans off their lands.

### **Ravenworth Tract**

In 1685, William Fitzhugh (the Immigrant) (1651-1701) acquired or was awarded a 21,996-acre land grant that by 1715 was known as Ravenworth. A later survey in 1791 specified its size as 24,112 acres. Today's Lake Accotink Park was originally part of the Ravenworth Tract. William Fitzhugh (the Immigrant) was a successful plantation owner, lawyer, and investor in land who lived near Fredericksburg, Virginia. Upon his death in 1701, the property was divided between his sons, William and Henry. The property was further divided over subsequent years. In 1796, William (of Chatham) Fitzhugh (1741-1809) built Ravenworth Mansion.

The mansion passed to William Fitzhugh's son, William Henry Fitzhugh (1792-1830). Following William Henry's death in 1830, the property was held by his wife, Anna Maria Fitzhugh, in life trust for William Henry Fitzhugh's niece, Mary Randolph Custis. In 1831, Mary Randolph Custis married Robert E. Lee. At her death in 1874, the mansion passed to the Lee's second son, William Henry Fitzhugh "Rooney" Lee.

In 1926, the mansion was destroyed by suspected arson. The land remained in the Lee family until sold to a developer in 1957. An historical marker dedicated to Ravenworth sits near the Port Royal Road entrance to the Ravenworth Shopping Center just south of Braddock Road and slightly west of Interstate 495.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

### **Jovite Plant**

The explosion in 1900 of an explosives manufacturing plant within the park's current border remains somewhat shrouded in mystery. The plant was built near Ditchley Station in 1884 or 1885. The Jovite Powder Works factory was located on property owned by the Lee family during the period that they owned Ravenworth.

Newspaper reports at the time stated that the plant was fully operational in 1885. It manufactured an explosive called Jovite, which may have been a relatively new explosive mixture. Indications are the military wanted an explosive to put in artillery shells that did not blow up the artillery pieces. A newspaper article mentions that Jovite was still being reviewed by Lt. Douglas MacArthur in 1908, several years after the explosion that destroyed the plant.

### **Civilian Conservation Corps**

In 1933, during the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to help unemployed men aged 18 to 25. CCC men created state parks, emphasized soil conservation, conducted reforestation and constructed fire trails. The men received food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education. They were paid \$30 monthly, of which \$25 was sent home. Projects of the racially segregated Fort Belvoir CCC camp, Army 3 VA-2399 C (Colored), included building fire trails through forested areas of Fairfax County. One such trail started at Old Keene Mill Road (near Irving Middle School), crossed nearby Accotink Creek, and then intersected with several old logging roads located within the park. An historical marker near the Park headquarters provides information on the CCC.

### **The Dam**

In 1915, the U.S. Army established Camp Belvoir, an engineer training facility, on the Belvoir Peninsula. This land was once part of the Belvoir estate built by William Fairfax in 1741. Upon the U.S. entry into World War I, Camp A.A. Humphreys was established near Camp Belvoir in 1917 on 1,500 acres between the Potomac River and Accotink Creek. The camp was named in honor of Civil War commander and former Chief of Engineers Major General Andrew A. Humphreys. Over eleven months, soldiers and civilians cleared, surveyed, and constructed camp facilities. The growing facilities and the increasing number of men stationed at Camp Belvoir and nearby Camp Humphreys necessitated a larger water supply.

A dam was built on Accotink Creek to supply water for the 20,000 men to be stationed there. Known as the Springfield Dam when it was built in 1918, it created Lake Accotink as a clean drinking water source. The reservoir originally covered about 110 acres and was approximately 23 feet deep. That first dam was dismantled in 1922 and replaced in 1943.



Photograph from Fairfax County Public Library,  
Virginia Room, Photographic Archive

### **Orange and Alexandria Railroad**

The Orange and Alexandria Railroad (O & A) was chartered by the Legislature of the Commonwealth of Virginia on March 27, 1848. It was authorized to connect the port city of Alexandria with the interior city of Gordonsville. Construction on the mainline began in 1850. The Accotink Park access road lies on the right-of-way of the O & A.

The O & A's connections between the coast and the interior of the state allowed farmers to ship their produce and goods at lower cost over a wider area. This connection became crucial during the Civil War.

During that war, the O & A was one of the most contested railroads in Virginia. The railroad was the most direct rail route from Washington to Richmond, and the Orange & Alexandria served as transportation for troops and supplies on both sides. The North used the railroad to support the campaign to capture Richmond. Control of the railroad by the North also cut Southern communications to the Shenandoah Valley.

The South defended the railroad against the Northern invading force, and several major campaigns (First and Second Manassas, Bristoe Station) and dozens of battles and smaller engagements took place on or near O & A tracks.

Following the war, the railroad company found itself in financial difficulties and caught in the struggle among other railroad extensions into the South. By 1873, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad had gained controlling interest in the company. In time, it would become part of the Richmond & Danville, then the Southern Railway, and finally today's Norfolk Southern.





An Original O & A Railroad Culvert  
Photo by Michael DeLoose

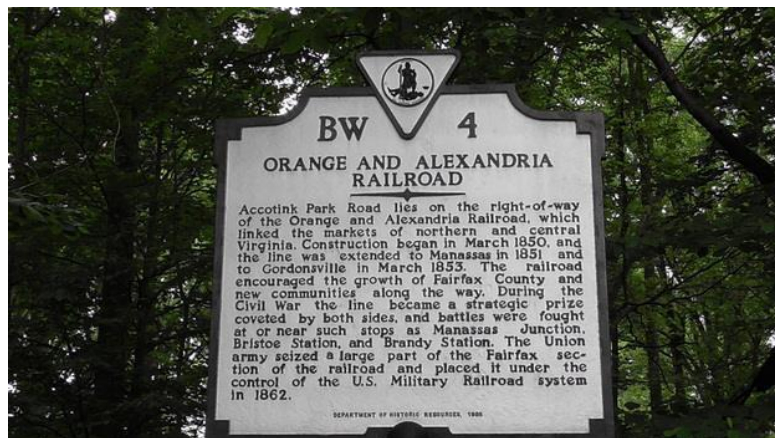


Photo from Historic Marker Database

### Railroad Trestle

A wooden railroad trestle bridge was built over Accotink Creek in 1851 as part of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. At the end of December 1862, following the Battle of Fredericksburg, Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart assembled 1,800 cavalymen and headed into northern Virginia to locate food and horses. During his December 28, 1862 raid on nearby Burke's Station, Stuart dispatched 12 men under the command of Fitz Lee (Robert E. Lee's nephew) to burn the railroad bridge over Accotink Creek. Stuart also tore up the rails and cut telegraph lines near Burke Station before withdrawing. The trestle was later rebuilt and continued carrying Union supplies for the duration of the war. In 1917, it was rebuilt out of wrought iron, and later a new bridge was built from concrete and steel. The current trestle is not in the location of the original 1851 trestle. Historic markers near the current trestle display more historical information on the railroad and trestle.

### Recycling A Worthy Project

The Orange and Alexandria Historical Trail, created in 1974 by Boy Scout Troop 881 of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Springfield, Virginia, stretched for 11.5 miles from Springfield Station at Backlick Road to Fairfax Station at Route 123. The trail provided educational, hiking, and biking opportunities for Boy Scout and Girl Scout units. A brochure described local landmarks and events related to the Orange and Alexandria Railroad and the Civil War. Hikers and bikers who answered questions in the brochure qualified for the embroidered Orange and Alexandria Historical Trail patch.

## **Significant Points of Interest on the Trail**

(Extracted from Troop 881's 1974 brochure)

### **Orange and Alexandria Railroad.**

Reservoir Road, the entrance to Lake Accotink was built on the roadbed of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, which was completed in 1854, but was in operation at this point in 1851. At the time this railroad was built, it extended from Alexandria to Orange, Virginia. The O&A suffered severely during the Civil War and shortly after the war the road was renamed Virginia Midland. Upon formation of the Southern Railway in 1894, the VM was double-tracked and became the northernmost segment of the Southern's main line. The present Southern Railroad tracks curve away about 100 yards to your right. This stretch of track was sold near the turn of the century.

Control of the Orange and Alexandria railroad at Manassas was the military objective of both the Federal and Confederate armies during the Civil War. It was, therefore, the reason for the First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run), and the O&A itself figured strongly in the Second Battle of Manassas. Straight across the highroad to Richmond from the north lay Manassas, where the O&A formed a junction with the Manassas Gap line which extended westward to Strausburg. By seizure of this junction, the Federal army hoped to follow the O&A southwest to Gordonsville and thence proceed by Virginia Central eastward to Richmond. General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate Army understood the significance of the junction also, and dispatched troops to defend the junction against attack by the north.

### **Civil War action at Accotink Creek**

The 1862 map shows the railroad bridge at Accotink Creek as "burned." On December 28, 1862, General J.E.B. Stuart and his Confederate raiders tore up the railroad track and burned the bridge across Accotink Creek. On July 23, 1863, a westbound freight carrying supplies to General Meade on the Rappahannock, was fired upon at Accotink Creek by a group of Confederates.

### **Ditchley Station.**

Proceed on Reservoir Road (O&A Trail). Occasional railroad spikes and other hardware may still be found. On your left, was a siding known as Ditchley which had a water tank and warehouse. Remains of these structures have been found on the high bank only a few hundred feet from the culvert.

### **Site of attempted derailment.**

On July 26, 1863, three days after the train shooting the incident, a loosened rail and some horseshoes on the track very nearly caused a train of supplies to plunge down a 12-foot embankment east of Burke's station. The engine and two cars jumped the break and a dozen Confederates waiting in the woods to burn the wreck were driven off by train guards. It was stated that "The Guard saved the train, and Providence saved a smashup, which would have prevented the Army of the Potomac from receiving supplies.

Exasperated by these and other troublesome attacks on trains presumed to have been done by local residents who farmed by day and became guerillas at night, Meade issued the following warning:

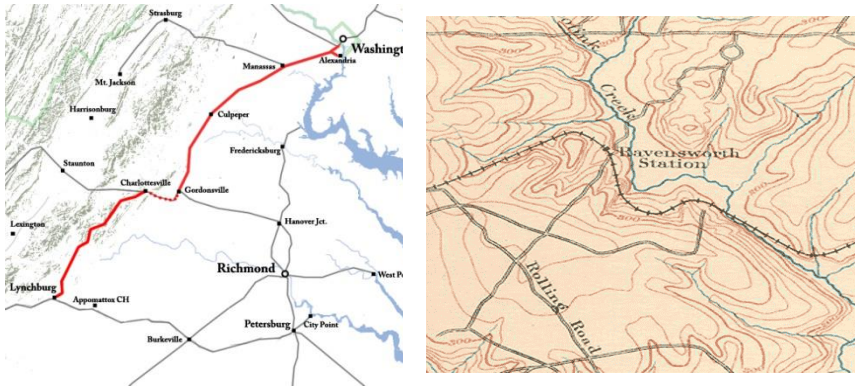
### **PROCLAMATION**

"The numerous depredations committed by citizens, along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad and with our lines, call for prompt and exemplary punishment. Under the instruction of the Government, therefore, every citizen against whom there is sufficient evidence of his having engaged in these practices, will be arrested and confined for punishment, or put beyond the lines.

The people within ten miles of the railroad are notified that they will be held responsible in their persons and property, for any injury done to the road, trains, depots, or stations by citizens, guerillas, or persons in disguise: and in case of injury done to the road, trains, depots, or stations by citizens, guerillas, or persons in disguise; and in case of such injury will be impressed as laborers to repair all damages.

If these measures should not stop such depredations, it will become the unpleasant duty of the undersigned, in the executions of his instructions, to direct the entire inhabitants of the district of the country along the railroad to put across the lines, and their property taken for Government use."

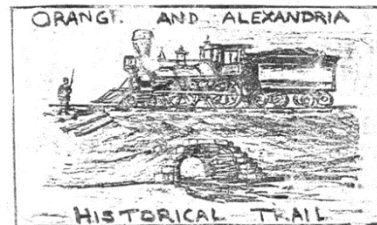
### "George Meade"



**Site of the Ravensworth Station.** Map circa 1925 placed the Ravensworth Station in this area.

**Confederate attack.** On August 6, 1863, about one mile east of Burke Station on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, 25 dismounted Confederate cavalry attacked 60 men of the Federal railroad forces cutting wood. They and 25 4-horse teams were saved by the railroad guard.

**(Ravensworth) Rolling Road (No. 1).** The term "rolling" was derived from the fact that the great hogsheads of tobacco transported to the warehouses and shipping centers, were rolled over the roads. A wooden pin was driven into each head of the cask, then rude shafts were attached to the two pins so that the hogshead looked somewhat like a present day garden roller. It was moved by men, oxen, or horses. This road was used by William Henry Fitzhugh



to take tobacco to the landing at Pohick Run.

### Orange and Alexandria in the Park Today

As you enter the park on Accotink Park Road today, you travel on part of the original O & A roadbed. As you walk or bike along the wide, level main trail on the south shore of the lake, you also are traveling on the path of the original roadbed. Within the park are traces of original railroad culverts. Some of these culverts sheltered soldiers and civilians waiting to ambush passing trains during the Civil War.

A station was built on Fitzhugh-owned land in the 19th century to serve the then 8500-acre plantation. Ravensworth Station was a private depot located between the public stations within Henry Daingerfield's Springfield Farm to the east and Silas Burke's land to the west. Its location in the Park was near the Danbury Forest townhome subdivision.