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Old Days on Ladd's Pond

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"HOW they dislike the rush of vehicles, the rumbling of car lines, the smoke of factories, and the wooden and concrete structures that crowd out the trees and ponds. They enjoy open fields, meandering creeks, green hillsides. What is life if it lacks joy and contentment?" said Dr. Kellogg, pastor of Taylor Street Methodist church, as we roamed with our cameras down the old trail to Ladd's Pond.

"But you are referring to our feathered friends and not to our human neighbors," I replied as I pulled my field-glass from the case.

"Yes, bird life is not so different from human life," he replied. "Some get satisfaction in the city where it is often easier to pick up meals. The birds I love are here in the outskirts of the city. Others are in the country beyond. How will it be 50 years from now when Portland is a real metropolis. Our bird friends will have passed, and so will I," he said.

That was 38 years ago, and there lay before us a peaceful little pond on the edge of East Portland. It was a self-made shallow body of water with its hem-line now in, now out, sedgy and careless-like, set off by a bunch of cat-tails here and there. A bit of way up the slope stood some fir trees. They, too, were pioneers of the place.

Some would say there was really nothing there to catch the glance of the eye, that it was disheveled and lonely, a forgotten corner. But wait. It is so still that it is ominous. The spring sunshine falls softly, creeps inside of one, and soon you are aware that something is going on, an undertone of life; that there is a personality in the picture. Yes, there were birds there, hushed for the moment by your intrusion.

This was Ladd's Pond, a part of the early Ladd farm nearby.

It was neither a forgotten nor a lonely spot, for it was the haunt of those who loved the birds—some old visitors, some young, some amateur bird students, some learned ones. The city itself was just growing up and was still a trifle countrified. Schoolboys still fidgeted for the last bell to ring that they might scamper for the woods—or Ladd's Pond, perhaps, to snatch a set of eggs from a busy bird mother.

And those who jotted down notes in boyhood days and were addicts of the out-of-doors are the ones who study the pictures of today to compare with those of yesterday. Glancing at one of my old notebooks, I read:

"June 5, 1894. After school I went out to Wade Pipes' home at Sunnyside. Then we strolled over to the woods near Ladd's Pond. In one of the fir trees on the west side Wade spied a nest about 40 feet up on the limb of a tall fir. I climbed up above the nest on another limb. The bird flew off. It was a female Louisiana or western tanager. Started to slide out on my limb to see what the nest contained.

"Look out! That limb is going to break!" yelled Wade.

"I kept hitching farther out on the limb. In the nest were four pale bluish-green eggs spotted with brown. Wade had a collection of bird eggs and I knew he wanted a set of the tanager. I tied a rope far out on the nest limb as possible and then to the trunk of the nest tree. Wade stood shuddering far below and insisted on my coming down.

Finally I got the limb sawed off. As I started to pull it in, it turned and nearly upset me as I tried to hang on to it. Two eggs dropped out. But at last I got the nest and the other two eggs for Wade's collection."

Hunting Was Good For Young Cameramen

A few years later when Herman T. Bohlman and I began hunting with a camera, this was the region where we "shot" many birds. In the bunches of cat-tails we found a colony of red-winged blackbirds nesting. As we approached the marsh and saw them clinging to the reeds the males fluttered up to the fir limbs above. How their scarlet epaulets blazed out as their black wings spread, and what a gurgling "ook-a-lee" song.

One day as we were hunting through the marsh, we saw a strange little wader. It had a sort of yellowish bill with a black face and throat. Moving along cautiously to get a better view, it cackled to the right and then to the left without ever showing itself. It was quite a while before we could locate the



Some 40 years ago what is now the beautifully turfed and landscaped Laurelhurst park lake looked like this. It was known as 'Ladd's Pond'—a beautiful sylvan spot, we would say, even before its face lifting.



Mr. Bohlman watches bird life 'through the glasses' at Ladd's pond in 1901.



William L. Finley and Herman T. Bohlman making friends with young flickers, or woodpeckers, just as they were for the first time leaving their home in the top of an old stump at Ladd's Pond, in 1901.

nest made of dry grasses on a tussock in the marsh. The eggs were grayish marked with reddish brown. Among all of the bird records for the past 40 years we do not know of any other Sora rail having been found around Portland.

In the grass at the edge of the pond was the home of the western yellow-throat, a shy little warbler that has a witchety-witchety song. Out near the end of a limb in a tall fir that still lives near the pond was the nest of a pine siskin. In a hole in another fir tree was where the Lewis woodpecker lived, and there were also several pairs of flickers in the neighboring trees. The latter is one bird that can take readily to

city life because it bores holes in telegraph poles and city residences.

Glancing again through my old notebook I came upon these jottings:

"June 12, 1901. In an old flicker hole in a dead fir stump we found the nest of a Parkman's wren. Opening it, we got a surprise. In the nest were four eggs. Under this home was another nest containing three eggs and a dead wren. Evidently the mother bird had died. The male had brought another mate home and built a new nest on top of his old one. It was a queer method of burying his first wife."

The most unusual record of bird life 40 years ago, one that can never occur again, relates to one of our well known game birds.

"May 30, 1899. Sunny spring morning. Wandering on the slope of the hill on the north side of the pond, I met an old blue or sooty grouse. She was more excited than I. She ran along clucking with wings down. A nest somewhere. Then I saw two chicks following her. As I moved nearer, chicks scattered in all directions. They looked to be not more than two or three days old. The mother fluttered back with a warning cry and every baby darted into the leaves and grass, and was gone."

What a transformation in the old Ladd farm and its pond, at that time on the edge of East Portland! The region is now called Laurelhurst. The farm is a center of city homes, concrete streets and sidewalks. Many of the same old firs look down at the modernized area. The old swamp has been cleared up and a landscaped lake has taken its place, with borders of domesticated plants and bushes, and flocks of tame birds. On the surrounding

lawns are tables and benches laden with picnic lunches. The place is merry with children at play.

The park is now a real bird refuge. Hutchins and Canada geese have been imported. Tame pigeons come and go. The mallards are contented and happy with city life. During nesting time they wander off into the gardens of surrounding homes. If there is a little goldfish pond in the yard, so much the better—for the mallard. He eats the fish and builds a nest in the back yard.

And instead of the sooty or blue grouse, one now may find the ring-necked or Chinese pheasant at home in Laurelhurst park. As one loiters along the walks, he occasionally sees a hen pheasant feeding. Her nest is somewhere under the flowering bushes. Although these are game birds, they are safe from hunters within the city limits, but when the young ones are hatched it is a great hunting ground for the neighborhood cats, if not for sportsmen.