



Environmental Learning Center at the Old Stone House — Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow

An oasis that attracted settlers to build their home on the prairie northeast of Denver in 1889 is now attracting people to connect with nature and appreciate their role in a healthy environment. The settlers' home – now known as the Old Stone House – is Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's main office and the centerpiece of its Environmental Learning Center (ELC), an exciting new resource for local and regional communities. The historic building on the north side of Barr Lake State Park near Brighton opens a window to Colorado's past and provides a place to learn how to create healthy human and wildlife communities for today and tomorrow.

Dedicated to bird and habitat conservation for nearly 25 years, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO) works to raise awareness and influence attitudes and behaviors to promote stewardship of natural resources. The ELC's unique location, 20 minutes from downtown Denver at the interface of the mountains and plains and along the Central Flyway, makes it an ideal spot to bring people and nature together for the benefit of both.

Yesterday

Emil Brunderlin and his family completed the stone house in 1890 using techniques and style that reflected their Swiss heritage to construct Barr City's "most substantial home." Unlike the neighbors who farmed their land, Emil was a bookbinder. The family of five had animals, gardens and fruit trees to feed themselves. Unfortunately, Emil died in 1892 in an accident as he boarded a train returning from a trip to Denver. Several owners occupied the house after his death, and eventually it was abandoned.

The Colorado Division of Parks purchased the house and 2,700 associated acres in 1975 and opened Barr Lake State Park in 1977. The house was designated as a State Historic Landmark in 1996, giving momentum to an emerging vision for its use. The park partnered with Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (then Colorado Bird Observatory) to raise funds to restore the house, and in 2000 it became RMBO's home.

Native tribes knew the water-logged depression that has become Barr Lake as a buffalo wallow. After farming began to expand in the area, canals were constructed to bring water to the wallow for irrigation, and it was named Oasis Reservoir. A 47-foot dam constructed in 1909 to meet the demand for irrigation water enlarged the lake and began the area's evolution into an important wildlife refuge, especially for birds.

Today

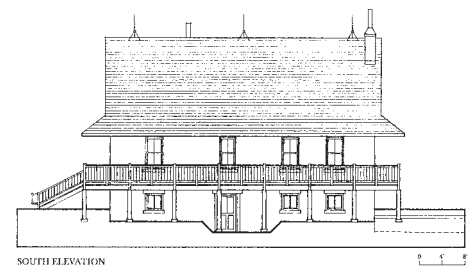
Nestled within diverse habitats, including native prairie, wetlands, the lake, wooded areas and croplands, Barr Lake State Park attracts migratory birds and local wildlife. More than 350 bird species have been recorded at the park, which lies within the Central Flyway, the migratory highway through the Great Plains that connects wintering habitat in Mexico and beyond with breeding habitat in the U.S. and Canada.



1900



c. 1980



1990s



2010

continued...

The Environmental Learning Center...

Business, agency, community and volunteer partners are helping RMBO create a place to engage people in conservation through demonstrations, workshops, field trips, day camps, self-guided discovery and more. An Adams County Open Space grant is funding better access through the State Park's north entrance and increased recreation and environmental education opportunities. New trails and interpretive signs in English and Spanish are bringing stewardship to life. An outdoor classroom accommodates landowner, teacher, student and family programs that encourage taking responsibility for conservation action. Demonstration gardens will showcase ways to improve the health of land and create beneficial habitat for birds in back yards, neighborhoods and communities.

RMBO's education staff is partially supported by the Scientific & Cultural Facilities District, a 0.1% retail sales tax that generates revenue for organizations in the Denver metro area. This contributes to a solid, enduring foundation for the learning center. Thus, an oasis on the prairie that a pioneer Colorado family called home has evolved into an oasis of learning about healthy landscapes and communities for wildlife and humans. But the story is not yet finished....

Tomorrow

To fulfill the promise of the Old Stone House and sustain the ELC's momentum, RMBO plans to: develop curriculum; secure permanent funding for the Colorado Education Coordinator; and train more volunteer naturalists to increase environmental education programs for school children, teachers and the community. We envision additional facilities, from the pragmatic – a picnic shelter and outdoor toilets – to the inspirational – a longer prairie trail and restoration of the surrounding prairie.

“A healthy home for birds is a healthy home for all of us” is the theme of the ELC. It is a place where people can discover a sense of place in the arid West, embrace stewardship of the land, broaden their appreciation of and interaction with the natural world, and learn about simple things they can do in their yards and communities to make a positive difference for wildlife and people.

RMBO's staff and board are inspired by and enthusiastic about the promise of the Environmental Learning Center. We encourage and welcome support and contributions from people who share the vision of a healthy home for all of us.



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