



The Sycamore Islander

July, 1999

Volume 78, No. 7

July Meeting

The June meeting voted to approve that waiting list applicants who are single could bring a friend when visiting the islands. Otherwise, there was general discussion on large parties and club usage. The use of the club for overnight camping has soared. Eight groups (scheduled and non-scheduled) have already used the Island for overnights through the end of May. A Large Party has been scheduled every weekend since the middle of April and in this good weather Doc reports an average of 30 people visit the island each weekday.

The July Meeting will be held on the Island in the clubhouse at 8:00 p.m. on July 14. An anti-fundraising party proposal is still being drafted and will appear elsewhere in this issue if done in time. More discussion on large parties is expected. An ad-hoc committee is being formed to review issues related to large parties. Please contact Tryon Wells if you want join this committee. All members interested in these topics are urged to attend the July meeting.

Minutes: June 9 Meeting

118th Annual Meeting

Attendance: Renee Dunham, Ilene Sinclair, Bill Bays, Peggy Thomson, Jane and David Winer, Peter Winkler, Maria Stenzel, Dan Dozier, John Matthews, Gerald Barton, Tryon Wells, Sandy Robinson, Betty Burchell.

President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order at 8:10 p.m. The membership approved the Minutes of the previous meeting.

Membership report: Membership secretary Peter Winkler reported 155 regular members, 150 on the waiting list, 14 applications mailed out, and 68 guest cards issued so far for this year. (This includes several members and applicants on the waiting list who were dropped for non-payment and then reinstated after their petitions and full payments.)

Peter proposed that Hilary Thomson receive honorary membership status until she returns to this area, at which time she will be obliged to apply for regular membership. The proposal was accepted unanimously.

New Addresses:

The Sycamore Islander is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Articles, photographic essays, drawings, announcements, letters to the editors— any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list— are welcome and should be sent to the Editors, Jane and David Winer, 5927 Onondaga Road, Bethesda, MD 20816. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to davidwiner@erols.com in all common formats. The deadline for inclusion in a particular issue is receipt at the Editors' address ten days prior to the second-Wednesday monthly meeting of the club. **Earlier submissions can be expected to**

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Treasurer's Report: Johnna Robinson reported that at the end of May all expenditures were in order. There is \$36,000 in the bank and \$40,000 in a self-insurance fund. The estimated cost of the *Islander* on the budget was set too low but will be adjusted without a problem. "We really are getting something for our money," commented Peter Winkler with agreement from the m e m b e r s h i p .

The *Islander*: David Winer reported that the *Islander* ran late last month because an important piece was not submitted on time. Also, switching to new publication software was complex and time consuming. On the upside, the publisher is now handling all the mailing.

Canoe Chair's Report: David Winer reported that guests continue to use members' canoes. In response to this issue, a sign will be strategically placed (exact placement not yet determined), worded as follows:

Guests may use only canoes marked by the club's symbol. All other boats are private.

Captain's Report: John Matthews reported that Tove Elfstrom has offered to resurface the swimming dock.

Old Business: Last month, David Winer proposed a change to the Standing Rules for guest cards as follows:

Guest Card holders who are single may bring a friend while visiting the Island.

This change was accepted unanimously by the membership. The sense behind this was that a single person's friend be might be accepted in the same spirit as a member's spouse or children.

New Business:

Peter Winkler proposed an amendment to the By-laws/ Standing Rules pertaining to guest card holders— Resolved: That Rule No. 6 of the Standing Rules be amended, by adding to the penultimate sentence the following clause: "other guest cards may be used only

by the holders and their immediate families."

If amended, that sentence will read: "Guest card holders who are single may bring a friend while visiting the Island; other guest cards may be used only by the holders and their immediate families."

The purpose of the amendment is to clear up some confusion that exists concerning the rights of guest card holders. Guest card holders may not exercise the privileges of membership. They may not, for example, vote at Club meetings or serve as Club officers. Similarly, if the amendment passes, it will be clear that holders of (the inaptly named) guest cards may not generally take guests to the Island; that privilege is limited to members and to guest card holders who are single. The amendment embodies current Club practice, and the understanding of the current and former membership secretaries.

Betty Burchell offered an addition to the rule regarding hours for the use of the kitchen (her proposed addition is in *bold italics*):

11. Clubhouse Rules

- b. Persons remaining overnight on the Islands shall not use the kitchen facilities between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 am, or make any avoidable noise in or near the club house during those hours. *The kitchen shall not be used before 9:00 am on the day of the caretaker's day off.*

The new wording would currently apply to Sunday morning. This addition will be debated and voted upon at the July meeting.

A committee will be formed by Tryon Wells to work on the issue of large parties. Discussion of this issue reflected a wide range of viewpoints. A brief sampling: "A clear definition of the purpose of our club would guide us in our policy." "Why must we have large parties at all?" "Parties are too large." "Only one party per weekend." "Only permit parties for educational or environmental issues." "Parties are lovely affairs, but courtesy and safety must be stressed for guests." Etc., etc.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:02 p.m..

— Rene Dunham, Recording Secretary

Archival Note

Does anyone have a copy of the September 1991 or July 1986 *Islander*?

Last winter I entreated outgoing Recording Secretary Holly Syrrakos to hand over her collection of past *Sycamore Islanders* and related archivist materials to the Supervisor of Website (me) so that I might make copies of the minutes back as far as she had. The copies would eventually be scanned and put on the website where they could be searched by interested members. I am pleased to report that what I received was an exceptionally thorough set of archival records dating from January 1984. I have organized and prepared them and will be taking these records down to the Washington Historical Society (they keep our archival records).

After careful checking of past *Islanders*, two issues are missing back to the early 1980s, the **September 1991** issue and the **July 1986** issue. Unlikely as it may be that some member has kept such old *Islanders*, if anyone does have a copy of either one, please call the club's Archivist, Holly Syrrakos at 301-589-7255 so that she may add them to the club's record with the Washington Historical Society.

— T r y o n

Wells

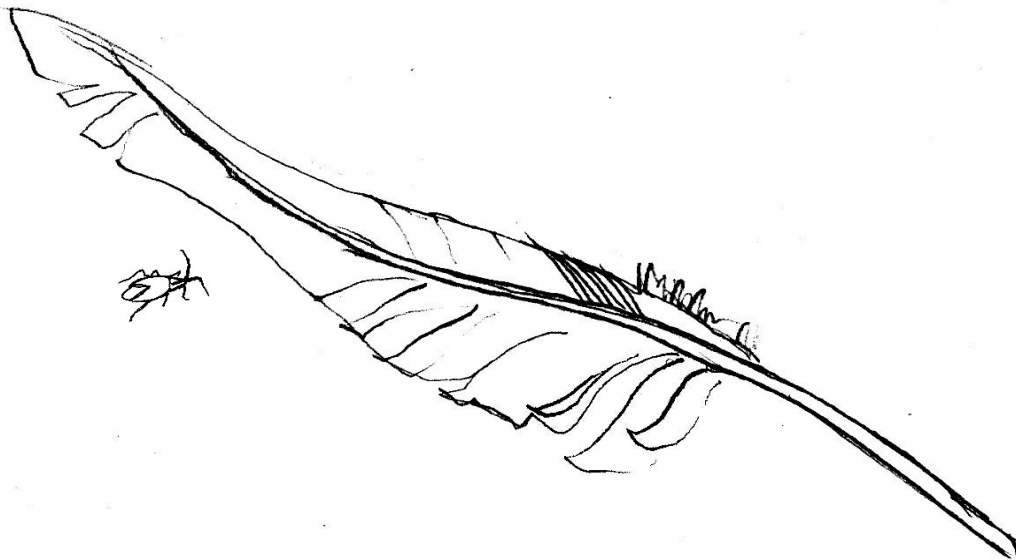
Disposition of Wooden Canoes

The club owns two old wooden canoes that are in poor condition. Both must be re-canvassed before they can be used at all. In such condition they are taking up rack space, and worse, they will fill with water if attached to the chain of canoes during a flood. To restore either of these craft to serviceable condition would take resources in labor and money that we as a club are not likely to provide. The boats do have some value to those wooden canoe enthusiasts who are willing to tackle the necessary restoration work.

Plan "A" is to offer these canoes to our members and those on the waiting list through an informal auction. Bids of at least \$100 for either canoe will be accepted by the Canoeing Supervisor by telephone or email (301-229-8963, davidwiner@erols.com). Bidding will close on the first of August.

Plan "B" will go into effect if no one in the club makes an offer. I will place a For Sale want-ad in *Wooden Canoe*, the journal of the Wooden Canoe Heritage Association, which offers members (I am one) this privilege.

Ask Doc to show you these canoes, if you are interested in bidding. — David Winer, Canoeing Supervisor



— Sycamore Island sketch by Jane Winer

Old Club Medal Discovered

After the June monthly meeting, George Loeb showed me an old Sycamore Island Regatta medal from 1931. Dave Winer and I both decided immediately that this beautiful piece of workmanship should be displayed in both the Sycamore Islander and on the club's website in all its glory. The building in the image was at first thought to be the old clubhouse, but after more careful inspection, it was revealed that it was the old canoe house and NOT the old clubhouse. On the 1932 map of the island (on the wall of the current clubhouse and reproduced on the club's website) the canoe house is depicted with steps leading into the water just as it is on the medal. And though the map shows a one-story structure for the old canoe house, this snippet from Norment Custis in 1985 confirms that the structure indeed had two floors:

The largest structure on the island was the canoe house, which was two stories. It housed canoes on the first floor and a dormitory on the second, where the sexes were separated by an imaginary line or a canvas curtain hanging from a wire about at the midpoint. There were many happy nights for the young people, gathered around fires, singing and strumming instruments, and finally falling asleep in the top of the canoe house.

The detail of the image on the medal is truly remarkable. If you have access to the club's website, the image has been blown-up to screen size so that its detail can be viewed more easily. The early 1930s was a high time for Sycamore Islanders. They had just re-built the clubhouse, fixed up the canoe house, resurfaced the tennis court and repaired the baseball diamond. Then in 1936 it was all washed away (again) in the great 1936 flood. I feel for the members of that time. I'll bet the old canoe house was a fun place.

– Tryon Wells

The Large Party Survey

If the large party is the enemy, the enemy is us.

It happens with depressing regularity. After a large party, the caretaker notifies me as well as other club officers that some infraction of the rules has occurred. This sets off a predictable reaction from some quarters for stronger enforcement and an opposite reaction from some others who ask, "Who did it hurt?" These contrary reactions have the effect of paralyzing the club from taking appropriate action.

The current rules have evolved over the years and seek to address three main issues: (1) Safety of members and their guests and corresponding liability of the club, (2) Consideration to other members visiting the Island during a large party and (3) Protection of club and private property.

I have been asked to create an ad-hoc committee to look into these issues. But it is my sense that the committee, the club and the caretaker would be well served by some direction provided by the club membership.

Please take the time to respond thoughtfully to the enclosed Large Party Survey. Consider how your opinion might affect your next large party. Consider also what you would like to see if you visited the Island during someone else's large party. It may be that some rules should be dropped, or new ones made. This is an opportunity for members who do not regularly attend the monthly meetings to have their voice heard. With fresh survey results in our hands, I think the club will be better able to respond to future incidents with action appropriate to members' wishes. The results will be published in the next *Islander*.

– Tryon Wells

Changes in Large Party Rules 1984 – 1999

“For some reason, the issue of large parties seems to crop up on the average of once a year.”

—Mimi Cantwell, October *Islander*, 1986

True to form, large parties dominate this month’s agenda. Here is a synopsis of significant rule changes regarding large parties over the past 15 years:

December 1984 – Large Parties are defined as being over 25 guests. Weekend large parties must be scheduled in the *Sycamore Islander* before being held.

November 1985 – Large Parties are redefined as being 10 or more guests (including children over 5). The Supervisor of Parties may refuse a party if the Island would be “unduly crowded.” Large parties are limited to 6 hours and to conclude at dark. Weekday large parties must be cleared 3 days in advance.

January 1992 – Large party fees set. \$10 for parties of 10-25 guests, \$25 for parties over 25 guests. Members are required to pay for a large party in advance.

April 1995 – Host required to be present during entire large party. Host must indemnify club and obtain signed indemnification forms from all guests. Large party size is capped at 35 guests.

July 1995 – In the July 1995 *Islander*, a “guidelines page” is stated to have been approved at the April 1995 meeting though the April minutes only mention: “The full statement regarding large parties is published elsewhere in this issue of the *Islander*.” It is not. Presumably, the July “guidelines page” is that statement. It includes the following new provisions unmentioned in the April minutes:

- Only odd-numbered days of the week are permitted for holding large parties.
- Overnight Parties shall vacate the Island by 11:00 am the following day.
- The Supervisor of Parties may require hosts to appoint assistants to assure adequate supervision of the large events, especially those involving children.
- Hosts are responsible for operating the ferry for their guests during a party.
- Hosts are responsible for assuring that parents of guest children sign a waiver.

- Punishment for large party rule infraction is to suspend member’s large party privileges for one year.

January 1997 – Senior members are granted the privilege to hold large parties.

February 1998 – Current Party Form approved.

April 1998 – Updating of all Standing Rules approved. This formally approves much of the language in the July 1995 “guidelines.” In addition: Weekday large parties must be scheduled one week in advance (up from 3 days). A large party is not considered scheduled until the fee is received.

May 1998 – Only one large party allowed per day. Only one large party may be scheduled at a time.

January 1999 – Punishment for large party rule infraction is to suspend member’s large party privileges for two years (up from one year).

Of Historical Note: An erroneous summary of the Large Party Rules was published in the September 1994 *Islander* that includes many “rules” which were NOT rules at the time. The non-rules that were included:

- Parties during the week with fewer than 25 participants must be cleared 3 days in advance.
- An “unduly crowded” Island means only one party per day.
- Host must be present during entire large party.
- Hosts are responsible for operating the ferry for their guests during a party
- Host must indemnify club and obtain signed indemnification forms from all guests.
- “For parties over 20 participants, the host shall appoint one assistant for each 10 persons, to assist with the responsibility for signing-in, ferry operation, canoeing and swimming safety (including warning about submerged trees, river currents, Little Falls Dam, etc.) and non-interference with members using the Island. However, parents will still be responsible for their children.”

There is no telling how this affected the debate at that time. The author of these “rules” in the *Islander* is not identified.

– Tryon Wells

Large Party Statistical Profile

Of large parties scheduled in the past 5 years (as reported in past Islanders)...

... about 10% of the membership hosted more than one large party,

... about 15% of the membership hosted only one large party,

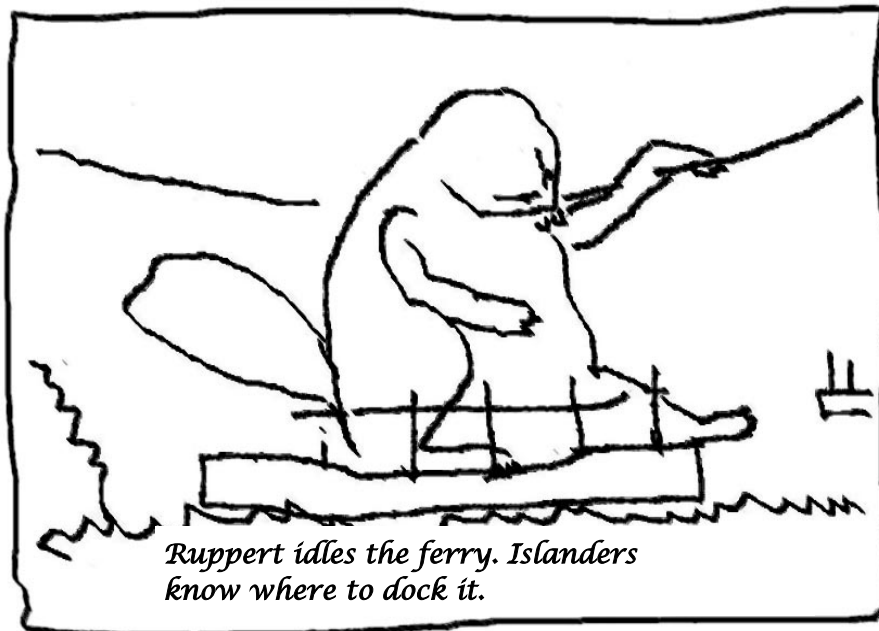
thus, about 25% of the membership hosted one or more large parties while 75% of the membership hosted none.

... about 5% of the membership hosted about 40% of all the large parties held.

Problems with the Data

There are two significant problems with the statistics listed here which is why the word “about” is used: (1) They are based on what was scheduled in the Islander, not what actually took place. (2) There is no way to know how many weekday large parties were not scheduled in the Islander since the rules require only weekend large parties to be scheduled (many weekday large parties were included in the Islander data however). Some parties likewise may never have been held, weekend or weekday, due to bad weather or other cause. Due to these problems, these numbers should provide only an indication of fact, not true fact.

Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Notes from the Island

It occurred late one afternoon. One moment we were sitting with guests under the mulberry tree, and the next... well... I had better start at the beginning. We were there visited by the unmated young female goose we call Pretty Face. Entertained by watching her forage for fallen mulberries a guest got up and shook the mulberry tree, to her delight. She then scrambled hither and yon to gobble them up... to his delight, and when there were no more mulberries lying upon the ground, walked up to him and looked first at him, and then at the tree... expectantly. The message was clear, so he shook the mulberry tree again. And then again and again, as she repeated her plea. Tiring of the game after several times, the guest took his seat and conversation continued. Chagrined at being ignored, Pretty Face walked right up to the guest and... like some petulant child... began stomping her feet. Conversation stopped, astonishment in the air. Did we just see what we thought we saw? Again she stomped, comically, rocking her body rapidly side to side as she as she lifted one foot to stomp and then the other. There was general laughter as the guest obediently rose to shake the tree. Conversation resumed... several snippets about goose cuteness... and then back to important and weighty human business, the moment forgotten. Suddenly Pretty Face was there again, right in front of the guest. Conversation stopped. She began stomping her feet. The silence lengthened, a certain undefinable unease in the air, the suspicion that although we did not know what exactly was happening, some line was being crossed. The stomping continued. We looked at each other in silence, with raised eyebrows. Why did this cuteness

seem somehow ominous? Again the guest rose and shook the tree, and sat back down. But conversation did not resume. All eyes were now fixed on Pretty Face, the quietness palpable. Stomping once was cute, twice was statistically significant, but thrice??? The tension mounted as she scooped up the last fallen mulberry and looked at us. And stomped. And that was when it happened... the legendary and fabled paradigm shift occurred... I now know what such a phrase describes... just as surely as I know that one moment I was a Lord of All That I Surveyed... and the next... well... reduced to a goose trainee... a mere waiter in training at a goose eatery. Proving yet again that unexpected changes in perspective can be a humbling experience.

Soon the Island will be much quieter as the geese are now rapidly growing new flight feathers and as soon as they can take flight again will leave. Their loud and sometimes argumentative voices will be gone, as will their poo, but the Caretaker will miss them as he will now have to start cutting the grass himself. It was in fact their raucous voices that endeared them to the Roman legions who carried them everywhere. They were valued too highly to be eaten unless in emergency as the Romans carried them as sentinels. Legions on the march would always stop before dark to make their encampments, around which they would throw up breastworks and dig ditches. The geese would be thrown into the ditches, and the Romans would sleep soundly knowing that no one or no thing can get by a goose in the dark without causing an uproar. It was no small thing that the Romans could always field well-rested troops on any morning.

Notes from the Island (continued)

Jeffrey Jay and kids returned from canoeing some weeks ago excitedly to report sighting a large unknown creature in the water. Not seen clearly except for the back as it rolled and dove in the water, it was as large as a small beaver but darker and without the distinctive tail. I considered this to possibly be a tale of another sort until two days later, returning to the Island on the ferry, I saw a similar critter leave shallow water near the ferry landing, but only for a moment and cannot add anything to the above description. There was a third similar sighting last week. What I saw seemed too large for an otter or muskrat, but perhaps not for a nutria. All Islanders are urged to keep their eyes open until this mystery is cleared up.

The 11th Annual Potomac Watershed Cleanup took place during a Saturday last March, sponsored by the Alice Ferguson Foundation, which runs the Hard Bargain Farm environmental education facility. Over

3000 volunteers were involved from many different organizations. This sounds like something our Club should be involved in, something akin to our purpose and mission, and something we are uniquely able to do as few others have such access to our part of the river. Perhaps on that day Club canoes could be reserved solely for the use of Members and their guests participating in the project.

The grounds supervisor, Trip Reid, has approved a new gardening initiative. Members with a passion for gardening could volunteer to be assigned responsibility for certain small designated areas of the Island. This would not be to start garden plots, but to simply be responsible for, perhaps, getting bindweed out of certain day lily beds, or garlic mustard out of certain wild flower areas, or making sure kudzu and poison ivy do not get a foothold in certain areas. People would be responsible for watching certain areas as the seasons pass and making decisions about pruning, weeding, or cleaning.

— Doc Talliaferro



Taking the plunge— Our new crop of Canada Geese near the swimming dock.

Regatta News (Early Notice)

The annual Sycamore Grand Regatta will be held this year on Labor Day, September 6th. There will be water events such as the Round the Island Race, the Bag Pickup, the Drowned Rat Relay, the Sink or Swim Relay, the Jousting Tournament and more. For landlubbers, there will be the usual Raw Egg Toss and Three Legged Race for starters. So, put the date on your calendar and COME ONE, COME ALL. This means all Sycamore regular members and those wait-listers too. Prizes, fun, and splashes galore!!!

Sunday Relief

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
June 6	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Eric Simpson Thorburn Reid	703-821-7556 202-363-8554
June 13	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Lyle Blanchard Dana Boyd	202-364-9579 301-229-3496
June 20	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Judy Hope Susanna & John Membrino	202-232-2445 301-229-1154
June 27	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Fern Ingersoll Liz & Dallas Jones	301-270-5219 301 571-4942

Call Ann Marie Cunningham (703) 876-9165 or send a note to annmarie.cunningham@lmco.com to volunteer for caretaking in July.

Large

Who	When	What
Lyle Blanchard	July 11, 3 til dusk	10 for a party
George Loeb	July 16, 1000-1500 hrs	41 for a school event (requires club approval)
Beverly Meeker	August 4, 1700-2000 hrs	50 adults for a baptism (requires club approval)
Karl Kosok/Emily Glazer	Aug 21, 1300-1800 hrs	35 kids for birthday party

Note from the Camping/Large Party Supervisor: two Club members have had their large party privileges suspended for violations of the rules.



The Sycamore Islander

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Bethesda, MD, 20817

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This Issue:

- Large party issues continue to vex.
- One of our *Islanders* is missing (actually, two).
- Action : Auction
- Doc encounters a Pretty Face.
- Yes, Virginians, (and Marylanders, and Washingtonians) there is a Regatta.



The Regatta is an old tradition at the club, as you can see from this medal. The story of the medal and an announcement of this year's Regatta are inside.