

# *The Sycamore Islander*

September 1999

Volume 78, No. 9

## **Regatta Almost Here**

The annual Sycamore Grand Regatta will be held this year on Labor Day, September 6<sup>th</sup>, at 1:00 p.m. 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 **next Monday** on your calendar and COME ONE, COME ALL. This means all Sycamore **regular members and wait-listers too**. Prizes, fun, and splashes galore!!! George and Marcia Loeb are providing the specialized game equipment. They still need assistants- call the Loeb's to volunteer at (301) 652-4229. Bring a favorite dish for the the pot-luck

## **September Meeting**

The August Meeting barely garnered a quorum after Jane Winer called to see if more members were needed. The main topic of discussion was George and Marcia Loeb's suggestion to refocus the club's orientation towards canoeing. (See George's recap of the discussion on p. 3 of this issue.)

The September Meeting will be held on the Island September 8<sup>th</sup> at **7:30 p.m.!** The early kick-off time was approved to accommodate an after-meeting slide-show presentation by Renee Dunham of her Maine canoe trip earlier this summer. The meeting's agenda will include more debate on the club's orientation and the question of limiting guest cards next year. All

members are invited to join in the discussion and enjoy the show.

## **August 11 Meeting**

**Attendance:** Gerald Barton, Tove Elfstrom, Marcia and George Loeb, Tryon Wells, Renee Dunham, Betty Burchell, Dick and Carol Schleicher, Jeff Komarow, David Holdridge, Doc Taliaferro, David and Jane Winer

President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order at 8:25PM - a start delayed by waiting for the requisite ten members to arrive (not counting spouses or our caretaker) to achieve a quorum.

## **August 11 Meeting (continued)**

*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**

While waiting, Doc Taliaferro reported a number of incidents during July and August in which teenagers (not members) at various times swam onto the Island, helped themselves to canoes (including the rescue canoe), noisily partied at the rope swing after midnight, etc. The Park Police are aware of the problem and are assisting in helping to keep our Island private. Doc also reported that Swimming Supervisors Ann Kip and Mark Brenneman brought five new inner tubes to the Island.

The membership approved the Minutes of the previous meeting.

**Communications:** President Tryon Wells read three letters to the membership.

1) From George Loeb: This letter proposed that the Club revitalize its canoe orientation by requiring that new members demonstrate canoe competency.

2) From both Marcia and George Loeb in their joint role as Entertainment Committee: This letter proposed Peggy Thomson or John Heideman as liaison with the Canoe Cruisers Association, restoring the close partnership we once enjoyed through John Thomson's efforts.

3) From Trip Reid: The letter expressed concern about some features of a recent large party that included an invitation in a local Church newsletter - another instance of the Club's general concern about the appropriateness of some types of large parties.

**Treasurer's Report:** In Johnna Robinson's absence, the summary given was that "everything is just fine."

**Canoe Chair's Report:** David Winer reported that one of the un-seaworthy wooden canoes was auctioned off for \$100. The remaining club wooden canoe requires extensive work and will be advertised for sale in a canoe journal. The Sycamore Island logos are now affixed to six of the for-member-use canoes. More canoes may be purchased in the future. Doc then gave a detailed inventory of the state of the member canoes and their repair status. Item: the rescue canoe was repaired, but still leaks slightly.

**New Business:** General discussion was invited on

the topic of canoe competency (see Communications above, letter #1) - the goal being to make the Club more canoe oriented and to ensure safety. Discussion touched on sources of canoe instruction, accident history, liability, canoe use for large parties, fairness in changing club rules, etc. George Loeb will rewrite his letter for publication in the Islander.

Tryon Wells will install a wooden door to the women's lavatory, insuring greater privacy. With the door installed, the small room outside the lavatory could then be closed and heated for substitute caretakers in the cold weather.

The meeting adjourned at 9:32PM.

## Old Timers Day Mid Day- Mid Week- Mid Month

Peggy Thomson interrupted her Cape Cod vacation ("irresponsibly going about in rowboats," she related) to phone in this news: Old Timers' Day will be at the Island on Tuesday, September 15, at noon. Rain date is set for the next day, Wednesday the 16th.

Who is an Old Timer? Do you want to be an Old Timer? Do you know Islanders who have been around the club a lot longer than you have? Good! Y'all come! Some folks will be coming from a distance to share this good time with friends of yore. The usual procedure is to bring something for the potluck lunch. Peggy asks that you phone her with your R.S.V.P. after September 1 at

## **The Canoeing Debate at the August Meeting**

**George Loeb submits this communication to the *Islander*.**

### **Proposal:**

It was proposed that prospective members, i.e., those on the waiting list and those to be on the waiting list in the future, should be required to take the Canoe Cruisers Association (CCA) elementary class (their flat water class) as a requirement for membership. The reasons for this were listed as:

1. As time has passed, the membership has undergone a gradual change from people who regarded the Island as a base for canoeing and associated activities such as fishing and camping, to an increased emphasis on the Island as a place for picnics and a swimming hole, with canoeing a secondary activity.

2. As this change has occurred, the membership has, to a larger and larger degree, become dependent on occasional use of the Club canoes instead of the general practice in the past of having their own boats. There is nothing wrong with that, but we should recognize that the emphasis has changed.

3. This has led to a decline in knowledge and experience with the elements of safe canoe handling. There is an attendant risk of accident and injury, with the Club being at least somewhat responsible in the eyes of the public and possibly in the eyes of the Park Service, in case of an unfortunate accident.

4. The Club rules call for members to be responsible for their guests, and this requires that the members know enough to take on that responsibility.

5. A point that is not quite as significant but should be considered: There was also the fact that the Club and the CCA have lost their old feeling of partnership with the passing on of old members who had membership in both organizations, especially John S. Thomson. The formal recognition of the combination of the CCA doing this class and the Island hosting the finishing ceremonies of the annual Potomac White Water Race is a way to restore it.

These considerations led to the proposed requirement that prospective members take the flat water canoe class.

### **Members' Responses:**

A member present objected that the proposed change was unfair to those who had been on the waiting list and paid their annual fee with the understanding that they would be admitted when their turn came without this additional requirement being imposed.

Other members suggested that the Canoe Cruisers be asked to present an instructional session at the Island for members and waiting list people in the spring and/or in the fall to familiarize Islanders with safe and enjoyable canoe handling. (A reflection on this last point which was not thought of at the meeting: The CCA class may require that participants bring their own boats, which may be why the regular classes are held close to canoe rental establishments.)

A further thought on fairness: that members who have not taken the CCA class should be asked to take it.

THE DEBATE WILL BE RESUMED AT THE SEPTEMBER MEETING



### A Northwoods Canoe Trip

Wooden canoes on Chesuncook Lake leave in wake  
sun-bleached bones of logs long beached,  
some bound for - never reached -  
mills.

Satin sheen of spruce and ash,  
Northwoods paddles dip and arc in perfect synch  
with back and forth of broad-brimmed hats,  
heading out.

Thirst anticipating scoop of lake,  
doubts defrayed by oh, how sweet  
and guides who say it's good, it's clean,  
we dip.

Moose horns rising from the water,  
monster branches dripping algae. Cocky with  
binoculars, I'm thrust against his snout  
and beg my boat, now tiny boat, to guide me  
through enormity.

— Renee Dunham

### Sycamoreans Venture to Wilds of Maine

This is a little embarrassing. I meant to describe a guided canoe trip that George and I took in central Maine. The accident poem above is what sometimes happens after a great experience. Not a lover of wooden canoes and not acquainted with the wilderness waters of Maine, we returned with enthusiasm for both. Alexandra and Garrett Conover were our guides, well-known for their knowledge of wooden canoes, the natural world of Maine and Labrador, the history of these regions, and the people wise in the basic skills needed to survive there.

We had a minimal packing list - essentially a set of clothes to wear and a dry set to keep, a warm layer, a swimsuit, AND NO INSECT REPELLENT! This last item was the scary part. We had no choice but to trust the Conovers' assurance that the bug jackets provided were the best solution. Fortunately, the dry spell this year was sufficient to make protection unnecessary.



**Campsite cooking:** Alexandra and Garrett (left) prepare spaghetti with choice of sausage or clam sauce. Ginger cake bakes in reflector oven. Adirondack packbaskets, lined up in back, carry food and equipment from canoes to dining site. George Dunham (right) awaits hungrily.

After three hours of driving on gravel logging roads, we put in at Chesuncook Lake. The canoes were loaded with waterproof sacks containing clothing, camping gear, and first aid. Add four Adirondack pack baskets made by Alexandra containing five days of food kept fresh without ice by clever packing. And finally, pack one wooden box contoured to the canoe bottom, called a “wannigan,” with cooking equipment. I mentioned in the poem that the water supply was below us. No filtration was used, but we knew a filter was handy for the jittery.

The paddles were beautiful to hold and use. They were of spruce and ash, light, and flat all the way up through the handle. This design enabled a paddle stroke - the Northwoods stroke - which demanded less effort than I have ever given to propel a canoe. The illusion of being able to go on forever, coupled with an endless, sweet-water supply created a timeless, expansive sense called contentment.



**Poling the Horseshoe between lakes. Paddling was difficult, so poling became the better choice in this moving shallow water.**

We explored a floating bog which rocked when we bounced. We learned about the old logging runs, the tasks and the lives of the loggers. We swam in the lake and bounced down the shallow river rapids. We practiced poling up and down the Caucamgomoc River, learning that “Caucamgomoc,” when yelled, was just the swear word we needed when our clumsiness beached us on a rock. We ate; we filled voids we never suspected with Alexandra’s fire-baked bread and cakes, sausages and salads and sauces, dinners cooked in a 24” stainless steel frying pan called “Fred,” who was well-respected. We visited a village, population five, to which there was no road. We listened to the Conovers’ stories that gave rich texture to this experience.

— Renee Dunham

*Renee will show slides of this trip at the end of the next Club meeting on Wednesday, September 8, on the Island. The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. in order to allow time for the slides.*



## **An Art Show of Interest to Islanders**

MY RIVER

Oil Paintings by Andrei Kushnir

From September 11 through October 8, 1999, Taylor and Sons Fine Arts will present an exhibition of New Naturalist painter Andrei Kushnir’s most recent paintings of the Potomac River. Andrei has been conveying the grandeur of the Potomac in his paintings of the river for many years, setting up his easel at spots that are visually beautiful, and which Andrei says evoke reflections on the nature and meaning of the Potomac.

The exhibit is open to the public, free of charge, from 12 noon to 6 pm Tuesday-Friday, 10 am to 6 pm on Saturdays and 12 noon to 5 pm on Sundays. The gallery is located at 666 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE.

## Sycamoreans Invited to a Bird Paddle

For the last several years, the club has hosted the Montgomery County Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society for an early autumn "bird paddle" from Sycamore Island in the MCC/MOS schedule of bird walks. This year, the Island's canoes are reserved on Saturday, October 2, at 7:30 a.m. for an expected 18 MCC/MOS members. Sycamore Islanders are invited to join these experienced birders for an interesting morning of paddling and bird study. Expect a couple of hours of searching from the river for ducks, raptors, migrating fall warblers and other songbirds. Afterwards the group will compare notes over coffee and edibles in the clubhouse. They might choose to search the Island's paths for more birds. Please note that all of the club's canoes are needed for the visitors; Islanders who would like to attend will need to supply their own craft.

If you would like to participate, or for more information, call David Winer at (301) 229-8963.

## Potomac Conservancy Seeks Volunteers for Clean-up of the River in Our Area

On September 18th, 1999, the Potomac Conservancy, River Network, Sierra Club, Student Conservation Association, Clean Virginia Waterways, Izaak Walton League, George Washington Memorial National Parkway, Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment and many other organizations are teaming up as part of International Coastal Clean Up Day to remove trash from the middle section of the Potomac River from DC to Great Falls.

The Potomac Conservancy is sponsoring a targeted clean-up effort along the Maryland shore of the Potomac from Lock 7 to Lock 10 with special emphasis on removing tires and other trash from the river bottom and adjacent islands.

Invite your family and friends and join the Conservancy for a fun-filled day on the river. If you know of a group that is looking for an activity, this is it!

**When:** Saturday, September 18, 1999, 9 a.m. till noon.

**Where:** Sign in at Lock 8 or Lock 7. (Lock 7 is the

next lock up from Sycamore Island, an easy walk.)

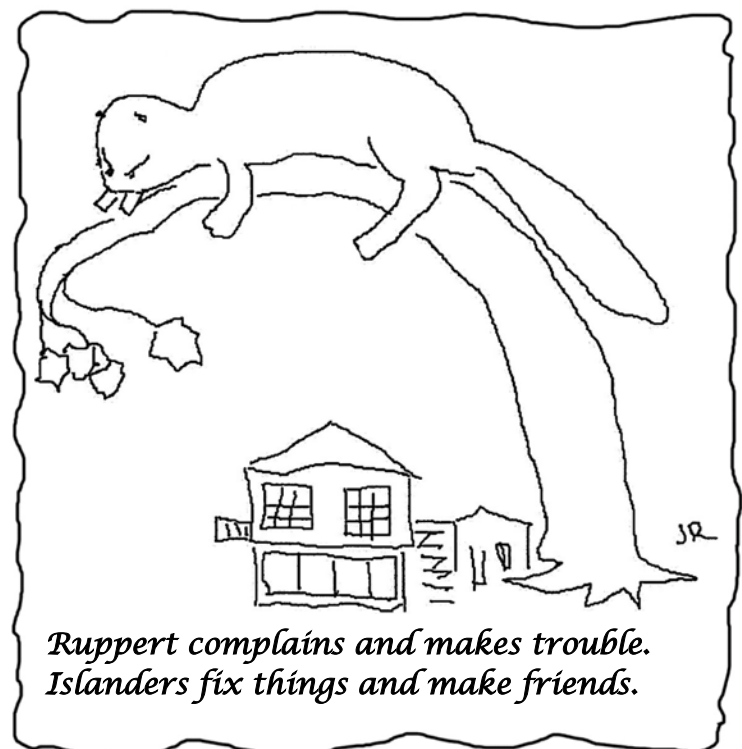
**Bring:** Water and snacks, work gloves, shoes and clothes that can get wet and dirty. Volunteers with canoes are encouraged to bring them and shovels for digging out embedded tires.

**Details:** We plan to make the most of the record low water levels by scouring the river bottom to remove tires and trash, as well as cleaning up litter along the bank. Specific areas of focus will include Minnie's Island (near Lock 8) and Cabin John Island (near Lock 7). For those with an adventurous spirit there will be plenty of opportunities to wade in the Potomac's shallows to pull out tires and trash. If you don't mind getting wet you should wear a swim suit and water boots and join our canoe brigade. For landlubbers, there is plenty of shore-based work along the C&O Canal and on river "islands" left high and dry in this drought. Some easy rock scrambling will be involved.

For more information, or to sign up, contact Matt Berres at: 202.338.4700 or [mberres@potomac.org](mailto:mberres@potomac.org)

Matt Berres  
Director of Administration  
The Potomac Conservancy  
1010 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Ste. 200  
Washington, DC 20007

## Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

# Notes From The Island

Who has sat in the chair at the top of the Island?? Who even knows that there is a hidden chair at the up river tip of the Island?? Anyone who has not explored the up-Island paths should do so before this year escapes. The Caretaker is amazed at the number of people who come to the Island only to visit certain small specific places... say a swimming float... or a barbeque grill near a certain table... or an upstairs game room. These folks leave the Island and are unaware of the great treasures so nearby. Did you know that there is an extremely large swath of blooming cardinal flowers containing over a hundred separate plants? Or that there are places you cannot stop and sit or you will be overcome by the overpowering sweet almond fragrance of the sweet autumn clematis? Or that there are places where one can sit surrounded by the purple flowers of towering ironweed and count a half-dozen butterflies at any given time? Because Nature is always in process, each visit to the Island can be a fresh exploration of new adventures and changing panoramas. Each day is like this to the Caretaker... of things on the Island to be visited or checked upon or gaped anew at. It is a wonder there is time for anything else.

By far the best show on the Island this year can be had on the Captain's Float for a few pieces of bread. Surely anyone on the float has noticed the zillions of baby fish that have hatched under it and hang out there. Casting bread upon the waters between the float and the shore will cause them to cluster to feed. After a few moments, the medium-sized fish will gather to take turns darting into the swarm to try to pick off one of the babies. Minutes later huge catfish will appear like sharks to see what the fuss is about and will drive off all other fish, although they themselves are really interested only in the bread. Children of all ages have shrieked at the thrill of that first moment the first catfish appears.

The lushness is back... the rains came...the Island is happy... and it can be such a great joy walking the Island in the rain. There is that feeling that reminds us we are simply bags of skin filled with water and electrolytes, and the negative ions from a thunderstorm urge us to fill our lungs and stand tall

against the sky like two leaves in a Leyden jar. Sometimes there is a certain quality of the light that causes one to look up to the tree canopy with the same feeling with which one looks up at the stained glass in a chapel. The rains that broke the drought during the last week of August only managed to raise the water level a foot... and only for a day and a half. Still, it was enough for a reality check for the Caretaker to relearn that the water "moves" and that "current" had returned. Imagine therefore this year's baby fish who must have been shocked to learn that they did not live in a lake... but in a river. Actually, considering the duration of the drought, even this year's fingerlings from last year have not really had to contend with much current. There must be some sort of genetic programming in fresh water fish to urge them to always swim against the current, or else they would all be hanging out in lakes or washed down to salt water.

Members and their guests should be aware of the changing situation at the rope swing. Because of the drowning of a teenage swimmer two weeks ago downstream of the Island near the dam, Park Police have become more aware of the large numbers of people using the rope swing. By large is meant 150+ on a hot day, including supervised school groups bused in and families bringing small children and lawn chairs from up the hill. Mounted Park Police have issued \$75 warning tickets on two occasions.

—Doc Taliaferro

## **Doc offers night tours.**

Doc Taliaferro announced at the August meeting that he would be willing to lead a nighttime Island walk for interested members after the monthly meeting, if the meeting adjourns by 9:30PM.



—Clubhouse sketch by Al Brown

### July 4th - Caretaking Sycamore Island

Alone with river  
Immersed in nature's silence  
Caretake Sycamore

Birds twitter, crows caw  
The blue heron floats through the sky  
Frogs croak and geese honk

Fallen Sycamore  
It lies half in the river  
Alive with green leaves

Leaves blow, fall and float;  
They slide downstream with current  
Flow of life's river

Still brown mud bottom  
Rainbow circles bubble up  
Float and disappear

Silver Sycamore  
Barkless patches reflect white  
Transfigured - it glows

Breeze blows down river  
Ruffling my hair, soothing skin  
Leaves to flow downstream

Serenity Isle  
Refuge from city speed, noise  
I re-find my soul

Fourth Celebration  
Retain Nature's Heritage  
Lightening Fireworks

*Haiku is a Japanese three-line poem, with the lines having 5 syllables, 7 syllables and 5 syllables. I like the form for it seems to focus on the essence of a subject. These poems appeared as Al Brown and I were substitute caretakers on Sycamore on the morning shift of July 4th.*

—Mardy Burgess



## Sunday Relief

Date	Time	Names	Tel. No.
September 5	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Tryon Wells Maxine Hattery	301-320-6762 202-362-1361
September 12	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Harry Schwartz Carl Linden	301-229-2285 301-229-2398
September 19	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Linda Riegelman Karl Kosok	301-229-2871 301-589-0034
September 26	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Joan & Bill Kugler Patricia Hartge	301-652-0132 301-907-6657

**To volunteer for caretaking in October:  
Call Ann Marie Cunningham (703) 876-9165**

— or —

**Send a note to  
annmarie.cunningham@lmco.com**

## Large

Who	When	What
David Winer	September 11, 1200-1400 hrs	15 Harley-Davidson enthusiasts.
Sue & Greg Super	October 3, 1200-1700 hrs	25 for kids birthday.
Betty Burchell	October 29, 1100-1700 hrs	30 from Church choir.
Mardy Burgess	Oct 23-24, 1400 to 1400	15 Junior high folks camping

**A large party application form may be printed from the club's Web page at  
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systems.htm>**

— or —

**To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, Bill Eichbaum  
301-229-1713**



## *The Sycamore Islander*

6607 Marywood Road  
Bethesda, MD, 20817

<http://www.>

**Address Service**

FIRST-CLASS MAIL  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID

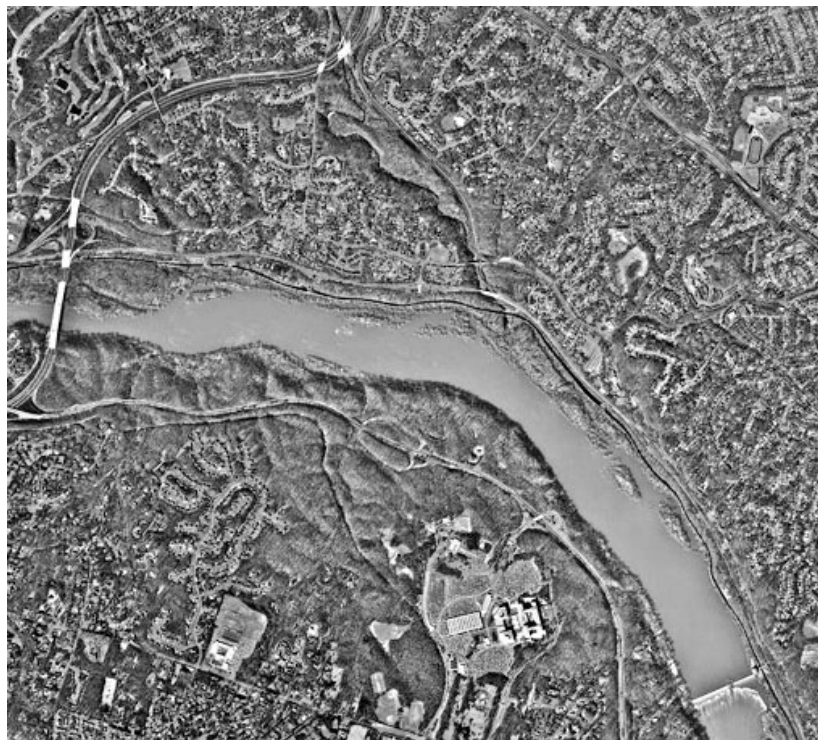
First Class Mail

First Class Mail

September, 1999

### **This Issue:**

- Don't forgetta Regatta!
- 
- Venturing to the north woods.
- Its time for Old Timers.
- What's a bird paddle?
- Sycamore Poets debut.



### **Wilderness and City**

**Beltway to Little Falls Dam, including Sycamore and Rupperts Islands.**

**Digital Orthophoto Quadrangle. Home Page: <http://nsdi.>**