



The Sycamore Islander

January, 2000

Volume 79, No. 1

DUES NOTICES ARE IN THE MAIL

Dues notices for the year 2000 have been mailed to the membership and applicants on the waiting list. They are due upon receipt. Any members or applicants paying their dues or waiting list fees late this year will find themselves unceremoniously dropped from the rolls. The waiting list is too long at this time to allow ourselves the luxury of late payments dragging on through the year. Members and applicants who are conscientious in this regard must not be penalized by those who are not.

JANUARY MEETING

December's meeting carried out the routine business of approving the budget and the slate of officers for the year 2000. It was decided to grant Guest Card eligibility to all applicants on the waiting list who has previous eligibility (i.e. those who applied before 1999) – not just to those had actually purchased guest cards last year. The new rule requiring a 3-year wait for eligibility to obtain a guest card will apply to applicants who applied in 1999 and all future applicants. Applicants who applied in 1999 are extended the option to withdraw their application for a full refund if they so choose.

The January meeting will be held at 8:00pm on January 12 at the home of Renee Dunham. On the agenda is a motion to limit the time-frame for accepting applications for membership and a motion to change the term

“Guest Card” to “Waiting List Pass” or “Pass Card.” All members are invited to come and bring their ideas, comments and good judgement to the first meeting of the new millennium.

Directions: From the intersection of Western Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue, go south (into DC) on Wisconsin. Turn left on Harrison Street to 3840.

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER MEETING

Attendance: Mark Brenneman, Betty Burchell, Philip Jones, John Krasny, Jeff Komarow, Trip Reid, Renee Dunham, Dick and Penny Doolittle, Jinny Jones, Tryon Wells, Peter Jones, John Stapko, Holly Syrrakos, Jane and David Winer, John and Judy Lentz, Peggy Thomson, Johnna Robinson, Brad Coolidge, Bill Eichbaum, Ann Marie Cunningham, Gerald S. Barton.

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 receive priority.**

DECEMBER MEETING (CONTINUED)

President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order at 8:08PM. The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Budget report: Johnna Robinson reported that expenditures were in good shape. The budget projection for year 2000, devised by the finance committee, was presented. Summarized here, it showed \$59,500 in expected funds received (including interest) and \$57,800 outflow. The budget was approved excepting the caretaker's salary and bonus which would be determined later in this meeting.

Drinking water status: Tryon Wells reported that the water has been tested for bacterial and mineral content. Neither test showed a significant problem. In addition, the odor was considered somewhat diminished after the second hot water heater was engaged. The sediment in the well, which has been flooded multiple times, is about three inches deep and is not seriously implicated in contributing to the odor of the water. In short, there are no present concerns about drinking the water. Annual testing is advisable.

Membership report: There are 156 Members, 156 on the waiting list, and a constant flow of applications for membership.

Finance report: Jinny Jones reported that \$956 was deposited since the financial statement last meeting, including a second \$25 gift from honorary member Bob Yoder. The Club thanks Bob for his gifts. Total funds before expenditures for the period January 1, 1999 through December 8, 1999 was \$59,950. There has been a delay in carrying out the provisions of the Horace Custis will in which \$500 was designated for the Sycamore Island Club. (The Club was informed of the bequest last September by the Custis family.)

Archivist report: Holly Syrrakos reported that the Historical Society of Washington at DuPont Circle has Sycamore Island records "from the beginning" in a climate controlled environment. She will submit the 1999 Islanders and associated materials when she receives them from the Recording Secretary.

Trees report: Trip Reid reported that trees were planted on the Island. All are native Maryland trees. There were two Black Locusts planted - one off the old volleyball court, the other on the Maryland side of the Island along the beaver trails. Two River Birch were planted on the downriver end of the Island on either side of the Ken Fassler tree. One Ornamental Red Maple was planted just off the corner of the Clubhouse deck for the purpose of being in position when the current Silver Maple at the corner falls.



Peggy Thomson hosted the December Meeting. As usual, her refreshments were scrumptious. —Photo by Renee Dunham

Islander report: The Winers encourage all to keep submitting photos, stories, poems, etc. Members commented that they enjoyed reading the list of birds sighted during the Bird Paddle in October.

Canoe report: David Winer reported that five ca-

noes were cleaned and polished during the November Workfest. The very heavy wooden canoe in need of repair (“a treasure for someone”) is up for auction; the ad placed in a canoe journal designates a minimum bid of \$100, bidding period to close on January 2, 2000.

Election of officers and supervisors for year 2000: The proposed slate of officers and supervisors, published in the November Islander, was approved unanimously.

Caretaker: The caretaker’s salary and bonus were approved.

New business: Tryon Wells moved to change the term “Guest Card” to “Waiting List Pass Card” or just “Pass Card” to clarify its use.

The guest card issue voted upon last month was revisited. Subsequent examination of the rule approved at the November meeting showed that applicants in 1997 and 1998 who had previously been eligible for a guest card would now no longer be. To effect the transition to the new rule, it was decided that all applicants that had enjoyed guest card eligibility previously could continue to do so. Applicants in 1999 would have to wait 3 years to be eligible, as per the new rule, but would be allowed to withdraw their request for membership, if they desire, and be refunded their application fees.

—Recording Secretary, Renee Dunham

Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

HOW THE MONEY IS SPENT

Comments from our outgoing Treasurer,
Johnna Robinson

In December the members vote on a projected budget for the next calendar year. Before the budget is drawn up, the Finance Committee meets with the Captain to plan what projects are necessary for the coming year. The important categories for discretionary spending are Capital Improvements, Repairs, and Grounds.

The person who coordinates all these areas is The Captain. It is crucial that all projects of building, repairing and maintenance be cleared through The Captain.

Committee chairs need to check before obligating the club for any new expenditures and the new Treasurer(s) will coordinate with the Captain before any bills are paid.



Curved and Straight

—Photo by David Winer

Excerpts from a web page of the American Canoeing Association, discussing off-season boating.
<http://www.enter.net/~skimmer/coldwater.html>

The risk of falling overboard or capsizing may be small, but the threat-to-life of such accidents is most serious...

The water is cold (less than 60 degrees F) in the off-season. More than half of the fatal boating accidents in Pennsylvania occur when the water is cold. Most such accidents occur in calm weather, relatively close to shore. Because fewer boaters are on the water, the likelihood of a prompt rescue is greatly reduced. Off-season boaters must be as self-sufficient as possible...

Immersion in cold water rapidly incapacitates and may kill boaters who are not wearing protective clothing. Surfers, sailboarders, and river paddlers wear wet suits or dry suits when the water is cold. Off-season sailors, fishermen, hunters, and other folks out in open boats can use these same precautions to greatly improve their safety on the water...

Strong swimmers have died before swimming 100 yards in cold water. In water under 40 degrees F, victims have died before swimming 100 feet...

Another web page— <http://www.venturenorth.com/home/wlder/hypo.htm>

But remember, cold water can be deadly! Few concern themselves with the dangers of hypothermia, the major killer of outdoor recreationists. Water of 10 Celsius (50F) is unbearably cold and will induce hypothermia within minutes. Even seemingly warm water can be particularly hazardous when exposure occurs for prolonged periods of time.

Ode to the Caretaker's Wife

She entered into my life, And brought me down to earth.

There she touched my soul, And gave me new re-birth.

My life was ever changed, And I was lost no more.

She blessed me with her love, Now I could really soar.

Again I leapt to fly, This time she by my side.

We danced among the clouds, But now I had a guide.

Two sparks of light and love, Had wandered through this life.

Forty-eight years I searched, To find my soul mate wife.

Two sparks had once been one, So many lives ago.

Had flamed inside a jewel, As one fire set to grow.

The gods had split the gem, And set the halves to wander,

To search among the worlds, To question and to ponder.

To learn how truly blessed, A single soul can be,

It must be split apart, Allowed to roam quite free.

Once it discovers self, And knows the road alone,

It starts the quest for unity, And follows that road home.

For it has learned that only love, Can make its life complete.

And we are all just wandering halves, Until the sparks can meet,

And kindle with their love a flame, To set the world alight.

A song for ages yet to come, To blaze the trail and make it bright.

The CIA Canoe Pool Revisited

—By Leah Hertz

On Friday, October 15, 1999, Renee Dunham (fellow ex-Fed (NIH)) and I set off from Sycamore Island to retrace the historical route of the legendary CIA Canoe Pool, "famous (so various parties tell me) in song and story."

Actually, Renee and I were meeting for the first time as a result of her having placed an announcement in the Canoe Club newsletter seeking fellow women kayakers. For a first time run, we decided to go on an easy expedition -- just over to the Danger/Undertow



The author, arriving at the old site.

— Photo by Renee Dunham

sign on the Virginia shore, to check out the current status of the Canoe Pool's former landing site. One thing led to another: We ended up landing, stowing our kayaks, and going up the entire path to the far end of the bridge over the GW Parkway, within sight of the guard shack at the CIA gate.

To get to the heart of the matter: The upper third of the trail has been obliterated. The section of the path that led directly down from the parkway off-ramp skirting a ravine, and the stone staircase that curved its way down to a high hillside stream (quondam "Crayfish Towers") are not in evidence -- swept askew or buried. The ravine has turned into a vast eroded chasm; the entire gully looks like it has shifted southeast, and the trees that formerly lined the edge have toppled or disappeared. Some remains of the stone staircase are visible underneath piles of tree trunks,

but the former path is completely impassable. Alas, its charming rustic architecture is no more.

An alternative path appears to have been trodden by unknown feet, possibly Chinese, (more on that later), starting about two-thirds of the way up the slope and



Remains of stone stairway (indicated by author's outlines) are hidden by years of nature's detritus.

skirting the area of destruction. This "trail" goes straight up a steep, denuded slope and looks like it would simply be all slippery mud most of the time. The mud track takes a bend to the NW and comes out onto the GW off-ramp just where the old path did. Out on the roadway itself, much looks the same. There are the same mowed grassy margins that are prime woodchuck territory (although we didn't see any). The bushes that were planted in the median strip are all dead -- victims of drought, perhaps, or neglect. Or maybe the Chinese sensors buried at their roots interfered with their growth. (More on that later.)

The spot past Pulp Run where the Poolers' route branches off uphill to the CIA is less marked than it used to be. The stone steps are tumbled, and again a "detour" -- a dirt track -- runs parallel to them. As one goes higher, the path itself remains distinct but definitely grows much narrower in places. It used to be that negotiating the path in the dark on the way home was a bit tricky. Hence, certain Poolers were seen using a helmet-mounted carbide lamp or hand-held flashlight. The more recent narrowing would make the nighttime path even trickier.

Pulp Run was a mere trickle. It was hard to imagine it as a raging torrent that once forced even veteran Canoe Poolers to get their feet wet en route home. I pointed out to Renee the site where the valiant Lydia Weber, spotting a pair of children's shoes left on a rock mid-stream, had cried out, "Look, elves!"

Although the shoreline portion of the Canoe Pool path is relatively unchanged, appearing well maintained and well traveled -- free of fallen trees and trash -- the Virginia landing site has changed considerably. A mini-inlet downstream from the undertow sign and a giant sycamore that leaned out over the water are no more. The bank that once was curved and sloping is now straight, blunt, and steep. The low plateau where canoes were hauled up over grass is now Nettle City. They grow dense and high without a break. Following (sort of) in the footsteps of the intrepid Canoe Poolers who, according to legend, pushed a canoe ahead of them across the ice as they traversed the frozen Potomac on foot, I pushed my boat along the ground ahead of me through the nettles to make a path to the trail.



The erstwhile path lies in alignment with, and beneath, this large downed Tulip Poplar.

At the base of the undertow sign, I searched long and hard for some sign of the Canoe Pool's old cable, chain, and bike locks. I found absolutely nothing. Not a trace. They must have become buried in the silt.

When Renee and I returned to Sycamore Island, Doc Taliaferro, hearing of our reconnaissance, had his own observations to add: Doc had noticed that there was

quite a lot of human activity on the river after dark. He had especially noted some Chinese soldierly-looking types who more than once went to the Virginia shore in boats and who, on one particular occasion, crossed the river after dark "on a rainy Tuesday

night." Doesn't sound much like fishermen. He thought it sufficiently piquant to call up the Agency, but whoever answered the phone there sounded less than interested. We speculated about who might have trod the muddy alternative track going up to the GW Parkway. (It has been noted that fishermen, among others, do park their cars on the verge of the GW off-ramp and clamber down to the water's edge on foot.) My alternative title for this account was "Ozymandias in Virginia." On a closing note, I append the relevant lines:

*"Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

Well, it ain't THAT bad.



Notes from the Island

It started as a normal enough December day until the Member on the ferry returning to the towpath commented “look at the chicken on the steps.” It took me a moment to focus... I guess I was looking more for an outline corresponding to a bucket of the Colonel’s best... when what to my wondering eyes should appear but a black chicken... clucking about on the steps. As we got closer it was revealed that the chicken had been wearing some sort of halter arrangement constructed out of red ribbon that was festooned with Christmas bells. The chicken had been tied to a large rock with another long piece of ribbon, but had managed to peck his way free of the ribbon and was just... well... sort of there. Whoever had left him had also left a small pile of corn for him to munch upon. Now, there are the occasional Members who visit the Island for a short time and tie up their dogs at the towpath landing, but this was sort of unusual. I returned to the Island to see if any Members there had left the chicken, but they had not, one commenting that in fact he had eaten before coming. I was grateful not to be the only person experiencing disconnect between the grammar and the facts. Returning to the towpath with Barbara Neal, Sarah Davis and daughter Katy, we observed several big dogs approaching. Although we applied ourselves to get max speed from the ferry, the dogs got there first, driving the chicken into the river where it floundered about before making it back to shore where it obtained purchase on one of the roots sticking out near the water level. Barbara borrowed a glove and crawled out along the roots near the bank to try to “pluck” the chicken from the cold river, and succeeded only after having to actually wade into the cold (very cold) water. The chicken was returned to the Island where he was held, dried, and warmed... and spent the cold night in the caretaker’s quarters.

The chicken, named Oscar, was taken to the Poplar Springs Animal Sanctuary (301-428-8128) near the end of River Road in the Pooles-

ville area. There Terry and Dave rent 400 acres where they provide refuge to abandoned and abused farm animals. Terry is a former vet tech at the National Zoo. They promised Oscar a safe and good home despite having no more room for chickens (and especially roosters). They depend upon volunteers and donations, and the Club should consider making some small appreciation to keep Oscar in corn. Anyone looking for a wonderful place to take little kids on any afternoon should keep this place in mind, for it is a great adventure at a beautiful place along the towpath with many unusual but people friendly animals. There is also a huge eagles’ nest in a tree behind the farmhouse, but fortunately they do not seem to hunt close to their home... or perhaps not close to a people home.

There is a small herd of approximately five deer lingering along the towpath in our area, and a few weeks ago a very large buck and his doe spent at least one day on the Island. The beaver have conducted their annual tree taste in which they take only one bite out of twenty trees, but they have not been back and none have been seen in over a month, which is unusual. A small flock of geese are back, but only in the area, they are not spending every day on the island, which is also unusual.

Members are reminded that the water is off in the Clubhouse until Spring, and the only functioning toilet is the one that is heated in the Men’s bathroom downstairs. The awful smell in the Island’s well water has almost disappeared as mysteriously as it appeared. The key word here is “almost,” as on some days it is noticeable despite the new charcoal filters. But on most days it is not, and the main troubling problem is that now several of the best experts in the area are concerned that they can not actually identify the problem. Most unusual. Stay tuned!

— Doc Taliaferro

Sunday Relief

Date	Time	Name(s)	Tel. No.
January 2	11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Richard Walker Ann Marie Cunningham	202-363-4546 703-876-9162
January 9	11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Bruce & Cathy Gaber Deborah & Doug Richards	301-654-7479 703-578-0822
January 16	11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Call Ann Marie Cunningham Richard Doolittle	703-876-9165 301-229-5632
January 23	11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Richard Edelson Sherry Pettie	301-951-0195 202-965-5366
January 30	11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Diane Noble John & Anne Armstrong	301-320-4216 703-847-6488

Note from outgoing Coordinator, Ann Marie Cunningham:

Thanks to all of you who made it easy for me to find relief caretakers. I appreciate your friendliness and willingness to help, and am sure that you will make this an easy job for John Krasny and Jeff Komarow.

*To volunteer in February,
please call John at 301-564-0342 or Jeff at 301-897-5996*

Large

There are no reports of large parties scheduled on the island during the months of January and February.

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

— or —

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



Happy New:

-Year

-Century

-Millennium !





The Sycamore Islander

6006 Welborn Drive
Bethesda MD 20816-1158

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January 2000

This Issue:

- Guest card issue revisited. (Still? Again?)
- A new term for Guest Card. (Finally.)
- Archeology of a not-so-secret trail.
- Playing “Chicken” Sycamore style.



Map of Sycamore Island

A full-color version of this artwork is now on display in the main club room upstairs. A copy is also posted on the club's Web Site. Date is unknown, but it is from way back in the *last* Century, probably c. 1932. Note the boat-house along the river side.