



The Sycamore Islander

March, 2000

Volume 79, No. 3

The Club's Annual Wildflower Walk

This year's walk is on April 8, from 10:00 to noon; meet at the base of the spiral bridge over the parkway. Experienced leaders will be along to assist in identification. Optional: Bring a sandwich for lunch on the island with the group after the walk. Wait Listers are especially welcome. Mark your calendar now.

The February Meeting decided to provide a list of members in the sign-in box on the ferry so that Sunday relief caretakers could check unrecognized faces before admitting them to the Island. It also decided to reorder and renumber the Standing Rules so that the large section on the duties of club officers would be at the back and more relevant rules of conduct would advance to the front. Finally, John Matthews introduced the idea of renovating or replacing the caretaker's quarters. The meeting requested that a more formal presentation with cost figures be made before any further action be taken.

The March Meeting: A confirmation vote on the restriction to receive applications for membership only during the month of January each year will be re-voted.

The meeting will be held at 8:00 p.m. on March 8 at the home of Alan and Caroline Gelb. Directions: Starting from the Glen Echo Shopping Center, take Golds-

boro Road and turn left at Millwood Road (the first left after you cross River Road). The house is on the left at 6824.

Minutes of February 8, 2000

Attendance: Jane Winer, Bill Kugler, Jeff Komarow, Bill Bays, Trip Reid, Alan Gelb, Tryon Wells, John Matthews, Brad Collidge, Maurice Tobin, Gerry Barton, Marcia and George Loeb, Renee Dunham

President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order at 8:10 p.m.

The minutes of the last meeting were approved after two corrections were made: Brad Coolidge's name should have appeared among the attendants. The statement "Doc suggested that the Club supply canoes at Lock 7 for the April river cleanup..." is not correct.

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.**

Your secretary misreported, and the correct notice for the river cleanup appears below, following these Minutes.

Islander Report: Jane Winer solicits you all to send ideas, thoughts, photos, etc. Otherwise, all is fine.

Treasurer's Report: Alan Gelb reports that a source for Workman's Compensation for the caretaker has been found.

Grounds Report: Trip Reid reports "cold and icy."

Relief Caretaking Report: Jeff Komarow reports that, due to the Island closing, relief caretakers will be rescheduled.

Captain's Report: John Matthews reported in one phrase, "ice walking." Several people had walked out on the River towards Virginia. Doc on one occasion "fell though."

Old Business:

- **Identification:** Various ideas were discussed for identifying ferry passengers to substitute caretakers. On a trial basis, a list of members and waiting list pass holders will be available on the ferry.
- **Standing Rules:** The Board of Directors met to consider membership procedures. Tryon Wells made a motion to reorder and renumber the Standing Rules to make it more readable. A sample was distributed at the meeting in which the most critical items (conduct, Clubhouse rules, penalties, etc.) appeared first and the "dull stuff" (officers' jobs) appeared later. The motion was passed unanimously.

New Business:

- **Improving the caretaker's quarters:** John Matthews summarized discussions with John Wiebenson on repair or reconstruction of part or all of the caretaker's current quarters. The goal is to make the quarters less affected by floods. Assurance was given that Club funds are available for realizing some solution to this problem. Members at this meeting discussed many aspects of the issue – flood frequency, post-flood recovery, mate-

rials, cost, design, etc. Alan Gelb suggested that we investigate the different capital issues involved and determine the long-term impact on our budget. He then moved that we request formal plans with cost estimates for repair or replacement of the caretakers quarters. The motion was passed.

- **Hospitality:** The meeting thanked Maurice Tobin for hosting our meeting and providing luscious sustenance in a much more regal setting than our simple Island. Another experience we could not have had on our Island was the inclusion of a Saint Bernard who almost was voted into membership when it appeared that we might not have the necessary quorum of ten.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

-- Renee Dunham, Recording Secretary

Mark Your Calendars for...

The Potomac Cleanup

The 12th Annual Potomac Watershed cleanup is April 1, 2000, from 9:00 am — noon. (The cleanup is sponsored by the Alice Ferguson Foundation, Inc. It has gone global; there will also be cleanup sites along the Arakawa, the Japanese sister river to the Potomac.) This year, Sycamore Island is an official site, open only to members and guests, and those on the waiting list. We will have a potluck lunch together at the clubhouse following the cleanup.

Please come help clean our river and get acquainted with other members. Wear sturdy boots or shoes and work gloves. Last year, four people alone collected 115 and 1/2 tennis balls, softballs, golf balls and many bags of trash. As a larger group working together, we can do more and keep our river clean for canoeing, fishing, swimming, and enjoying. Join us for a day of fun!

—Vicki Judson

Suggested Remodeling of the Caretaker's Quarters —reported by Johnna Robinson

After some much needed and awkward repairs to the floor of the older portion of the caretaker's quarters, the Captain decided it was time to look into moving the lower portion of the quarters to above the 24-foot flood level. (Recent floods have been above the 20-foot level.) During the past three floods, the quarters have been under water up to the lower window sills. This warps the floor, gets into the appliances, cabinets, and the electrical system.

After considering several options (including using the current club kitchen as new space and eliminating the women's locker room...) the Captain and the architect, John Weibenson, came up with a plan which would fill in the area just canal-side of the club kitchen, level with the

clubhouse. The space would be 28' x 14', with a stair down to the current living room. It would include new closet space, a comfortable bedroom, a new bathroom with two doors and a kitchen with a sunny dining area. The new addition would be energy efficient and relatively spider-free. It is difficult to estimate costs, but the Captain thinks it could be built for \$17-20,000.

This suggestion is put before the membership it to assess the degree of support such a proposal would have.

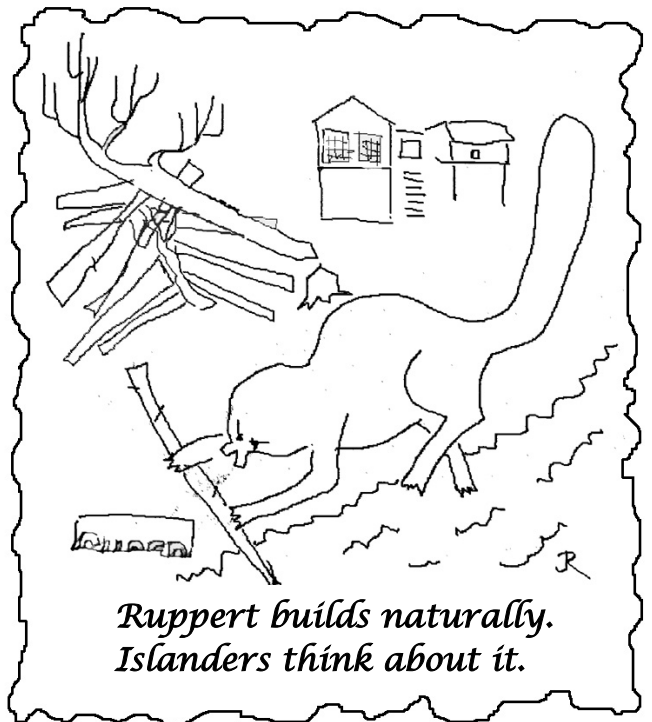
NB: The "floor" of the canoe shed is ~10'
The floor of the quarters is ~20'
The floor of the clubhouse is ~28'.

Needed

A member of the club, or someone on the waiting list, who is a Structural Engineer to call the Captain, John Matthews at (301) 229-0234.



Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Sycamore Island Club
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting

February 8, 2000

Attendance: Tryon Wells, Betty Burchell, Bill Kugler, George Loeb, Peter Winkler, David and Jane Winer, John Matthews, Blair Bower

President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order at 8:08 p.m.

The meeting began with a description by Peter Winkler of the procedures that the Membership Secretary engages in, from the first contact with a new applicant, to when that applicant becomes a member. The discussion then focused on the application form and a companion notice "Notes to Assist You in your Use and Enjoyment of the Club." Tryon Wells offered a new version of both documents, which the group then critiqued and made suggestions on. Peter Winkler also stated that he sends a "Welcome" letter to each applicant but that document was not available at the meeting.

The discussion then moved on to the materials to be sent to applicants on the Waiting List who wished to get Waiting List Passes. It was recommended that the "Notes to Assist You in Your Use and Enjoyment of the Club" and a shortened copy of the Standing Rules be sent along with the Waiting List Pass to those who wished to purchase one.

Finally, the topic of an orientation for new members and first-time Waiting List Pass holders was taken up. There was general support for the idea of an orientation meeting to acquaint applicants with the participatory expectations of the club and the rules. It was also noted that the orientation would enable members and new members to get to know one another which would promote more club socializing, an undercurrent of expression that popped up at regular intervals throughout the meeting.

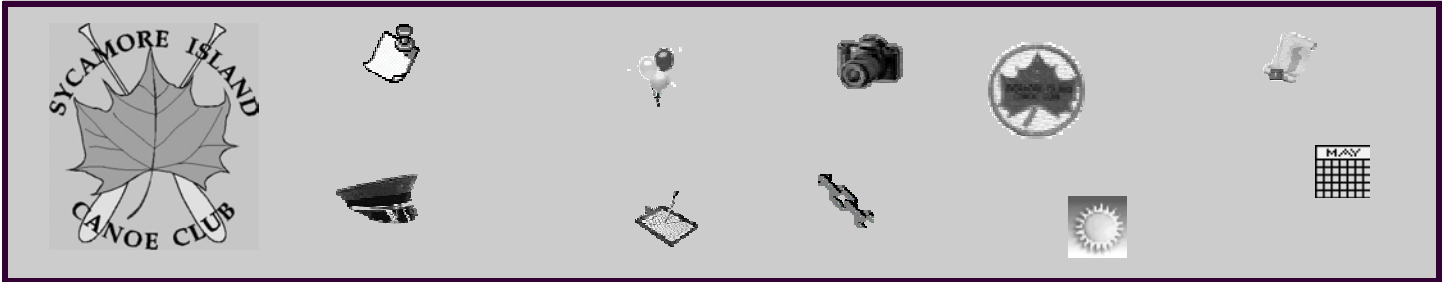
The general sense of the meeting endorsed the majority of the content in the material presented. The question of whether sponsorship of a new applicant by two current members was required at the time of application or later was deferred at the request of Betty Burchell who is working on a presentation of an historical/philosophical document that she argued would help determine the decision.

The meeting also endorsed the idea of an orientation for new members and first-time Waiting List Pass holders, to be held every spring and be a mandatory requirement prior to use of the Island. It was also recommended that the orientation be open to all members who wished to participate and would include an island tour and barbecue. The discussion bogged down in the details of when to schedule the orientation and when to admit new members. As it was getting late, it was decided to think further on how to accomplish the orientation procedure for the convenience of all concerned.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 p.m.

— Tryon Wells, Acting Recording Secretary

Our Web Meister has been busy...



It is my pleasure to announce that the Caretaker's Log will again be updated daily by Doc on the club's web site at:

www.sycamoreisland.org

The web site now also contains almost all of Peter Jones's "Notes from the Island" between 1988 and 1996. It remains to put Ken Fassler's contribution to this monthly Islander column that he started in the early 1980's.

Though the web site contains few of the more elaborate bells-and-whistles found on the Internet these days, it still contains quite a bit of useful information for club members. Herewith, some of the highlights:

- *Directions to Sycamore Island: A quick page that can be printed out for guests.*
- *Calendar of Events and large Parties: A quick reference calendar to check for parties before heading down to the Island.*
- *Instructions on How to Host a Large Party: Forms and notes to assist any member organizing a party.*
- *Locker and Canoe Rack Assignments: Check here to see what's available and for telephone numbers of the supervisors.*
- *Links to Other Web Sites: Links to Weather, Canoeing, Birdwatching, Astronomy and Parks in the area.*

- *Club Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws and Standing Rules: The full and most up-to-date text of these documents.*
- *Club Officers: A list of the current club officers and past administrations back to 1984.*
- *Minutes of Monthly Meetings: The latest meeting minutes and previous meeting minutes back to 1996.*
- *Press Articles on Sycamore Island: Old articles on the club published by the Washington Post and the Potomac Almanac.*
- *Old Maps: A wonderful map of the Island (1931) and of the Sycamore Store area (1932)*
- *The 1985 Centennial Issue of the Sycamore Islander: A treasure of beautifully written articles by current and past Sycamoreans.*
- *Old Sycamore Islander Articles: Articles written for the newsletter get a second life on the web site indefinitely.*

Finally, I have recently added a rudimentary search capability (it's rudimentary because it's free) to the site for the research and historically minded among us. You can find it on the "Official Club Business" page. Happy reading!

-- Tryon Wells



A couple of years ago we had the pool table refurbished. Now, it's possible to get into a serious game of Eight-Ball. Jim Drew lines up on the cueball.



Purists call it table tennis, but it's still great fun played as ping-pong. Nate McCoy socks it to his guest.

The off-season. Islanders have indoor choices when the weather outside is frightful.

Et cetera Some thoughts from our Caretaker

Betty Burchell called recently to inquire of my opinion concerning the historical changes in the Club. Although I have in fact recently spent some fascinating time reading parts of the Centennial Edition of the Islander, I had no quick answer to give. But I very much enjoyed the recent letter to the Islander by Claire Collins Conner, which was highly evocative of the sentiments and reminiscences found in the Centennial Edition, and her comments about guests and friends have caused me to ponder how much more "personal" Membership used to be. In those days the Club was a place to go to "meet" and "be" with your friends... these days it seems only a place to "bring" your friends.

And from the Caretaker's log... Since the Club President has instituted the daily update to the web page by the Caretaker, and since there are rainy days in which there is nothing happening on the Island to write about, it is difficult for the Caretaker to avoid the opportunity to ruminate about Island issues which are on his mind. Of course, the Caretaker is not supposed to involve himself in "issues," only in security, admini-

stration, maintenance, and ferrying. But although his voice can not thusly be heard in meetings... questions might be raised in this Island log... especially since it is seldom read... even by the Club officers who are the only folks to whom it is distributed.

I hope that the Annual River Cleanup that is taking place on April 1 will be the beginning of a new Club tradition. Certainly this is an opportunity to pay our dues to the river gods for providing so much enrichment to our own lives. Here is an opportunity to commit an act of service and have fun at the same time... a chance to introduce children to so many worthy values in an entertaining venue... more deserving of a place on your weekly schedule than soccer practice or sleeping late or shopping. It has been proposed that the Club canoes be reserved this morning only for the use of folks contributing to the cause. Think of this as an opportunity to make a personal offering to Mother Nature... and like an act of worship, something we really do not for others but for ourselves... and hence deserving of equal status on our calendars.

Notes from the Island

Your Caretaker has been inveigled to resume the daily log on the Island's web page, and to provide river level and water temperature as part of a daily reporting routine. This may be useful to those wanting to check to see if the Club is open, or the river canoeable, or if interesting things are afoot. The NOAA river forecast is usually posted by 1000 hrs, so I will try to have the daily musings ready by 1030 hrs at www.sycamoreisland.org under "Caretaker's Log." No promises on content, but certain days of last month's log have been excerpted to give you a taste:

Wed 9 Feb Peter Jones and Tryon Wells came down to ice skate on the slough around 1000 hrs, at which time the Caretaker's Wife walked across to go to the store. Later the boys decided to take a canoe out to the open water on the river, but not until after spending twenty minutes cutting a channel from the Captain's Float using a sledge hammer. It was therefore a surprise when the Caretaker walked across the slough to the steps on the towpath to escort the Caretaker's Wife back to the Island and, only 15 feet from Wife and steps, fell through a soft spot in the ice up to his armpits. Surprised, but not really frightened, until about the third time he was unsuccessful in crawling back onto the surface of the ice... as the ice kept breaking and the hole enlarging. Fortunately, it is standard procedure to walk across the ice with a hand on the ferry pull rope and the current did not sweep him under the ice. Fortunately, the Caretaker's Wife does not allow him to play on the ice without wearing a life preserver (and is certainly not now ever likely to). Fortunately, and unthinkingly, he finally rolled over onto his back to float, and then pulled hand over hand backwards on the rope until the ice behind him stopped breaking and he reached ice solid enough to support him, mainly proving that DNA sometimes knows what to do when the reasoning faculty is inoperable.

Sat 12 Feb This morning we cut a channel for the ferry through the ice remaining along the Island shore which still had the ferry locked in tight, despite several days of above freezing temperatures. **This means today is the first day the Island has been open since 20 Jan.** We were much relieved to get the ferry operational, as we were prepared to employ desperate measures to cope with the crisis of having no cat food... meaning we would either have to cross an icy river without the ferry or spend the night in a tent. Anyone who lives with cats will understand the problem. Also, this meant the computer repair person could make his much delayed visit, making a quantum difference in the quality of life for the Caretaker.

Tue 14 Feb We are happy to report that the pileated woodpecker is now seeming to make a semi-regular visit to our feeder every morning around 0800 hrs. In each of the last two years he has landed on the feeder once in the Spring and made a show of staying there for a long while as if to declare to the awaiting multitudes of smaller birds who is "King of the Feeder". But on these occasions he was not observed to actually feed. This year with the cold and snow he comes to feed. You will recall that there is a pair living on the Island in one of the sycamore trees near the river. They are frequently seen together but it is unclear whether one or both visit the feeder. I say "he" because one often hangs back... and at least in the animal world sexual stereotypes are not yet politically incorrect.

Thu 16 Feb Last night there was a ruckus in the men's locker room, and upon investigating, discovered a racoon trying to get into our garbage can. Fortunately, the can has a latch which has thus far proven to be critter proof. Unfortunately, what with being iced in for so many weeks and having limited opportunities to get garbage up the

Notes from the Island

hill, the can was full and there were even bags thrown up on top the lockers. This guy did not look like Rocky, our former Island resident who was not seen last year, and in fact did not act the part either, being more skittish. You will recall that Rocky's familiarity with humans was downright un-nerving.

Fri 17 Feb Today young Alex McCoy asked about the age of the map hanging near the kitchen door depicting the area near great falls. He had studied it and noticed a small designation for a gold mine. Seems he has a great interest in trekking around our river area and discovering neat things of interest or re-discovering old things. Now, the Club has a casual group of older trekkers who periodically get together to check out things like the Indian weirs or the old Civil War fords or other forgotten points of interest along the river, but I was surprised and impressed to find what seemed to be the same instinct in a teenager. But then, I probably should not have been. Seems to me there is a lot of river lore and interesting history about our area of the Potomac that should not be forgotten, and that in fact, it would be a worthy mission for the Club to undertake the generational transmission of the history of this area of the river. Each year since I have been here we have received at least two visits a year from non-Members investigating some aspect of the local lore and history. Since the Centennial Edition of the Islander has been archived on the web, I have had occasion to direct numerous calls to it. It is fascinating to see the traditions, lore, and history of the Club (and hence the river basin) laid out for over a hundred years. So many people with all of this interest... all of this effort... all of this talent... and none of it connected! Therefore, I propose that an informal group be constituted as the "**Sycamore Trekkers.**" This can be done simply by instituting a telephone list of people who might like to be notified anytime a Member has an impulse to trek

around to some interesting site. All you have to do is notify the Caretaker you wish to be put on the list and provide your telephone number and e-mail address. If there is a certain critical mass of interest the decision can be taken to go to the next step in formalizing the group by actually having a meeting on the Island some beautiful Saturday, followed by an organized trek to investigate some interesting place nearby.

Sat 26 Feb Such a disappointment... today was to have been so beautiful but this morning's forecast calls for fog and drizzle off and on. Yesterday was a day of firsts... the first crocus bloom... the sudden realization that the funny purple tips sticking up are actually the first appearance of the bluebells... and the discovery in the afternoon that hundreds of spring beauties had sprung into bloom without our noticing. Goose clamor continues to intensify... there are now 12 regulars and one spent the day checking out the top of the canoe shed, perhaps the same one that nested there last year. In the late afternoon a big beaver was seen swimming in the slough and sort of hung out in the ferry channel. Then, suddenly he disappeared and could not be seen resurfacing anywhere. Where could he have gone aground?? Curious, I did a survey, and if you stand on the canoe float and look at MD, a newish hole in the bank can be made out at the one o'clock position. Even the bugs made their first appearance of the year. Our new kitty, Miss T, discovered her first flies and spent the day chasing around madly... stopping only to pant. Many other moths and crawlies made their first appearance, and the day had the magical innocence of Spring right up to that moment in the late afternoon when I got my first mosquito bite.

— Doc Taliaferro

Sunday Relief Caretakers

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
March 5	10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Tove Elfstrom Ginny Fowler	703-533-5537
March 12	10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Steve and Kathleen Paley Maxine Hattery	301-229-3950 202-362-1361
March 19	10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Allan McKelvie Barbara Torrey	301-320-5812
March 26	10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	George Malusky Maxine Hattery	301-871-1707 202-362-1361
<p>*** Caretaker Volunteers ***</p> <p>Call John Krasny (301-564-0342) or Jeff Komarow (301-897-5996) to volunteer for caretaking in April. You can also contact them by e-mail at jfkrasny@erols.com or jeffkomarow@aol.com</p>			

Large

There are no reports of large parties scheduled on the island during the months of
March and April.

**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

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March 2000

This Issue:

- Focusing on Caretaker's quarters.
- Board of Directors— Yep, we have one.
- A rewoven Web.
- Potomac Cleanup to include Islanders.



The Road Back.

Despite the lengthy period of ice in the river, there have been some days when the club was open. It's always a good idea to call when conditions are iffy.