



The Sycamore Islander

January, 2001

Volume 80 No. 1

About the ice...

This winter may well offer opportunities to cross to the Island on foot. Please note that the hazards vary from time to time, and from place to place on the ice, and *always pose some risk*. You must evaluate the risk yourself, for there is no one in the Club or on the Island who can do so for you. Remember to sign in at the ferry if you arrive on the Island by crossing the ice. It is still necessary for your guests to sign the liability release sheet.

January 2001 Meeting

The December meeting conducted routine end-of-year business with a short interruption to listen to Vice President Gore's concession speech. It then defeated a motion to waive the three-year waiting period to obtain a Waiting List Pass for applicants with young children.

The January meeting will be held at the home of Bill and Lucky Marmon on January 10th at 8 p.m.

Directions: Go north on Wisconsin Avenue a short distance from Western Avenue in Friendship Heights. Turn left on Dorsett Avenue. Take 2nd right on Warwick Lane. Take the next left on Cumberland Avenue to the end at 4921 Cumberland Avenue

Unfinished business from the November and December meetings include: (1) a motion regarding age limits on club canoe use, (2) a motion to require club applicants to attend a club orientation before using the club, (3) a motion to codify in our rules the requirement that any applicant be sponsored by two members of the club before admittance (as stated on our application form) and (4) a motion to abandon the three-year waiting period to obtain a Waiting List Pass for all club applicants. All motions have been recorded in this or the last *Sycamore Islander* and can be voted upon.

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.**

Minutes of December 13, 2000 Meeting

Attendance:

Carl Linden, Nell Hennessey, Frank Daspit, Alan Gelb, Peggy Thomson, Robert Henry, Brad Coolidge, Trip Reid, Ann Marie and John Cunningham, Tryon Wells, Jane and Dave Winer, Gerald Barton, Bill and Lucky Marmon, Joan and Bill Kugler, Charlotte Brewer, John Matthews, Johnna Robinson, John Noble and Larry Heilman.

The meeting was called to order at 8:10. The minutes were approved as printed in last month's *Islander*.

Tryon Wells reported that Jinny and Phil Jones were retiring from the club after 40 years, most of which were spent in a leadership position. A motion was made and passed to make them honorary members.

Year 2001 Budget:

Tryon reported that there once was an occasion when the treasurer absconded with the treasury, and, as a legacy, we have three financial officers to guard our funds.

Treasurer Alan Gelb began discussion of the budget by praising the order, preparation and sound forecasts that Johnna Robinson had put into previous budgets. The actual expenditures for the year 2000 appear to be as budgeted for the fixed expenses, with variable expenses slightly below budget.

The proposed budget for the year 2001 is slightly more than for the year 2000 primarily due to increased postage for the *Islander*, higher utilities and insurance costs. The grounds budget was reduced.

It was pointed out that the planned construction on the caretaker's home would impact the reserve funds and income, so future year's bud-

gets may not be so easy to balance. The budget was passed.

Club Officers for 2001:

The nominees for office that had been presented in the *Islander* were elected.

There was a brief adjournment to watch Vice President Gore's concession speech.

Old Business:

A motion presented last month to eliminate the three-year wait for waiting list passes for families with young children was discussed. Some felt that there wasn't sufficient knowledge of the numbers of affected applicants. The orientation of new members and a renewed focus on the idea of canoeing as a focus of fun and fellowship were discussed. The motion was defeated.

A new motion to rescind the three-year waiting period for all waiting list applicants was introduced for discussion and a vote in January. (Editors' note: See Gerry Barton's communication on p. 3.)

The caretaker's compensation and bonus was discussed. An increase equal to the local CPI and a bonus was passed. An employee review in the summer or early fall was recommended.

The meeting thanked Peggy Thomson for hosting the meeting and then adjourned in time to watch President-elect Bush and to enjoy delicious refreshments.

-- Ann Marie Cunningham,
Acting Recording Secretary

Communication from Gerry Barton

Motion:

I moved at the December 2000 Club Meeting to remove the restrictions on Waiting List Passes. The motion would delete the following section of Current Standing Rule 7. Waiting List Passes:

Upon the request of an applicant for membership who is in good standing, and if the applicant has been on the waiting list for a minimum of 3 years, the Membership Secretary may issue to such applicant a Waiting List Pass valid for the year in which issued. Any applicant 65 or over or any applicant having a terminal illness may request of the membership chairman an exception to the three-year waiting period. The exception will be voted upon by the members at meeting assembled.

And replace it with:

Upon the request of an applicant for membership who is in good standing the Membership Secretary may issue to such applicant a Waiting List Pass valid for the year in which issued.

Discussion:

The Club allowed Guest Members to have Waiting List Passes for many years. The change was passed recently and there has already been one modification to the rule to allow applicants over 65 to become Guest Members immediately, and another modification was voted down at the December Club Meeting. At the Meeting there was a suggestion made by a member that if we keep making exceptions to the limitations imposed by Rule 7 perhaps we should not have the limitations. I made my motion after this suggestion. I was a guest member for almost three years before becoming a full member. I attended Club Meetings and participated in monthly work sessions and was able to use the Club after work during the summer. Being a Waiting List Member (Guest Member) was a valuable Sycamore Island experience.



Drawing by Jane Winer

Sycamore: of Time and the River

— by Bill Kugler

The tree in the accompanying photograph, taken in mid-September 2000, is unremarkable in all respects save one: at one time, the duration unknown to me, it anchored the downriver end of our island. When Joan, the kids and I first started coming to the island in the mid-1960s, this tree was probably no more than 10-15 feet from the water's edge. Everything now downriver from this tree—silt and land buildup plus the explosion of plant and tree growth—has occurred in the past 35 years or so. Furthermore, the period when this tree marked Sycamore's downriver end was probably quite long, suggesting strongly that conditions upriver in the watershed such as erosion in the last third of the 20th century were significantly different from those in that century's first two-thirds and possibly extending some time back into the 19th century when our club was formed.

The tree in question is located about 40-45 yards from the Davis memorial fireplace downriver from the canoe shed. Follow the trail along the spine of the island's lower end until it directly meets the tree with its thick diameter and extensive girth, both of which were already quite distinctive in the mid-1960s, compared with its neighbors. This indicates to me that the tree had been there for a considerable period of time before our family first encountered it. The tree is now in decline, having lost 3 or 4 large limbs to high winds, which is why I decided to write this article now, while the tree is still with us.



The proximate reason I am able to recall this tree and its location is that at its base back in the 60s there was a park bench facing downriver, probably installed by the club or by certain members for contemplative viewing of the river downstream. To secure this bench, there was a loose chain linking one end of the bench with the other upstream of the tree. By the mid-1960s the bench was still in place but in sorry shape as it had lost its supporting blocks to high water with the result that the seat of the bench had broken in two. First our kids and then Joan and I would sit on this bench, but none of us for long, as the angles of the broken seat sections precluded a comfortable repose of any duration.

Further support for my contention that this tree once marked the downriver end of Sycamore lies in the 1932 romanticized, pictorial map of the island; a framed copy of this map is in the upstairs social room of the clubhouse. I assume the footbridge over the canal and the two landing sites for the ferry now are where they were in the early 1930s, when this map presumably was prepared. Extending a line through the two ferry crossing sites across the island shows that at that time only about a third—at most—of the island measured by its length alone lay downriver from this line. In terms of the total land area of the island then, the disparity is even more striking: at least 75-80 percent of Sycamore's land area 70 years ago was upriver from this line inasmuch as the downriver section was funnel-shaped and quite narrow compared to the area above this line, judging from this map.



Circa 1932 pictorial map of the island.

The final two photographs from last fall show some of the growth of the island since the mid-1960s looking downriver, with the first snapshot including the tree on the right and the second with the tree on the left. I estimate that the downriver end of the island is now roughly 50-60 yards beyond the tree. What is equally impressive is the extensive broadening of the island downriver from the tree, espe-



The “marker” tree is on the right.

cially on the river side. My guess is that the section of the river downriver from the imaginary line noted above is about half of the island’s total land area versus no more than 25 percent 35 years ago.

As to where the additional earth now in place downriver from the tree came from, my impression is that it is not from the upriver reaches of the island; this end and its relation to the outcroppings of rocks and small islands appears to about the same as I recall it



The “marker” tree is on the left.

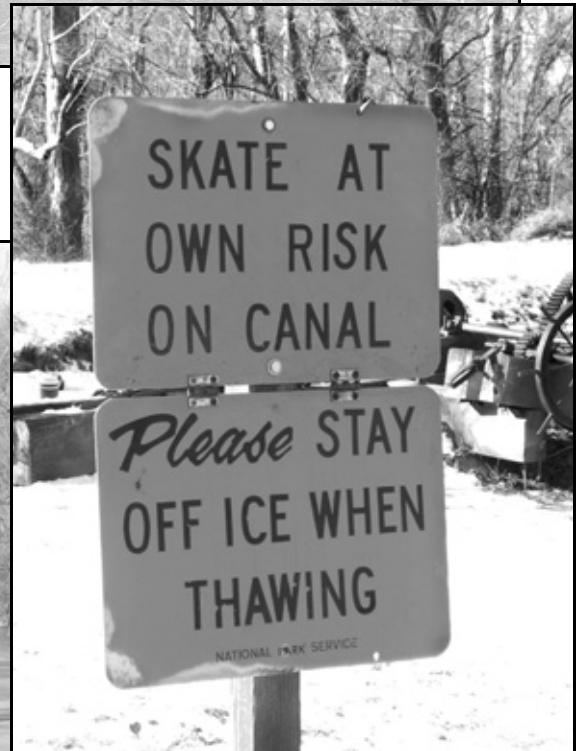
from 35 years ago. Thus I conclude that the most probable cause of this heavy silting is from further upriver in the watershed as a result of more intensive farming practices and greater residential and industrial development. I doubt that floods and periods of high water have contributed significantly to the accretion of land at the downriver end of the island. The normally relatively slow current and back eddies at the lower, river side of Sycamore are more than likely the main reason that silt has accumulated in a steady, relentless process that gives no sign of subsiding or altering appreciably. I would, for example, not be surprised if our island at some point joined the small island in the slough now across from the downriver end of Sycamore.

In closing, I hope this article brings forth comments, corrections and above all, possible alternative explanations to the developments described above.

Bill Kugler is a long time member and past President of the Club.

Ice Action at

LOCK 7





A mid-day week-day during the Christmas season found lots of people out for frigid fun.

Lock 7, upstream from Sycamore Island, was a favored spot. Groups of skaters congregated in this area, but plenty of tracks lead all the way down to Sycamore on this day. A couple of enterprising women brought skates *and* dogs.

Yes, there was even ice fishing, but when their worm froze into a solid rock, frustrated boys turned to Plan B: winter woods exploration.

The Park Service seems to be taking a practical stance these days. Remember the goofy signs that prohibited skating, admonishing that the ice is NEVER safe? —Photos by David Winer

Notes from the Island

Sat 2 Dec Captain Matthews called to say that he had visited the area of the rope swing yesterday and found the area trashed... to include empty gin bottles lying about. Over hearing the conversation, the Caretaker's Wife chimed in to say that on Thursday night after midnight another large party group had gone to the rope swing area but she had not awakened the Caretaker to mention it. Thursday night it was considerably below freezing and one can imagine much gin would have been necessary to ignore that fact. Again, one would think there are better places to party where one does not have to walk over a quarter mile in freezing dark. This means partying two nights in a row. On the second night several female voices were heard, but it is probably safe to say no party activities were indulged in that involved disrobing.

Mon 4 Dec The bird feeders are now out... a large "Dr. Geis" hanging feeder, hanging thistle for the finches, suet for the woodpeckers, and a large window platform feeder for everyone. We managed to get them up one afternoon and waited with heightened expectation for them to be discovered, but as daylight finally passed there were no visitors, but instead that type of disappointed annoyance when the main event at a concert keeps you waiting. And since it is now terminally brown down here, one could walk the Island and see no life... and hence no movement... just a sort of cold aloneness.

Stepping out early the next morning all had changed! The constant flurry of three-dimensional movement was dizzying. There were birds on every branch stretching to the water's edge. Hundreds! Or so it seemed! Jockeying for position... stacked in landing patterns that would make National Airport on Christmas Eve look desolate... each waiting to make the next small move closer once a bird on a feeder left. We are no longer alone... Nature is squabbling over space and seed outside our windows.

Thu 7 Dec Areas of bare ground are starting to take on a pockmarked and cratered look, indicating the freezing and thawing of surface ground water during this period of night time temperatures in the 20's. This is mentioned because of the several queries from Members about the geese. They are not in evidence... frozen ground at breakfast time is not for them... the red goose poop shovel has not been used in a long time... these temperatures are sending them further

south into the tidewater... but that is only an afternoon commute for them when warmer temps return.

Mon 11 Dec In the winter when the leaves are gone one is suddenly confronted with the "nearness" of everything. This is not just visually... but aurally. There is no muffling effect to soften distant noises; hence many things seem closer than before. Sounds of the surrounding metropolis intrude and it is not as easy to pretend one is far out in the country. Still... even though the city may seem nearer by its noises, it is actually further in motivation. Leaving the Island in freezing weather is more like an EVA on the space shuttle... one has to really suit up and pay attention to what is going on, especially on the water, until one gets to the next warm place.

Tue 12 Dec It was 0800 hrs when the winds shifted, chilled, stiffened, and got downright loud... heralding the passing of the front line. The whole outdoor experience changed in but a moment and it was clear that suddenly wild and awesome forces had seized control of the world as limbs came crashing, whitecaps appeared, and exposed skin begged to go indoors. There is no drama more compelling than the drama of Nature flexing her weather. Not a good day to attempt to handle the ferry.

Fri 15 Dec One of the things to occupy a Caretaker's mind in the off-season is to muse upon the physics of the ferry. Hands grip the rope... shoulder and back provide the motive force... but it is through the ankles and feet that the actual force is transmitted to the ferry. Some of you who have substituted on a busy day may have awakened the following morning wondering why your ankles were sore.

This morning there was a coating of ice on the ferry... very slippery. Hands gripped the rope... shoulders and back slipped into gear... ankles and feet moved... but the ferry did not... and the Caretaker proceeded to pull himself across the ice on the ferry deck and almost off the edge of the ferry. Only artful teetering and tottering saved the Caretaker from a very cold swim. Fortunately, the laughter of the Caretaker's Wife was masked by the terror of that moment on the precipice. You all know how the ferry can hang up in low water, and you can be sure that icy ferry operations will never again be attempted without careful calculations of the co-efficients of friction.

Notes from the Island (continued)

Thu 21 Dec There is the looming presence of yet another house across the river, spoiling the view of the Island and the river gorge. This is not a new house, like last year's intrusion, but the way it now sticks out gives meaning to the sounds of chain saws across the river that we heard all summer and fall. There ought to be a law.

Sat 23 Dec The river is frozen solid between the Island and the ferry landing on the Maryland shore. It took all morning to clear a channel for the ferry, which we had to do because of family arriving to spend Christmas, and it is noteworthy that the ice was so thick that the only technique that worked required two people. A single person on this Island would be ice-bound... the ice being too thick for the ferry and too thin to walk on. Arriving family does not yet suspect this Christmas will be a "Little House on the Prairie" experience, but we hope this will add to the Christmas-on-the-Island mystique.

Sun 24 Dec Weather conditions enroute caused arriving family members to be delayed last night until midnight. The ferry was run every hour until arrival in order to break up ice that was trying to re-form in the channel we had cut through this morning. Everyone is here... there is that charming feeling of being snowed/iced in for Christmas... just like "olden" days... we expect that to last until the younger set realizes there is no casual bopping out the door for a pizza or cola replacement.

Mon 25 Dec The first of family was scheduled to leave, and accordingly the canoe was deployed on the ice beneath the ferry pull rope. Adventurous nephew Bret Green then pulled himself across the cracking ice to the towpath to show how it is done, but some family members were daunted by the procedure and decided that thin ice was a perfect reason to cancel any plans to leave the Island.

Tue 26 Dec It is true that from our perspective there sometimes does not seem to be much intelligent life on the towpath. One of the most stupid things to witness is the all too common practice of throwing sticks into freezing water and forcing dogs to swim for them. Now you would think that if the river were frozen everywhere except where a channel in the ice was cleared for the ferry that even a clueless urbanite would suspect the water was cold. Or maybe it is not

brains lacking but compassion. The sticks are thrown into the clear patch of water and invariably the dog runs down the ferry landing steps and stops on the last step. Of course, the dog is not stupid, and hesitates to throw his body into freezing water. But always there is the human urging the dog on or more sticks are thrown until the dog's desire to please overcomes common sense. Often some adult is thoughtlessly trying to amuse a child by forcing the dog into the icy water, and one wonders if we finally see the effects of an older generation of parents who have seen too many roadrunner cartoons. The TV generation is now rearing the digital generation and the disconnect with the natural world grows.

Wed 27 Dec We are now seeing the first people attempting to cross the ice while hanging on to the ferry rope. A sign has been posted warning folks of "dangerous ice," and they seem to agree because no one gets very far away from the ferry landing. The Caretaker's Wife has been heard to mutter about "pioneering" again, and indeed deserves recognition for being such a good "Conestoga Woman" regarding her daily commute to work. The ice is now thick enough that it does not break beneath the canoe, and thus the crossing is not as un-nerving. Of course the Caretaker is not allowed to play on it after the close call of going through the ice last year while the Caretaker's Wife looked on.

—Doc Taliaferro

*Excerpted from the Caretaker's Log at
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>*



Drawing by Louisa Winer Tran

Fly Fishing Show

George Malusky II, our top fishing promoter, and (who wants to argue?) our top fisher, alerts Islanders to an off season opportunity the weekend of January 13-14.

Location: Reckord Armory, University of Maryland, College Park

Times: Saturday, 9:00 a.m.– 6:00 p.m.
Sunday, 9:00 a.m.– 5:00 p.m.

Admission: Adults, \$12; 2-day pass \$20;
kids under 12, \$2 per day

- Seminars
- Classes
- Casting Demonstrations
- Fly Tying
- Rod Building
- Where to go & How to do it

Ice Fishing Tip

Bill Bays and George Malusky II are renowned around the Club for their fishing prowess. Recently they had occasion to learn something new. It seems they both decided to drop by the Island for some ice fishing during the recent heavy freeze-over— each had the same idea, to use the new warm room to take breaks from the Arctic conditions around their fishing holes.

George and Bill sought out the spots they felt most likely, chopped holes, and proceeded to dangle their chosen baits in the river on the canal side of Sycamore Island. It wasn't long before they discovered each other's presence on the ice and drew up a friendly bet as to who would catch the most fish. A couple of hours passed and the score remained a tie: Malusky 0, Bays 0. Their disappointment showing, both men retreated to the clubhouse to compare notes.

Looking over the main channel from the warm room window, they spotted a man out on the ice who had a stringer full of fish at his side. Amazed, they decided to submerge their pride, and walked out to the man to ask what he was doing to catch all those fish when they hadn't even had a nibble. As they approached him, they saw the fellow was an old timer, all grizzled and serious looking, squatting over his ice-hole. Bill said, "Sir, would you mind telling us how you managed to catch so many fish?" The fellow glared a bit at the intruders, and then said, "Yhhummpf hwavl tchee wmmmsos wmamm."

George looked at Bill inquisitively, but Bill only shrugged to indicate that he couldn't understand either. So George decided to give it a try. "We really admire how successful you are and (gulping) we haven't been able to catch a thing. Would you please tell us your secret?" The old fellow, appearing more annoyed, said, "Yhhummpf hwavl tchee wmmmsos WMAMM."

Now Bill and George were completely frustrated at being so close to discovering this great fishing wisdom but still were not able to understand a word the man said. In desperation, they blurted out in unison, "Sir, would you say that again?"

This time, the man cupped his hands, and spat into them. He stood erect, and shouted, "You have to keep the worms WARM!"

Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Sunday Relief Caretakers January 2001

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
January 7	11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Tryon Wells John Stapko	301-320-6762 301-953-1949
January 14	11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Caroline and Alan Gelb David Lyles	301-229-5969 301-536-8692
January 21	11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Joe Cecil and Judy Friedman Howard and Candy Means	202-244-7036 301-320-5270
January 28	11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Tove and Susan Elfstrom Dick and Judy Edelson	703-533-5537 301-951-0195

***** Caretaker Volunteers *****

Call Brian & Anne Waidmann (703-536-3168)

or

Patricia & Terry Murphy (202-667-4153)

to volunteer for caretaking in February.

Winter on the Island is a special time. Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

No Large Parties are scheduled for January or 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,
John Noble 301-320-4216



**** Classified ****

Ladies figure skates, girl's size 4. White leather, very good condition. Includes blade guards.

“Free to a good home.” Call 301-229-8963.



The Sycamore Islander

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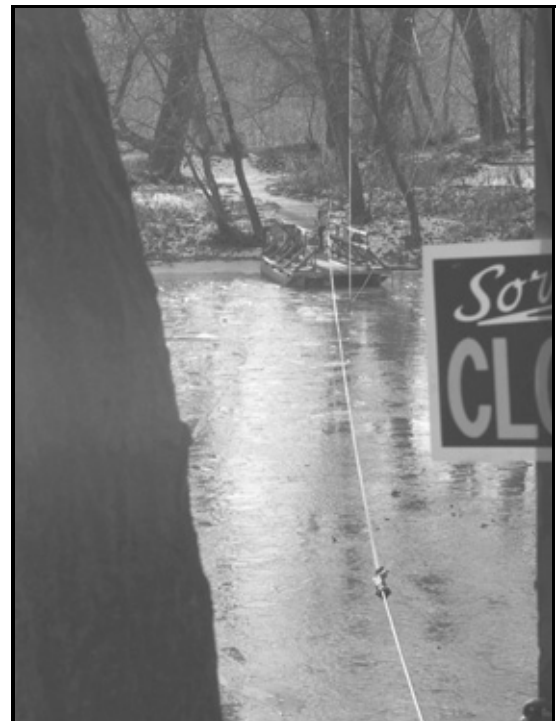
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January 2001

This Issue:

- The downriver end... slooowly changing.
- Fun arrives with winter at Lock 7.
- Island bird traffic like planes at National?
- Christmas like "Little House on the Prairie?"
- A tale of three fishers.



Trespassers W?

The ferry becomes locked in ice despite the best efforts of the caretaker to keep a path open.

— photo by Jane Winer