



The Sycamore Islander

February, 2001

Volume 80 No. 2

Special Event for February Meeting

We've asked author Carolyn Reeder to come talk to us on the pleasures of the research for her '99 novel, *Captain Kate*, a copy of which at the Island has attracted fascinated readers. Set in Civil War time, the book (appropriately for us) is the adventure of a coal-barge trip on the C&O Canal--under the aqueduct and through locks and tunnel--to Georgetown. And it's filled with great detail about the calls and maneuvers with snubbing lines and mule teams. Formerly a teacher at Georgetown Day School, Carolyn is a Sycamore neighbor who (in winter and with some gymnastics) can see river and canal from her Glen Echo house. Over the years, she has written three nonfiction adult books on the Shenandoah valley, followed by her six historical novels (officially for young readers, but, hey! that includes us).

Come to hear Carolyn, ask questions, and enjoy some canal history! The talk will take place at Johnna Robinson's house at 7:30, half an hour earlier than the Sycamore meeting itself, which as usual will begin at 8:00. See directions to Johnna's below.

February 2001 Meeting

Our new president, Carl Linden, presided at the January 10th meeting. Long active in canal and river affairs, he sees Sycamore Island as a true gem of the Potomac, a treasure we are privileged to enjoy and duty-bound to preserve. Several motions concerning the process of bringing new members into the Club were approved, though one on ending the

three-year waiting period to obtain a waiting list pass for applicants and another on use of Club boats by minors were not (see the minutes below). At the February meeting a motion on the use of flotation devices when using Club boats will be considered. Also the Archivist's annual report will be presented. Please take note that the February meeting will begin a half hour early

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.**

at 7:30 so members can hear a talk by a guest speaker (See Peggy Thomson's note above for details). The February 14th meeting will be held at Johnna Robinson's home starting at 7:30 p.m. **Directions:** From Massachusetts Avenue, turn south on Sangamore Road for one short block; turn right on Walhonding. Go to the second left intersection and turn sharply onto Wehawken Road. The house is at 5421 Wehawken, immediately on your left.

Minutes of January 10 Meeting

Attendance

Trip Reid, Peggy Thomson, Ann Marie Cunningham, Dave Winer, Gerald Barton, Alan Gelb, Ned Goddard, Nancy Bower, Blair Bower, Jeff Komarow, Lucky Marmon, Bill Marmon, Brad Coolidge, Jane Winer and John Noble were present.

The meeting was called to order by our new



January meeting hostess, Lucky Marmon, greets Ann Marie Cunningham, Peggy Thomson, and Trip Reid.

president Carl Linden at 8:15. Carl introduced himself by describing his affiliation with the Canal Association and its through hikes from Cumberland to DC, and how his support once led him into a learning experience with the Island's policies.

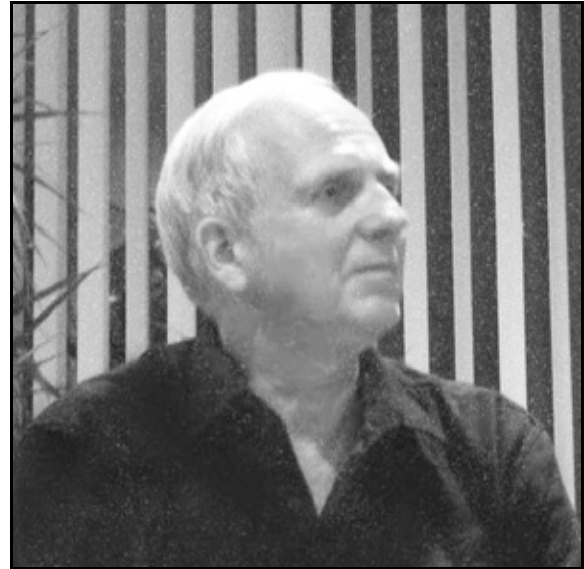
The minutes were corrected to show that Jeff

Komarow was present at the last meeting.

Peggy Thomson shared an article about the friendly neighborhood relations between the community and Lowell School, which is guided by Island member Abigail Wiebenson.

Committee Reports

The treasurer's report showed that last month's numbers brought the year-end figures very close to what had been projected, approximately \$5,500 below budget. Alan Gelb recommended that there be a report on budget trends mid-way through the year. This would indicate the effects that possible new construction, changes in inter-



Carl Linden, fielding hard issues, presides at his first meeting as President.

est rates, and possible drop in waiting list and application fees would have on our income and financial situation.

Membership

Members are reminded to send their dues to Bob Henry at the address on their dues notice.

Keff Komarow reported that applications for membership are being sent out. As the notices are being sent out slightly late, the period for returning them will be extended accordingly. There are currently 171 names on the waiting list.

Minutes of January 10 Meeting (continued)

Building

Ned Goddard reported that they are moving forward with the structural engineering. They have an architect in mind. They are considering John Matthews feedback on the structural engineering.

Editor

Dave Winer inserted a Classified Ad in the *Islander*, which was very successful. The Editors are very appreciative of new articles concerning the Island or subjects of interest to Islanders. They were especially grateful to Bill Kugler for his interesting article on the growth of the Island.

Camping

There was no camping last month. Discussion of building a tent platform on Rupperts Island was suggested, as well as building a landing. Dense underbrush and the remnants of an Indian structure are to be considered. A tree house was also suggested.

Old Business

The motion to codify in the standing rules the requirement that two members of the club sponsor an applicant before admittance was discussed and approved. This makes official a standard practice that has been part of the application process.

The motion that club applicants be required to attend a club orientation before using the club and its facilities was passed. The Membership chairman will have input in developing the curriculum and conducting the orientation, but does not have sole responsibility. This will help to encourage members to participate in club activities and have respect for the Island and its culture and traditions.

A motion to abolish the three-year waiting period to obtain a waiting list pass for all club applicants was discussed. This waiting period policy

has generated two previous motions, one that amended it to eliminate the waiting period for applicants 65 years of age and older and in poor health, and one that failed to pass to eliminate the waiting period for applicants with children. This motion resulted in a tie vote, and therefore, lacked a majority to pass.

A fourth motion to require that anyone under the age of 15 using a club canoe or boat must be accompanied by an adult of at least 18 years of age was also defeated. This was due to the wide range of competencies of canoeists and the desire to teach responsibility.

New Business

A new motion was made to change "guests" to "persons" in paragraph 6.b. of the Standing Rules so it reads "All persons using Club canoes or boats must wear an approved life preserver or personal flotation device (PFD) at all times." It will be discussed next month.

Peggy Thomson is going to invite Carolyn Reeder, author of *Captain Kate*, to the next meeting, which may then start one half hour earlier to allow time for discussion of the book by the author.

Everyone expressed appreciation to Lucky and Bill Marmon for hosting the meeting at their home. All attendees enjoyed the coffee and comestibles that the Marmons provided for the occasion.

The next meeting will be on February 14.

—Ann Marie Cunningham
Acting Recording Secretary

Further remarks on the Island's shoreline...



Sycamore Island ferry landing and staircase leading up to the canal. An enlarged section from a photo dated May 1914.

This was long before the Little Falls Dam. How many steps down to the river level in those days? More to the point of current discussions, what was the island shoreline at this water level?

To the Editors:

This is in response to Bill Kugler's letter in the January Islander. It is no secret to anyone who has visited the lower end of the island over the years that it is moving south, and not slowly, either. I hope I am here when it gets to within a few hundred feet of Brookmont Dam. The ensuing debate on what to do about it will make the 10-year discussion about replacing or repairing the canoe shed pale in comparison.....

Each time I read the Islander, I am struck by how lucky the club is to have members like Brad Coolidge; Jessie Bakeman; the Bowers; Betty Burchell; the Loeb's, Maluskys, and

Joneses; and most important, John Matthews, among others, who decade after decade have cheerfully and energetically (and with occasional fortitude) looked after the island and its best interests with little recognition or thanks.

I wonder if those members who show up only for their own social events on the island realize how much work goes into keeping the club and the island stable and healthy.

Ruth B. Haas
Honorary member
Sandia Park, NM

Reading Bill Kugler's *Sycamore: of Time and the River* in the January issue of the *Islander*, provoked some thought of how we might further document changes that he described.

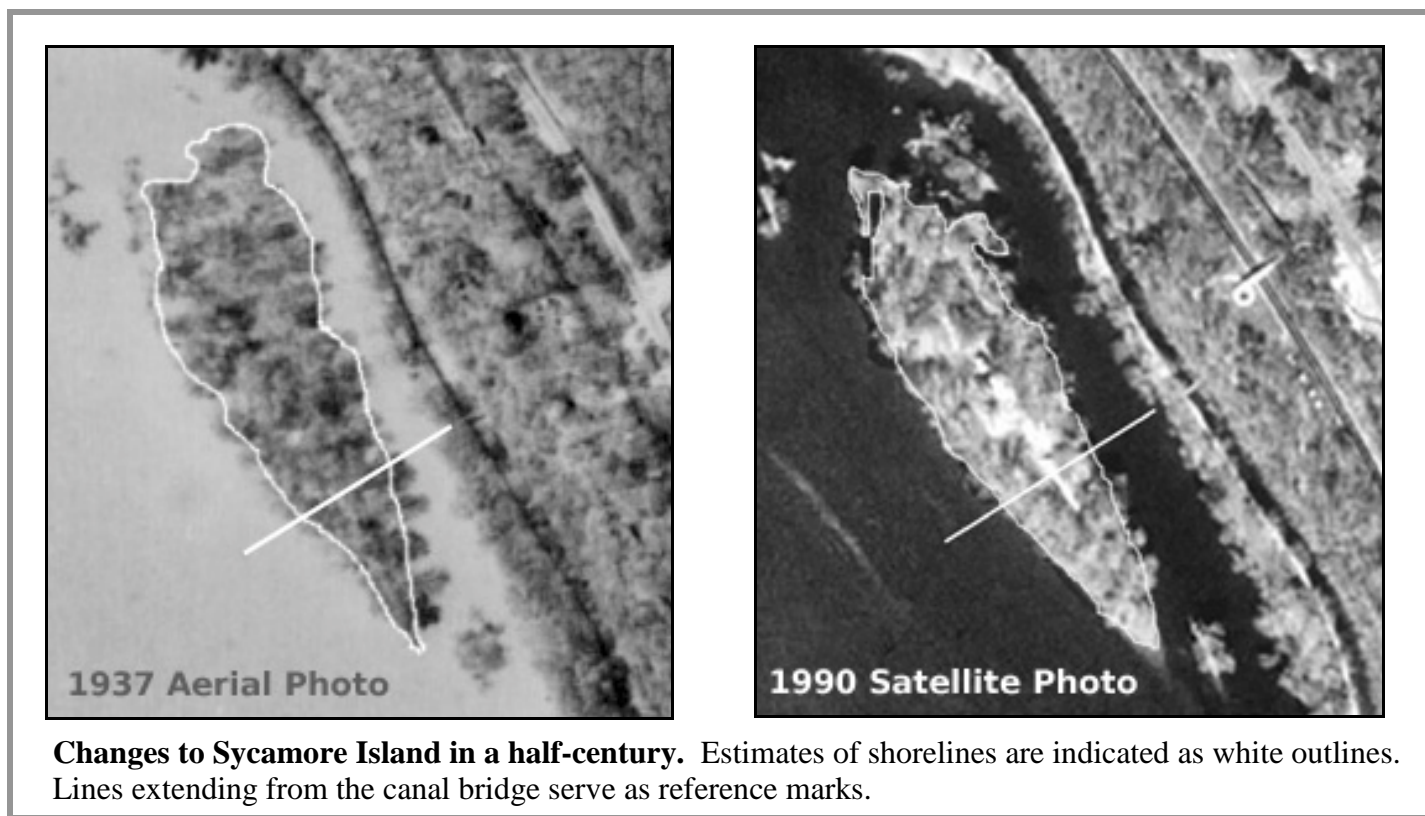
I decided to dig up two old photos of Sycamore Island: one from the <http://teraserver.microsoft.com> website, and another once made available to me by Tryon Wells. I wanted to compare the images in two widely spaced years for changes in the island's perimeter. The photos were not at the same scale, but adjusting them to equal size on the computer (by eye) made this comparison easier. Even so, large trees leaning over the water and their shadows presented

difficulties in determining the exact shorelines.

In presenting the two photos here, I have added white outlines to represent my judgment of where the shores were. Also, as a reference of sorts, I drew a line on each photo extending from the canal bridge that is barely visible in both photos.

Draw your own conclusions, but I am struck by the decrease in size of the upper island, particularly by the severance of the upstream knob of land from the property. We catch fish in there now!

— David Winer



These photos bring up some interesting problems. As Bill Kugler wrote in the past *Islander*, the 'south' end of the island has been accreting soil and is longer and wider than it used to be. I remember that tree the bench, and the view. Looking at the 1990 photo, you can see that the floods between 1937 (after the big ones) and 1990 have carved a channel from each side of the island. From my memory, in the early 70's you could not canoe through the slough at the upper, canal side of the island.

In 1958, the Brookmont Dam was built. Before this time, the Island was in a flowing river, not in the backwater of a dam. Does anyone know how much

the water level was raised by the construction of the dam? The 1921 pictorial map of the island also shows a smaller island on the upstream river side. Could the ridge of rocks we can swim to from the float be the remnants of this island, washed away by the higher water levels? Old photos from the 30's of the steps to the ferry landing seem to show a much longer staircase. (See example on p.4 taken in 1914. —Editors) At one time the plans for Brookmont Dam and the fish ladder were in one of the old file cabinets in the Club House. Perhaps we could find them and solve a couple of mysteries.

— Johnna Robinson

Attention Sycamore Island Club Applicants!
Sycamore Island Orientation
***** March 31 *****

Last month, Sycamore Island members voted to require that all applicants on the waiting list attend one club Orientation before being admitted to the club. In addition, attendance at one club Orientation will now be required before receiving a Waiting List Pass as well.

The Sycamore Island Club will hold a club Orientation for all applicants on the waiting list on March 31, 2001 at 10:00am.

This is the first instance of what will become an annual event to be held every year in late March.

As the waiting list is several years long now, club applicants will have ample opportunity to attend any year's Orientation before they become eligible for a Waiting List Pass or club membership.

The Orientation will cover basic rules and procedures of the club and will include an informal question-and-answer session while taking a walking tour of the Island.

Because this year's event date may be a conflict for some applicants, applicants seeking a Waiting List Pass this year and those to be offered membership this year are exempted from this requirement. There will be no exemptions made for next year. Those high on the waiting list who can attend this year are encouraged to do so, but do have next year's event to attend as a backup. The same applies to persons eligible for a waiting list pass next year.

Applicants who are already eligible for a Waiting List Pass are also exempted from this requirement as regards obtaining a Waiting List Pass but are not exempted as regards being admitted to membership.

Actually, the sentiment expressed most by members promoting this requirement is anticipation and interest in meeting applicants on the waiting list. It is viewed as a wonderful opportunity to meet, mingle and become acquainted with each other. This may also be an opportunity for applicants to forge future ties with club members for those applicants who have not yet obtained two club member sponsors on their application (workfests are good for that too).

Looking forward to seeing you at the Orientation!

Member Bill Bays recently attended a meeting at Waldorf School on Sangamore Road concerning a matter he thought would be of interest to Islanders. His notes of the event are included here.

Montgomery County to Upgrade Police, Fire, & Rescue
Communications Capabilities-- Project named *Public Safety 2000*.

A new system is planned to fix problems experienced in using the existing 40-year-old equipment, which is inadequate when trying to communicate into rapidly dropping terrain such as from Massachusetts Avenue into the river & similar situations.

The new system will include a 75 foot pole above the Safeway Mall on Sangamore Road with two small antennas, less than 12 feet long. One is horizontal & one is vertical. Also, a small electronic box will grace the pole.

This elevated site is needed to provide line-of-sight function to a larger base mounted structure being rebuilt in Kenwood Country Club which has greater relay power. The basic system will transmit at 800 MHZ and have bi-directional radio antennas. The system will include a Command and Control Center. There will be two or three larger towers along 270-S. These will allow good communications technology for all safety officers into all terrain and will mesh with the following areas: Arlington, Loudon, and Howard Counties, and the District of Columbia. (Prince Georges County not included.)

There will be two or three "low profile" antennas near the Potomac River to provide bi-directional amplified radio communications. (These will replace twelve-year-old antennas now in place.)

This planned facilities will provide communications up and out of the river as well as down onto the river valley itself. The U.S. Park Police will also be able to use the system.

Some people raised questions about the electromagnetic emissions. The local & river emissions were described as equal to a cell phone and infinitesimal in comparison to what is believed to come from a nearby U. S. government facility. Two citizen engineers who had spent their careers in communications engineering described these emissions as, "Nothing."

One person asked "What if the pole falls down?" Answer--You put it up again in the "out" years.

—B. E. Bays

P. S. If you can capture the proposed emissions on the river, you can use them to warm fish worms. George Malusky take note.

Notes from the Island

Wed 3 Jan You all know that announcement made by airline pilots that everyone should stay in their seats until the plane has come to a complete stop. Well, this morning we had just used the ferry rope to pull a canoe across the cracking ice so that the Caretaker's Wife could go to work... again... when the Caretaker stood up, stepped on to the ferry landing, and then reached down to give the canoe a tug to bring it closer to make it easier for her to step off. Unfortunately, he had made no such announcement, and looked back in time to see to his horror that the Caretaker's Wife had had no hint of the extra movement coming and had stood up. The result was that she came crashing down, but because she had the presence of mind to grab at the rope as she fell, managed to crash on the bottom of the canoe instead of through the thin ice adjacent. It was a very frightening... and very dangerous... moment. The Caretaker's Wife put on a brave face, exited the canoe, and turned to walk up the hill before the Caretaker could see her tears... which he pretended not to notice.

Thu 4 Jan It is interesting that as winter barrenness and cold has descended upon the Island our cats have become more active. They are far more adventurous in the daytime, especially our timid Czech kitty, Barney. On one hand one wonders why in the world they are so willing, even eager, to go out when it is so cold, but there really does seem to be a direct relationship between the lessening of vegetative ground cover in late fall and early winter and the frequency of outdoor cat excursions. One possibility is that less vegetation means greater line-of-sight... after all... when one's eyes are only eight inches above the ground the world can seem a pretty close-in place in the summer... when any fearful surprise could be lurking behind the next bush or large plant. But in winter they are the lords-of-all-they-survey, and they can actually survey what must be to them long distances of Island real estate that would otherwise be hidden behind summer foliage. Add to this the fact that to them winter is also a crinkly season, when dried leaves and other detritus announce the sounds of movement of "preymates" at greater distances. Of course this works both ways, as there is less opportunity for feline sneakiness, especially where birds are concerned.

Sat 13 Jan We have received a query from a Member about the reported water temperatures on the Log: *Just noticed from your log that the water temperature has been 32 degrees for some weeks now. Is this right or has your source given up on measuring it since there's ice on top?*

Each morning the water temperatures and levels are taken from a report on a NOAA web site that usually, but not always, has the data ready by 1030 hrs. A link to this site may be found through the Sycamore Island home page by clicking weather and river conditions and then the river forecast. There are a total of seven automated river gauges in this report on the Potomac, but only four record water temperature. During this time of river icing the temperature at the Little Falls gauge, which being just a few hundred yards down-river is the one we always use, has been given as 32 degrees. The other gauges reporting temperature have reported warmer temperatures... and usually the further up-river... the warmer the temperature. Interestingly, despite this warm snap, the up-river temperatures are now colder than at any time this winter. Other unknown factors may influence this data, as perhaps, because of internal friction, a faster (higher?) river may be a warmer river.

Mon 15 Jan We knew we were in "deep doo doo" when we took the plumbers helper to the backed up toilet and the "doo doo" backed up into the bathtub... quite literally. So much for baths for a while! Previously, we had boiled large kettles of water to pour down the drains to clear them, and that had seemed to work for a couple of weeks... but now we were iced in by ice too thin to walk on with no prospect of immediate help... and suddenly grateful just to be able to walk through the cold to get to the toilet in the men's room... which still worked. Kinda like going to the out-house on a cold winter's night.

Tue 16 Jan In this warm weather the river ice on the Virginia side has finally cleared and there is now a small clear water channel in the ice in the slough on the Maryland side. With the ice breaking up we are truly trapped on the Island, and the small freezer purchased last fall is turning out to be the wisest family purchase of the year. Of course, we still look forward to milk, eggs, and Roto-Rooter.

Notes from the Island (continued)

There is that old adage that “I cried because I had no shoes until I met a man that had no feet.” Lest the gentle reader think we are crying instead of reporting, let’s make mention of the real pioneers... our predecessors... Peter Jones and Holly Syrrakos. When they moved here twelve years ago the quarters were only half as large because the one nice room that sticks out had not been built and there was not even what one could call a living room... just bedroom, bathroom and kitchen. The only heat was an electric heater in the bathroom and a very small wood stove that needed constant tending. There was no septic field then and the winter water situation was such that for Holly to live with Peter that first winter she had to use a porta-potty for three months ... which surely for a woman must qualify as true love.

Thu 18 Jan The Caretaker’s Wife turned on the crock-pot and abandoned the Island to overnight with friends. The adventure began when we put a canoe in the water at the Captain’s float, as the ice was mainly cleared from the Virginia side of the Island, and paddled up-river towards Ruppert’s Island to find a place to cut through the ice to where there was a channel of open water running down the slough on the Maryland side towards the towpath ferry landing. The ferry is still locked tight in the three inches of ice near the shore, and there is no telling when Roto-Rooter can get here. It was cold and rainy... but the rain was relatively light and not actually uncomfortable and served mainly to heighten the drama of the morning. Working our way back downriver we arrived near the ferry landing and began to work from the canoe on breaking and clearing the thinner ice there to get close enough to land. We had recently visited Jamestown and imagined ourselves in a unique Disney World ride recreating the settler’s hardships. Spirits and adventure were high... especially when the Caretaker’s Wife finally stepped to the towpath landing.

A friend later suggested that the Caretaker’s Wife had voted herself off of our own version of the Survivor TV program. But in fact, the more compelling reason was her need to return to her professional life. Still... overnighing with friends means that for the first time in six days she will not have to put her coat on and walk out the front door to use the toilet

Thu 25 Jan The geese are back as this thaw continues. Last evening they came in from the south at dusk... gaggle after gaggle. There must have been at least six gaggles of maybe 25-30 birds each, but most departed the next morning. It looked like a migration, what with so many, but that is hard to credit this early in the season. Surely they are just restless as they probe the northern extent of a warm air mass.

The ducks, however, are here to stay. They showed up last week as soon as there was open water in the ice and their numbers have grown. When we had ice we had gulls scattered about it during the days. Again, the gulls just seem to be hanging out and it was impossible to observe them actually doing anything, like feeding or mating. As the amount of open water increased, so did the numbers of ducks. As the amount of ice diminished, so did the numbers of gulls. When there were only a few pieces of ice, the gulls would gather in small flocks and be communal and one could paddle very close to them and be ignored... unlike the ducks, who have a personal comfort radius of about 50 yards. But then, the shared collective consciousness of gulls does not contain the same dark dream of predator humans and their shot-guns.

Wed 31 Jan Loud... it’s that time of year again, when it gets cacophonous down here as the sun comes up and the geese start in. This morning they seemed to be arguing with the crows. No more post-dawn snoozing around here... it is like living on a farm or waking up in a house filled with small children. The Romans used to have a festival in which they paraded a garlanded goose to celebrate a famous victory. It seems that while the watchdogs slept on a foggy dawn the sneaky Gauls almost got close enough to carry the gates of Rome, and disaster was averted only because disturbed geese gave the alarm. Thereafter, to commemorate the day, the geese were celebrated and ten dogs were crucified.

—Doc Taliaferro

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

We do chicken right.

You may recall the story that Doc related in these pages of a chicken, abandoned and tethered to the ferry landing. Before Islanders on the ferry could retrieve him, a large dog chased the chicken into the river. Barbara Neal then waded into the cold water to rescue him. Presumably the bird had been someone's pet because it had a leash of red ribbon with bells.

Doc and Phyllis managed to harbor the young rooster on the Island for a short while until the Poplar Springs Animal Refuge took him in. Marianne Ross recently visited Oscar at the Refuge and carried back a PETA calendar that had this picture along with the story of his rescue.

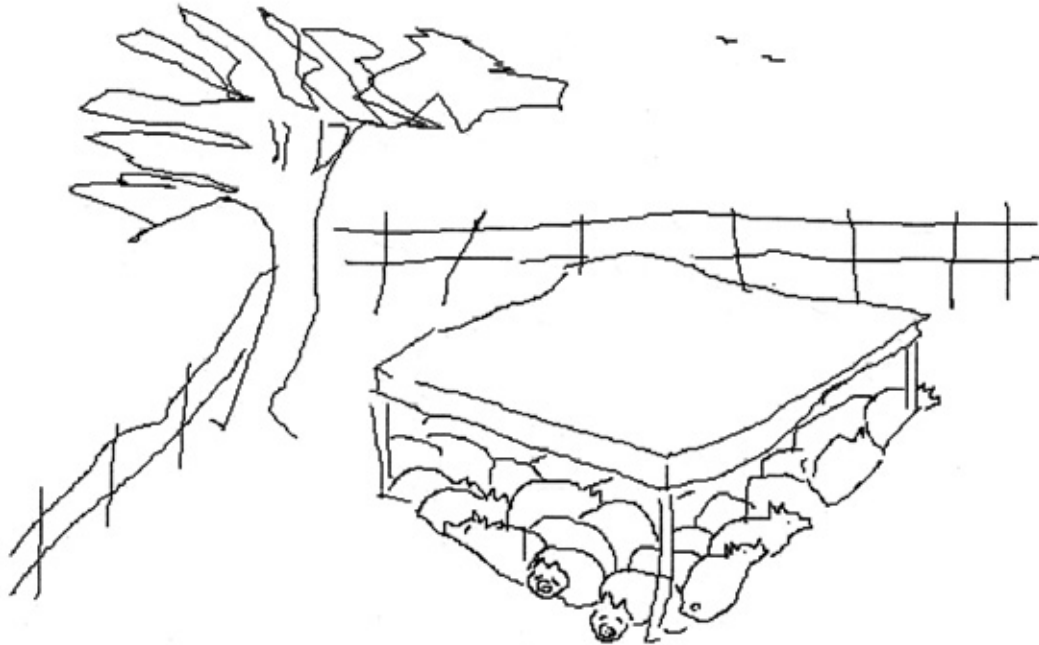
He now has a full time girl friend, Audrey, from whom he is reportedly inseparable.



Oscar at his new home with friend .

—PETA calendar photo by Susan Rayfield

(Ruppert, the rascally beaver, is on vacation in February.)



Members of the Suidae Family gather for a day of fasting and meditation on February 2.

Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Sunday Relief Caretakers February and March 2001

| Date | Time | Name(s) | Telephone |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| February 4 | 11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk | Maxine Hattery Vicki Judson | 202-362-1361 301-320-5787 |
| February 11 | 11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk | Terry & Patricia Murphy David Lyles | 301-263-9766 703-536-8692 |
| February 18 | 11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk | Tryon Wells Brian & Anne Waidmann | 301-320-6762 703-536-3168 |
| February 25 | 11:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk | Anna Sofaer & Michael Pertshuk Jeanne Asherman | 202-966-0352 301-587-5790 |
| March 4 | 10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk | Caroline and Alan Gelb Peter & Julia Smith | 301-229-5969 703-385-2883 |
| March 11 | 10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk | Ted & Ann Zahn Winston & Nancy Wiley | 301-656-9749 301-299-7586 |
| March 18 | 10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk | Johnna Robinson Gene Wathen | 301-229-5421 301-493-9499 |
| March 25 | 10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk | Peter Winkler & Barbara Kraft <i>OPEN--Please call!</i> | 301-320-2285 |

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

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

or

Patricia & Terry Murphy (202-667-4153)

to volunteer for caretaking .

Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged.

Large Parties

Peter Geiger hosted a group of Cub Scouts in the afternoon of February 3. No other large parties are scheduled in February.

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,
John Noble 301-320-4216



The Sycamore Islander

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February 2001

This Issue:

- The upriver end... slooowly changing too.
- River rescue ends in comfortable nest.
- Caretaker's icebound "adventures."
- Orientations required for newcomers.
- *Captain Kate* (not Janeway!) to be discussed.



Heron off Sycamore Island.

Sometimes you are there at just the right moment for that special shot.

— photo by Sue Super