



The Sycamore Islander

March, 2001

Volume 80 No. 3

The Island needs your help with the River Cleanup April 7.

Please plan to contribute some of your time to help clean the Potomac River on Saturday April 7. This is an outstanding Sycamore Island activity where you clean trash from the waters and river banks near Sycamore Island. We'll supply work gloves.

We had a small group last year that collected a significant amount of trash. You can work from your canoe and get an early start to the 2001 canoe season. Bring a buddy so that you have two in your canoe, or go out with a fellow Islander. This is an interesting way to meet new people. You will be amazed at the amount of trash once you start look-

ing. There are many balls and you can see if your canoe wins the ball collection contest. We will have a potluck lunch together at the clubhouse following the cleanup.

Jennifer Esch is coordinating the Sycamore Island site of this 13th Annual Potomac Watershed cleanup. Other groups will work the Tow Path and Canal. Jennifer and her family are on the Waiting List. Please help her make this event worthwhile. Here is an opportunity for Waiting List Members and Club Members to get to know each other.

—Gerry Barton

March 2001 Meeting

During the half hour before the February meeting began, Author Carolyn Reeder spoke about the C & O Canal and her novel on life on the canal. Peggy Thomson's motion on wearing flotation when using club canoes was passed and Jeff Komarow introduced a series of motions for action at the March meeting designed to improve the membership application process (see in-

side for details). Safety issues were a focus of discussion and arose out of recent instances of members canoeing in hazardous winter conditions, especially one episode when a canoe overturned and the occupant was forced to swim ashore (without flotation) in freezing water --he required prompt attention and care at the caretaker's quarters. Various safety measures were con-

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.**

sidered and Vice President Anne Marie Cunningham agreed to prepare a draft "honor code" asking members to exercise prudence and observe safety rules in avoiding dangerous situations on the river. Club archivist, Holly Syrrakos, gave her annual report on the archives saying they are in good order. Al Brown reported on progress in the new caretaker's quarters project. Captain John Matthews reported on various tasks undertaken to keep the island ship-shape. Before adjourning, all present expressed appreciation to Johnna Robinson for her hospitality in hosting the meeting and providing all with refreshment.

The March meeting will be held on the Island at 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, March 14.

—Carl Linden, President

Minutes of February Meeting

Attendance:

Peggy Thomson, John Matthews, David and Jane Winer, Doc Taliaferro, Gerald Barton, Brad Coolidge, Jeff Komorow, Carl Linden, Betty Burchell, Anne Marie Cunningham, George and Marcia Loeb, Robert Henry, Holly Syrrakos, Karl Kosok, Renee Dunham, Johnna Robinson, Al Brown, Martha Burgess, Jim Drew, Charlotte Brewer.

If you attended the meeting and your name is not included, please contact your secretary Renee Dunham.

The business part of the meeting started at 8:07 PM after Carolyn Reeder's presentation of her book, Captain Kate, a young person's book about canal boat life along the C&O Canal. Stimulated by this event, our caretaker spoke up for more "fun things" before the monthly meetings. President Carl Linden suggested that we plan social events for young people on the Island and at these events present some local history for their interest.

Treasurer's report:

Carl Linden reported for Carol and Alan Gelb that the treasury is in "good shape."

Membership report:

Jeff Komarow reported that we have two vacancies for membership. The applicants eligible for these slots were accepted unanimously. They are: Jim Drew and family, and R.G. Steinman and John Parrish. Their first opportunity to attend an official Sycamore Island orientation is March 31. However, attendance is voluntary for this year.

We have 155 members and 200 applicants on the wait-



February Meeting speaker, Carolyn Reeder, describes the research for her C&O Canal historical novel, *Captain Kate*.

ing list. (Note: the terms, "member" and "applicant" may refer to a single person, couple, or family.) A new person on the waiting list may now wait over 12 years for membership. Some interesting data:

Year	1999	2000	2001
New applicants for waiting list	30	14	24
New members admitted (This used to be 10-15 per year)	3 or 4	1 or 2	3 or 4

Among the 150 waiting list applicants now eligible for passes, 60 have been requested and issued. Currently, 40% of new applicants (those who apply during the open month of January) request passes. The number of passes applied for will increase as new members apply, and our caretaker commented that a higher percentage may apply in the future. Jeff suggested that we close the waiting list until it has decreased to approximately 150 or some number less than the membership. These issues may be addressed when the Membership Secretary presents the annual report in May.

Captain's report:

John Matthews reported that the sewer was clogged. A Roto-rooter was used to ream out the septic system. Several toilet stoppages have occurred since then, but have now subsided. John surveyed the drop of the sewer line and found the grade was acceptable. The septic system seems intact now. The old lids will be replaced. There have been no frozen pipes this winter.

Caretaker's report:

Doc Taliaferro reported that the septic problem mentioned above occurred at the time the Island was closed.

Doc was the victim of five insect bites which infected his lymph system and required emergency hospital treatment.

Doc reported several cases of very bad judgment, such as not following advice concerning the use of canoes on cold and windy days. (See caretaker's Notes from the Island.) Accidents occurring in cold water can be fatal. This initiated a discussion concerning the authority of substitute caretakers to enforce safety rules. What guidelines should there be, based on wind speed, water temperature, and river level? How can these guidelines be posted and enforced? Ann Marie Cunningham volunteered to draft some recommendations. Once again, we were reminded that the sign-in sheet on the ferry is a release from Club liability. *Members should not sign in for their guests, as guests should read the release and be bound by their signatures.*



Doc Taliaferro sneaks a cookie *prior* to the meeting.

Archivist report:

Holly Syrrakos requested materials necessary to complete the archives. She informed us that the D.C. Historical Society is open to the public and copies of materials can be obtained from them.

Old business:

Caretaker's quarters: Chairman Al Brown summarized that the planned quarters will be above most floods, architecturally pleasing, utilitarian, lasting, suitable for a couple, and within budget. Drawings have been submitted by an architect and bids will go out for construction.

Proposed Amendments: Amendments had been proposed by Jeff Komarow to Standing Rule 7 (Waiting List Passes) and to Standing Rule 10 (Assignment of Boat Racks). Jeff submitted to the membership the text of his proposals together with his explanations. This material appears elsewhere in this *Islander* issue. Members will vote on the proposed amendments at the March meeting.

Flotation Devices Amendment: The motion made at the January meeting to change "guests" to "persons" in paragraph 6.b of the Standing Rules was passed. It now reads, *All persons using Club canoes or boats must wear an approved life preserver or personal flotation device (PFD) at all times.*

New business:

Potomac River Cleanup: Sycamore Island is one of the sites designated for cleanup on April 7, the general Potomac River Cleanup day. However, only Island members will be involved in the Island cleanup. A question was put to the Club by the sponsors of the River Cleanup as to whether we would like publicity about our Island included with the general publicity for the various other sites. The sense of the membership was definitely NO.

Discovery Creek: George Loeb applied for a large party permit for Discovery Creek activities on July 3 and in August. Discovery Creek is an ecologically oriented organization for children. The organization was well recommended by Doc and the permit was granted.

Island Workfest: The Workfest date was set for April 28 with May 5 as an alternative in case of rain.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM, followed by socializing, delighted munching, and inspection of the fascinating art objects in Johnna Robinson's home. Thank you, Johnna for your hospitality.

— Renee Dunham, Secretary

Jeff Komarow's proposals and their purposes

Proposed Amendments to Standing Rule 7

Amendment 1

Add the following new sentence after the first sentence of the first paragraph of Standing Rule 7: "Waiting List passes shall be valid through March 31 of the year following the calendar year in which they were issued."

Amendment 2

Change "membership chairman" in the next to last sentence of the first paragraph of Standing Rule 7 to "Membership Secretary."

Amendment 3

Replace the last sentence of the first paragraph of Standing Rule 7 with the following sentence: "The Membership Secretary may grant the exception after determining that the requirements have been met."

The changes of Standing Rule 7 are shown below:

7. Waiting List Passes

Waiting List Passes may only be issued between January 1 and March 31. Waiting List passes shall be valid through March 31 of the year following the calendar year in which they were issued. 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, and if the applicant has attended a formal club Orientation, 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 Membership Secretary an exception to the three-year waiting period. The exception will be voted upon by the members at meeting assembled. The Mem-

bership Secretary may grant the exception after determining that the requirements have been met.

Explanation of Rule 7 Amendments

Amendment 1

This amendment would clarify that Waiting List passes are valid through March 31 of the year following the year in which they are issued. This amendment codifies the financial and administrative practicalities of running the Club: specifically that fees are timely if paid between January 1 and March 31, that the Membership Secretary issues Waiting List passes in batches several weeks to a month apart, and the roster of Waiting List passholders is not updated for the Caretaker and on the ferry for Relief Caretakers until after March 31. The amendment would ensure that existing Waiting List passholders could continue to use the Island without question during January-March until they receive their new passes in the mail.

Amendment 2

This amendment corrects an error in Standing Rule 7. The reference to "membership chairman" is changed to "Membership Secretary."

Amendment 3

Standing Rule 7 provides for a limited exception to the three-year waiting period for Waiting List passes where the applicant is over 65 or has a terminal illness. However, the exemption is not automatic. Rule 7 requires the Membership Secretary to bring the request to a meeting for a vote of the membership. As Membership Secretary, I believe that requiring a vote of the membership on all such exemption applications is unnecessary and counterproductive. Such requests have been rare and clear-cut. Since the standard exists in the rule, the Membership Secretary should have the authority to grant the exemption on his or her own motion if the requirements have been met.

Komarow's proposals (continued)

Proposed Amendments to Standing Rule 10

Amendment 1

Make the following changes in the fourth paragraph of Standing Rule 10 as shown:

At any time when the demand for racks exceeds the supply, the Supervisor of Canoeing shall make a rack available by bumping, in the following order: (i) second racks assigned to honorary members or and Waiting List Pass holders; (ii) second racks assigned to senior members; and (iii) second racks assigned to regular members; then (iv) initial racks assigned to honorary members or and Waiting List Pass holders and (v) initial racks assigned to senior members.

Amendment 2

Add the following sentence at the end of the fourth paragraph of Standing Rule 10:

“However, the initial rack assignment of a senior member shall not be bumped if the senior member (1) obtained such assignment while he or she was a regular member, and (2) has retained the assignment in good standing without interruption during the period of senior membership.”

10. Assignment of Boat Racks [Proposed Amendment is Underlined]

All questions of priority or applications for assignments of racks or transfers in the canoe shed may be referred to the Supervisor of Canoeing.

Regular members, senior members, Waiting List Pass holders and honorary members are eligible for a canoe rack. Racks shall be as-

signed by the Supervisor of Canoeing on the basis of one rack per member, and in the following order of priority: a) Regular members, b) senior members, c) Waiting List Pass holders and honorary members.

Should there be any racks remaining after an initial one-rack assignment has been made, such racks may be assigned as second racks to the same classes of members, and in the same order.

At any time when the demand for racks exceeds the supply, the Supervisor of Canoeing shall make a rack available by bumping, in the following order: (i) second racks assigned to honorary members and or Waiting List Pass holders; (ii) second racks assigned to senior members; and (iii) second racks assigned to regular members; then (iv) initial racks assigned to honorary members and or Waiting List Pass holders; and (v) initial racks assigned to senior members. However, the initial rack assignment of a senior member shall not be bumped if the senior member (1) obtained such assignment while he or she was a regular member, and (2) has retained the assignment in good standing without interruption during the period of senior membership.

A storage fee of \$24.00 per year (payable annually, but pro-rated monthly as appropriate) shall be charged for initial racks assigned to senior members, Waiting List Pass holders and honorary members, and for second racks assigned to any class.

[The amendment does not affect the remaining paragraphs of Section 10]

Explanation of Rule 10 Amendments

Amendment 1 clarifies the order of bumping of canoe rack assignments if the demand for

Komarow's proposals (continued)

spaces exceeds the supply. It is not intended to make any substantive changes.

Amendment 2 is a substantive change that would protect the right of a senior member to his or her space in the canoe rack if he or she acquired the space as a regular member and has continued to pay for the space after the member moved to senior status. The purpose of the amendment is to remove a potential disincentive to senior membership – the loss of a canoe storage space – where the member acquired the space as a regular member and has continuously maintained the space after becoming a senior member.

A regular member of the club may convert to senior membership after 20 years in the club. Senior members do not count against the 155-member limit on regular membership. A number of regular members could convert to senior membership, but have not done so. The amendment would encourage eligible members to elect senior status and open up places for the Club's swelling waiting list.

The Club currently has 200 waiting list applications for the 155 regular membership slots. The waiting list has been growing rapidly. There are currently 37 applicants from 1999, 13 from 2000, and 29 for 2001. By contrast, there was only one vacancy for regular membership in 2000.

Senior membership is attractive because senior members pay one-half of the dues of regular members. Senior members also must pay \$24 to obtain a canoe rack assignment. However, regular members who have canoe rack assignments may not want to convert to senior status because they potentially could lose their canoe rack assignments to regular members. If the demand for canoe rack spaces exceeds supply, Standing Rule 10 establishes the priority of canoe rack holders. Under the bumping rule, the request of a regular member for an initial canoe rack assignment could require the Canoe Supervisor to evict a senior member from his or her only canoe rack assignment. This amendment would protect the canoe rack rights of senior members who obtained their canoe rack assignments while they were regular members by

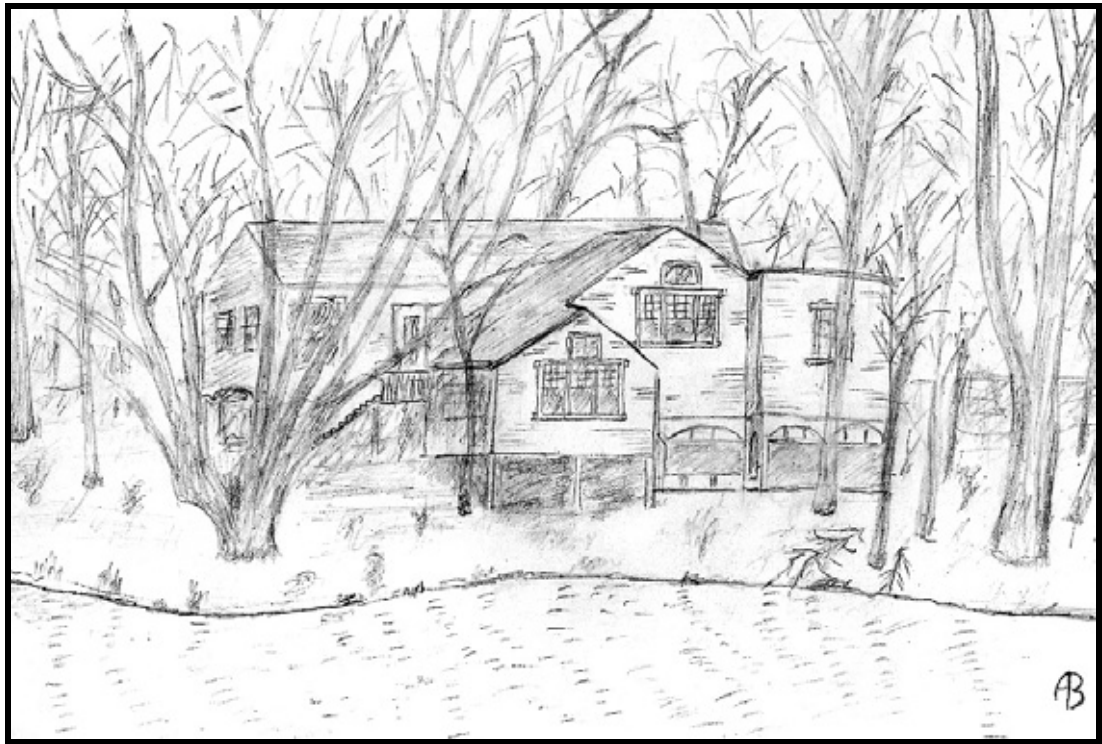
Wildflower Walk

Joan Heidemann and Ellen Richards, who have led the Sycamore Island Wildflower Walk for many years, have decided to retire from this activity. We regret their decision, but we hope—as they do—that some other enthusiasts from the ranks will step forward to lead us onward and upward along spring wildflower paths of the future.

The Club now seeks one or more leaders for the Wildflower Walk. Leaders will choose their own dates, times, and locations in the vicinity of Sycamore Island.

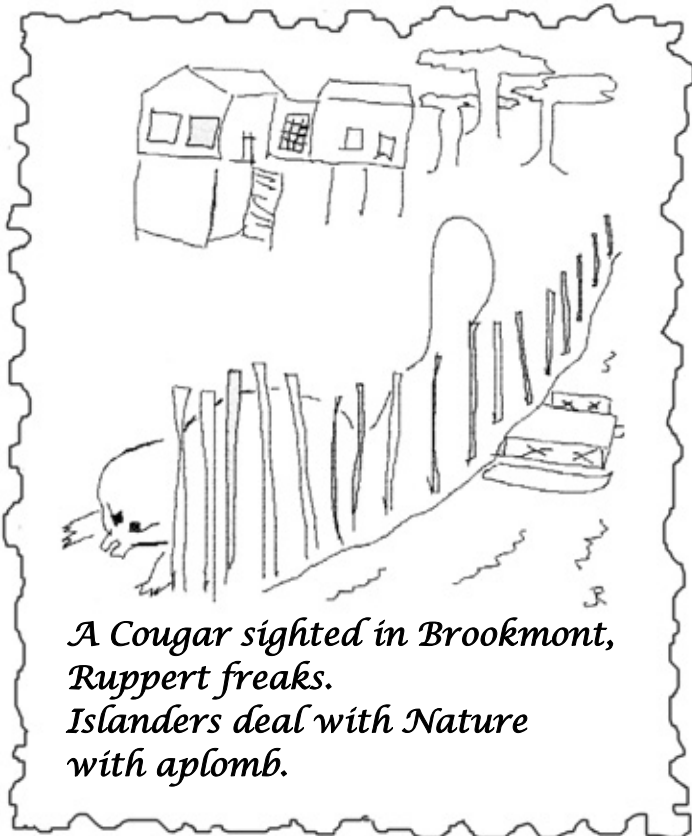
You don't have to be a member. Since Waiting List members participate in these walks, this is a special opportunity for you to participate as a leader in a Club activity. Please call our President, Carl Linden, to volunteer to continue this Club tradition.

Envisioning the clubhouse addition.



Al Brown, Chair of the committee overseeing the planning for the new caretaker's quarters, sketched how the clubhouse might look from the outside. Al notes that this version represents what the committee wants to achieve, but that they may still make "minor" modifications.

Ruppert



Mardy Burgess included some Haiku verse about the proposed addition.

*A new Island home
Stands among aspiring trees;
Safe above water.*

*Branches frame rooftops,
Overseen by Sycamores;
Caretakes the Island.*

*Watching the river,
Rafting across those who come
For Island pleasures.*

Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Notes from the Island

Thu 1 Feb We were awakened at dawn again this morning by loud, hormonal geese. The season is upon us and barring the use of earplugs there will be no late snoozing into the daylight hours... kinda like having small children in the family. There are now two couples that have become territorial and are attempting to bully any others who pass by into leaving.

Sat 3 Feb This morning there was a Red-tailed Hawk cruising the window feeder attached to the high windows facing the towpath. We were lucky in our timing and literally had a front row seat. Up close one realizes what massive birds they are. Surprisingly, the chickadees and the titmice did not seem to be too cowed or impressed, and barely paused in their early morning feeding frenzy, perhaps feeling they were too nimble near so many sharp corners around to feel threatened.

Tue 7 Feb The Caretaker is responding to treatment, and it now seems likely he will not have to be admitted to the hospital, as was feared, although it is now also clear that this is only because the Caretaker's Wife insisted that emergency medical treatment be obtained Sunday night, rather than waiting for Monday morning. The diagnosis is severe cellulites... specifically, rampant infection of the connective tissues of the lower left leg, presumably induced by multiple spider bites as he lay asleep in bed. As the Caretaker is required to stay in bed for the next several days, Members visiting the Island before the weekend should be prepared to find the ferry locked up. The Substitute Caretaker Supervisor has been notified to find coverage for Saturday.

The Caretaker's Wife deserves additional mention in the dispatches for cool management of the aftermath of a canoeing accident Sunday. Turning abreast a strong wind, a Member tipped his canoe. Although not wearing a life preserver, he swam to shore in 35-degree water. Substitute caretaker Vicki Judson brought

the Member to the quarters where the Caretaker's Wife took charge and saw that he got immediately into a hot shower to forestall hypothermia, and provided hot liquids and dry clothing... all this while also ministering to the Caretaker who lay feverish and generally out of it. Vicki organized Members to help retrieve the errant canoe before it could go over the falls.

Mon 12 Jan For over a week we have heard an owl just about every night. In years before there was an occasional call, but now this new neighbor has become a regular component of our night time soundscape. Last night, in the early evening, the owl was so surprisingly loud that we were convinced he was just outside, as we could hear him over the TV and all other indoor sounds and with the windows tightly shut. So all indoor lights and sounds were turned off as we opened a window to try to see him in the moonlight... of course to no avail. What we did determine was that at his loudest he seemed to be across the towpath and up the hill, and that he seems to cruise the canal.

Tue 13 Feb A suet feeder hangs from a limb that is about three feet from the living room windows. The other night the Caretaker, unable to sleep, was up in the living room and chanced to look out to see on the limb... something large looking in!!! Well... it was a shocker... a frozen moment! When the adrenalin spike started to subside and eyeball focus returned, it was unclear just exactly what the creature was. The moon was down and it was dark, and in fact all that could be made out at first was a shadowy outline on the near branch, that might have gone unnoticed by anyone not aware of where every shadow should be, as can only be conditioned by long familiarization. That... and the prickly certainty of being watched. Somehow the outline was too sharp to be a racoon, and the next thought was that it might be the elusive owl. So close... and yet so mysterious. Finally, unable to stand it, a slow move was made for a flashlight and in an

Notes from the Island (continued)

instant the shadow was gone. Much later in the wee hours, hanging out the open window, flashlight at the ready, the mystery was finally revealed when the twelve-foot man walked out from beneath the quarters. Ah... but the story of the twelve foot man is untold because of acute embarrassment to the Caretaker... so you do not know that it was Petey... the possum.

Thu 15 Feb Today we are busy with two projects on the Island. Captain John Matthews arranged to have Arturo Fuentes come to the island to dig out a deep hole adjacent to the septic tank and septic field into which the solids, which composed a 2-foot thick crust in the septic tank, could be shovelled out and put into in order to be buried and composted. Arturo shovelled the holes and the Caretaker shovelled the you-know-what... on the theory that a man should shovel what was mostly his own. The Captain has obtained two new lids for the septic tank to replace the two that were damaged when Roto-Rooter was here. It was then so cold that they were very brittle when it was attempted to remove them.

Tue 20 Feb Yesterday, Club Captain John Matthews came down and installed a new locking cable for Club canoes, with the concurrence of Canoeing Supervisor David Lyles. Winter rules are thus now in effect, although just what they are is still being worked out. Until they are, the on-duty caretaker will have the key while the Club Fathers determine guidelines on when winter canoeing is unsafe... as will be determined by river level, water temperature, and wind velocity. Anyone with their own canoe on the Island is free from any restrictions excepting that inner voice of common sense.

Mon 26 Feb Your Caretaker has returned from visiting his Mother in West Texas to find the Island bursting at the seams, with new growth everywhere... who says all of February is a terrible month. Going to supper with friends in Texas the Caretaker noticed a tree full of chattering and singing birds and commented, virtually in sotto to himself, "Those birds are singing up a storm."

Well... the group conversation stopped abruptly... and several sets of wizened eyes scanned the horizon reflexively. It was then the realization came that one person's colloquial expression might be derived from another's living experience. Clearly, some older folks with a Texas ranching background took this comment as an oft-repeated, literal observation, and quite seriously believed and expected that bird behaviour could be an indication of weather just over the horizon. One wonders if such learned skills are a generational experience that is not being passed on, as the younger ranchers are accustomed to starting their day with the weather channel and have no need or incentive to pay such close attention to the birds. Just another example of how our evolving modern culture leads to an increasing disconnect with Mother Nature.

Tue 27 Feb Today we can report our first blooming crocus. The Island is approaching that season where the lawn is covered with the new growth of spring flowering bulbs. It is becoming impossible to step anywhere without crushing some emergent Virginia bluebells. This occasions great sadness and frustration for the Caretaker, who must now curtail any night time strolling upon the lawn. Members are surely aware that in a matter of weeks the Island will be transformed into a wildflower garden that the hand of man cannot improve upon. Just the display of bluebells is a singular enchantment to behold, and why so many Members do not avail themselves of this experience is a mystery to the Caretaker. Accordingly, Members are warned that any attempt to bring groups of any age here for the purpose of playing ball or soccer on the lawn during this fragile time will be ruthlessly prohibited.

—Doc Taliaferro

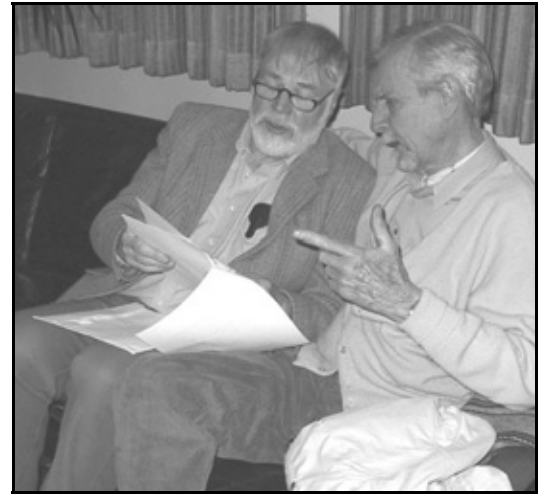
*Excerpted from the Caretaker's Log at
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>*

Refreshments at Joanna's after the February meeting...



The cold season meetings at members' homes usually turn out to be especially sociable. This one worked out that way as everyone caught up on the latest Island and other happenings.

Overheard topics: Carolyn Reeder's talk on the canal, and the new caretaker's quarters.



**Sunday Relief Caretakers
March-April 2001**

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
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 301-229-7586
March 18	10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Johnna Robinson Gene Wathen	301-299-5421 301-493-9499
March 25	10:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Peter Winkler & Barbara Kraft Pat Barry	301-320-2285 301-229-5351
April 1	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	<i>OPEN--please call!</i> Tom & Elizabeth Gibbon	_____ 703-243-9620
April 8	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	<i>OPEN--please call!</i> John & Diane Noble	_____ 301-320-4216
April 15 (Easter Sun.)	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	<i>OPEN--please call!</i> <i>OPEN--please call!</i>	_____ _____
April 22	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Peter & Amanda Cannell Cecily Abram	301-229-8658 301-718-1727
April 29	10:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Phyllis Olfky Greg Hitz	301-345-2353 301-229-2998

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

Call Brian & Anne Waidmann (703-536-3168)
or
Patricia & Terry Murphy (202-667-4153)
to volunteer for caretaking .

It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

Large Parties

No large parties are scheduled in March.

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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March 2001

This Issue:

- 200 applicants: ...more calls for limiting list.
- Clubhouse planning: making good plodgress.
- Untold story of a 12-foot (second story?) man.
- Winter Canoeing Rules: uncertain but in effect.



Bows

— photo by Jane Winer