



# The Sycamore Islander

January, 2002

Volume 81 No. 1

## New Meeting Format

Members often request that our meetings include some form of program or entertainment related to our interests. Look for the first of these in the January 9 meeting. This program starts early: 7:30 p.m.

### January Meeting

John and Diane Noble will host the January 9, 2002 meeting at their house, 7024 Arandale Road, in Bethesda at 7:30 pm. (Go north on MacArthur; right on Wilson just before the bridge; first left on Broxburn; first right on Arandale.)

By arriving at 7:30, you will see a twenty minute film on the C & O Canal's Monocacy Aqueduct. Carl Linden will talk briefly about the Canal Association's recent successful effort to raise the funds for the historic structure's restoration.

The membership meeting at Peggy Thomson's house on the evening of December 12th was festive. As ever Peggy's hospitality was welcoming and warm and the refreshments so very good. The *piece de resistance* was scrumptious apple crunch and ice cream. For all, a good time! The gathering's business was also duly accomplished. The treasurer's annual report on the budget was heard, dis-

cussed and adopted, the club officers were elected, and the caretaker's compensation for the coming year approved. (See minutes below for details.)

### Minutes of December 2001 Meeting

**Attendance:** Trip Reid, Carl Linden, Renee Dunham, John Stapko, Bill Bays, John Matthews, Gerry Barton, William Brad Coolidge, Johnna Robinson, George Loeb, Ann Marie Cunningham, Alan Gelb, Peggy Thomson, Jim Drew, Judy and John Lentz, Joan and Bill Kugler, John Noble, Jeff Komarow, Larry Heilman, Jane and David Winer.

**Captain's Report:** John Matthews reported that architect Pat Berry looked at the canoe shed, which consists of separated structures. He recommended that one continuous structure would better withstand floods, but it will probably suffice as it is now.

*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. **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the February issue is receipt at the Editors' address on Feb 1. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

## December Minutes (continued)

### Membership Report:

Jeff Komarow reported that Blair Bower requested and was granted Senior Member status.

We are still reviewing the question of how to ensure that the septic system is acceptable to Montgomery County, considering that it is in a flood plain. It is not clear that we have an immediate problem, but if this arises there may be a solution with intelligent re-design, and we have found some good resources for this.

Grounds supervisor: Trip Reid reported that eight ironwood trees and six black willow trees were planted upstream from the clubhouse during the workfest. In addition, two more sycamores were planted on the downstream side. All were wrapped with chicken wire to protect from determined beavers. All are trees native to this region and grow well this Island terrain.

### Old Business:

Budget: Alan Gelb passed out a written report of the Island's budget, showing status-to-date, expected status at the end of 2001, and the proposed budget for year 2002. The line items were discussed, and this offered an opportunity to set out what the Island's needs and activities have been, what they have cost, and how expenses are likely to change in the future. Overall expenses for 2001 are about as anticipated, including expenses-to-date on the construction project. The impact of the project on the Club's finances is still unclear, as the project is on hold pending a better understanding of permit requirements.

For year 2002, Alan recommended that we increase the entertainment budget in line with the welcome trend towards increased outreach and participation, in workfests, the summer party and the successful Orientation meetings. We will create a list of authorized events, and use this to encourage involvement and plan expenses. Employee costs will increase for year 2002, as medical insurance has risen considerably. Liability, and property insurance premiums are expected to increase as well, but it has not yet been possible to get quotes for 2002. The budget proposal for year 2002 was passed unanimously.

Officers and supervisors for year 2002: The slate of nominees for Officers and supervisors was unanimously approved. The office of Recording Secretary is still unfilled, however.

Caretaker's salary and bonus: The Personnel Committee recommended that the Caretaker's salary be raised according to the cost-of-living increase for Washington, along the lines reported by the *Washington Post*. There was some discussion about the exact value, so that rather than specifying an amount, Ann Marie Cunningham moved that we increase the Caretaker's salary according to the index. The motion passed unanimously, and the Treasurer will review the index.

The Personnel Committee also recommended a bonus for the Caretaker. The Club moved to accept the recommended bonus amount and the motion was passed unanimously.

### New Business:

Numerous suggestions were made for future Club activities. Carl Linden offered to make a presentation on the Monocacy Aqueduct. John Lentz offered to give a presentation on Sir John Franklin's expedition to the Arctic. The members also expressed interest in hearing about John's own travels by canoe in the Arctic. Renee Dunham suggested a wintertime family games night in the cozy environs of the clubhouse.

On motion, the Club noted Tryon Wells' great efforts in enhancing our website and commended him for exceptional contributions to the website; further noted that this commendation includes award of a software package for Tryon, of his choosing.

The adjournment of the meeting was welcomed by those eyeing the sweets laid out for all on Peggy Thomson's dining room table.

— Renee Dunham, Recording Secretary

# Official Sycamore Seal Looking for a Recording Secretary

—A contemplation upon the present need to fill the office

The Sycamore Island seal, made in 1885 when the Club began, is of graceful art deco design with golden-leaved, red-blossomed wildflowers hand painted on either side. Its arched handle invites you to place your palm over the palms of genera-



Beautifully decorated tools are a gift from the past.

tions of past recording secretaries. Press this handle of history to emboss the official Club seal onto parchment and experience the somber weight of



Ready for business—the jaws await their chance to serve.

self-importance. It is the threshold to a greater and richer life. Leaving three years of secretarial ser-

vice is made more difficult for me as this wonderful seal goes with the office. I hesitate to reveal the lightness of this service as it might reflect upon my sense of responsibility, but I hope this honesty may attract a soul otherwise reluctant to commit his or her time. This task requires that, but once a month, you reduce the content of a Club meeting to its simplest form.

Imagine yourself at a meeting. You are listening to some of the finest minds of the century turn their attentions to our little island – deliberating upon the consequences of flooding, water safety, issues of justice as it pertains to membership and waiting lists. You are also hearing tales of Sycamore Past and learning about septic systems, construction techniques, and countless other skills that bring you to the raw edge of life. If you are more a people person, then the interplay of many people with many opinions is fascinating material. Truthfully, reducing this all to the fewest words can be painful, as it is terribly tempting to tell the story with humor and guts.

I invite you to talk to me if you need more encouragement. I grew a lot through this experience and got a lot of willing help. As thanks for the help I received, I extend my own to the next Recording Secretary. I invite you to give it a try.

—Respectfully yours, Renee Dunham,  
former Recording Secretary (202) 686-6451

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*The Club wishes to thank Renee for her devotion and service as Recording Secretary. When it was sometimes necessary to miss meetings, she faithfully sought someone to take over the duty. Note that the newsletter was never without the minutes of the meetings!*



# John Matthews' B-i-i-i-g Tree

—by Johnna Robinson



Johnna Robinson

John Matthews, our Captain, hikes and canoes around the Sycamore Island area and knows it very well. Last fall he started talking about a Really Big Tree near lock 7. I went down to see it and was most impressed.

According to local lore, all trees within a mile of the river were cut during the early part of the Civil War to assist in the defense of Washington. Fort Sumner, an earthwork fort was on Sangamore Road and just across the river are some tall earthwork lookout stations. There was always fear of attack; General Jubal Early got thru the defenses and ranged down as far as the Cathedral site.

This great tree, which must be about 135 years old, is a scarlet oak of the bottomland type,

Nuttall perhaps. It extends above the canopy by 40-50 feet. It is a 'double'; the trunk splits about 10 feet from the ground into two large trunks. It sits in a p a w p a w grove, so is somewhat hard to locate in the summer. It's also very hard to photograph.



Jane Winer

The tree is 30 feet in circumference at chest level. The bole is ovoid, but is about 10 feet in diameter at the wide dimension. It is by far the largest tree in the area. Even the giant sycamores don't outsize it.

Directions to visit this giant: Go to lock 7. Take the path to the river. Two paths go from the river side toward downstream. Take the upper path and go about 50 yards until you come to logs across the path. At this point, the tree is up and to your left.

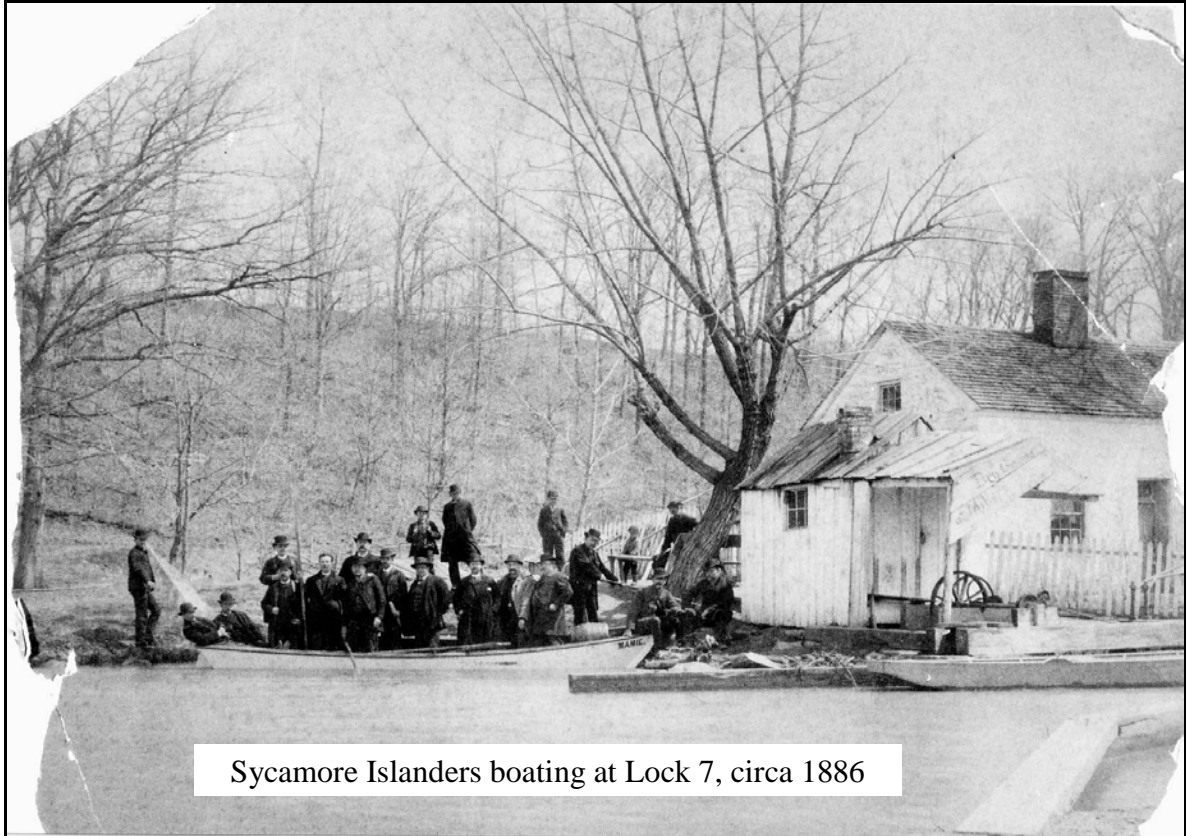
Happy hiking.



David Winer

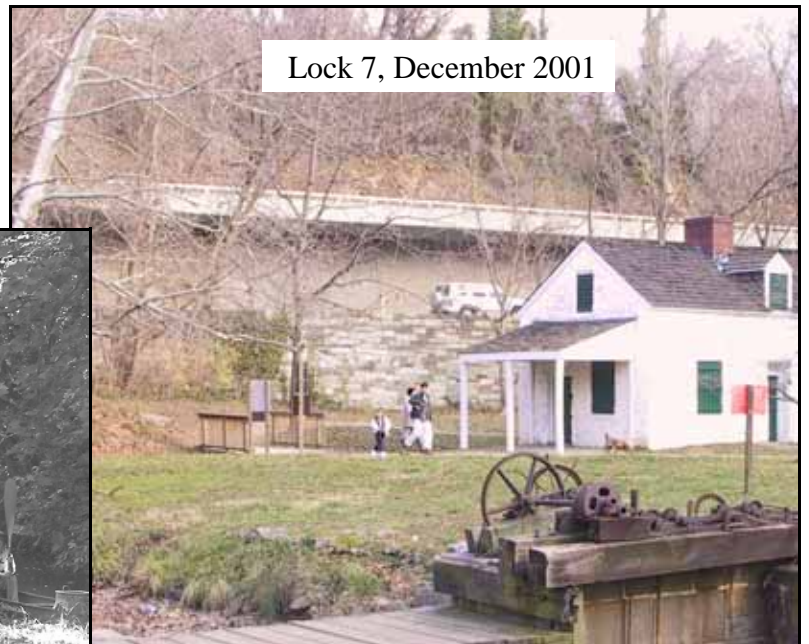


**Then...**

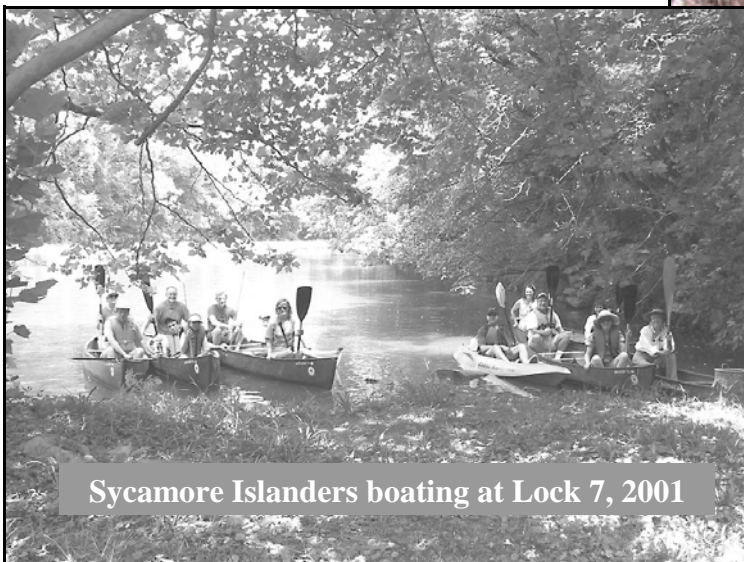


Sycamore Islanders boating at Lock 7, circa 1886

**and Now...**



Lock 7, December 2001



Sycamore Islanders boating at Lock 7, 2001

## Notes from the Island

**Fri 7 Dec** Despite the wintry look and feel of this dreary looking day... the temperatures belie the seasonal change, as this will be yet another uncharacteristically warm day... air temps in the mid 60s. Of more interest is the water temperature... which normally rises through the 50s in April... but by November a year ago it had already dropped back into the 30s. Note today's river temperature... 53 degrees! Ground water is surely Mother Nature's lifeblood... and the anomaly of this year's unprecedented Indian summer is clearly an indicator that something strange is afoot in the climate cycle.

The Log should further note that yesterday Bill Bays caught a 9-inch small mouth bass. Despite the fact of the Club canoes being locked up when the water temps dropped below 55 degrees... and remember that Fletcher's Boathouse locks their boats up when the water temperature drops below 60 degrees... several people had their own boats on the water yesterday.

**Mon 10 Dec** Recent rains have not raised the river level... meaning that the Island is as still as large as it gets. It is possible to walk dry-footed to the small isle upriver between the Island and the towpath, and again several Members have mused about how nice it would be to build up that area so that there could be a permanent connection. But this is only because the river has been so low for so long that memories do not stretch to the normal situation... where there is two feet of water to wade through to the isle. In that area it is possible to walk from rock to rock far into the river and count the many river clams or mussel shells that are the broken remains left by diners of unknown identity... but their numbers speak to the health of the river.

**Tue 11 Dec** Perennially there is the seemingly new discovery of sound in the winter when the leaves are off the trees. With the buffering effect removed, things of the city

seem not only louder but also closer. What happened to the "quiet"? This effect is enhanced by the fact that the green-leafed privacy screen is gone, and suddenly one realizes that there are houses and roads with autos... why... just over there!!!

Still... in this Indian summer it is still possible to pretend that the outside world and its concerns do not intrude... to be able to still sit out and remark on such a beautiful evening... the river... the viewscape... the many Blackhawks thundering by.

**Wed 12 Dec** The Log would like to note a mention of appreciation for the left-handers that must sign the ferry log. Talk about an anonymous minority... as one notices the awkwardness with which they deal with the ferry log... one realizes that their daily life must be one contortion after another to cope with the "right-handed" world. And yet, the log as currently designed by Captain John Matthews is wonderfully clever, especially as an intelligent remedy for the previously wide-open situation in which the log had to be found "somewhere else" on the Island to sign. Thus the Club was frequently vulnerable to liability exposure from visitors and guests. Although we now take it for granted... the ferry log has not yet reached its five-year anniversary.

**Thu 13 Dec** All is sepia tones in the river gorge today. Especially it is a day to appreciate the sycamore trees. Looking across the distance towards the Virginia shore the bare white trunks stand out... and when the mist rises a few feet above the water they look all for the world like the skeleton of some lost civilization... calling to mind the mists of Avalon. When the clouds drop low and skim the ridge separating the riverbank from the CIA headquarters... they look like white bones stretching into the clouds and holding up the world.

## Notes from the Island (continued)

**Fri 14 Dec** Still on the Island there is deciduous green hanging on. The two willow trees planted by Mardy Burgess' Quaker Sunday school yet have green mixed with the yellowing leaves. The last to go... they will be the first to come in the spring. And surprisingly... last year we wintered over in the quarters an avocado plant. On whom it was stuck in the ground in the spring and has not compelled much attention until now... because it is still a glorious green as though still in southern California. Of course... down here there is always some new wonderment... as the passing of the seasons makes real the Marcel Proust comment that the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes... but in having new eyes.

**Mon 17 Dec** Ahhh... to be outside... under the sky... on a balmy December evening!! Is the planet getting warmer or not?? Without leaves and with a bare aspect to the gorge at night it is easier to see the big dark things that fly in the night, usually but not always great



blue herons commuting amongst feeding areas. Having recently re-read *The Fellowship of the Ring* in preparation to see the movie... the appearance of big dark things that fly in the night can be startling.

Late on the same Friday night we were startled in bed by a loud voice on the towpath yelling, "Bear... Bear!" Well... you can be sure we were at the windows quickly... and the voice did after a few times seem more to be calling than warning... but it was a relief nonetheless to see signs posted the next morning asking folks to be on the lookout for a lost dog named Bear.

Sunday morning the river was covered with foam... and here by covered we mean perhaps 5 to 10 percent... which is a lot. From the wooden walkway one could not be sure it was not small floating ice on the river... the river is often looks similar when covered with small patches of ice before freezing...and we had go down and check to be sure. Interestingly enough... there was no foam in the slough on the Maryland side of the river.

**Tue 18 Dec** A friend described a scene in which he was driving down the road in his van... kid seat mounted... Xmas tree tied to the top... son's first bicycle boxed in back... OBX decal displayed... American flag on his antenna... carols on the radio... realizing that he not only fit the Norman Rockwell Christmas picture profile... he was the profile! And was content.

In these difficult times, we at the Island wish you all a happy holiday season and the good fortune to find your own Norman Rockwell Christmas.

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*Excerpted from the Caretaker's Log at:  
[www.sycamoreisland.org](http://www.sycamoreisland.org)*

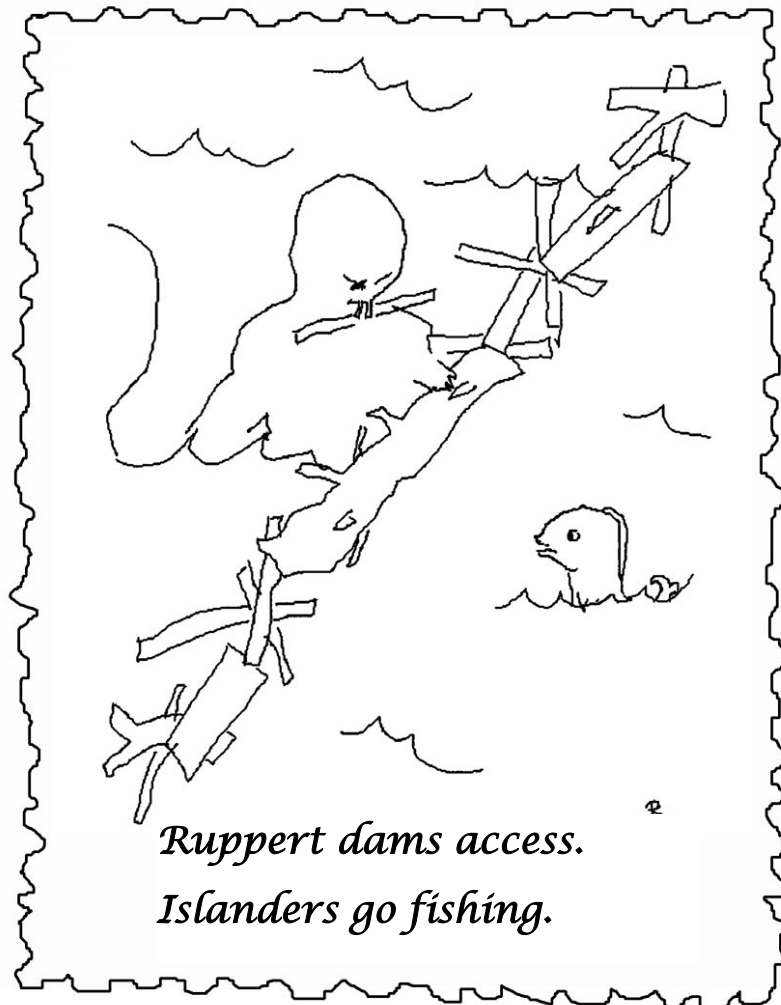
*Time-Sensitive*

**REMINDER**

The Waiting List will be open for applications by the children of Regular and Senior Members during January, 2002. This is a unique opportunity for members' children to obtain a priority vis-a-vis future applicants.

**Contact Jeff Komarow, Membership Secretary: 301-897-5996 or [JeffKomarow@aol.com](mailto:JeffKomarow@aol.com)**

*Ruppert*



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson



## Sunday Relief Caretakers January 2002

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
Jan 6	11:00 - Dark	Brian and Anne Waidmann	703-536-3168
Jan 13	11:00 - Dark	Joe Cecil and Judy Friedman	202-244-7036
Jan 20	11:00 - Dark	Howard and Candy Means	301-320-5270
Jan 27	11:00 - Dark	Tove and Susan Elfstrom	703-533-5537
Feb 3	11:00 - Dark	Terry & Patricia Murphy	301-263-9766

### **\*\* Relief Caretaker Volunteers \*\*\***

Call Bill & Lucky Marmon (301) 654-7893 or  
Howard & Candy Means (301) 320-5270  
to volunteer for relief caretaking.

It's a great way to spend time on the Island!  
*Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. Don't forget: Relief Caretakers sign in too!*

## Large Parties

**No Large Parties have been reported for January 2002**

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  
e-mail: [jnoble@erols.com](mailto:jnoble@erols.com), phone: 301-320-3554, fax: 301-320-4216



## *The Sycamore Islander*

6006 Welborn Drive  
Bethesda MD 20816-1158

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>

To view this month's *Sycamore Islander* on the Internet, go to:  
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/sandwich/islander.htm>

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January 2002

### **This Issue:**

- Budget and finances all settled.
- Waiting List opens slightly: for our kids.
- Islanders: finest minds of the century?
- Big dark things fly in the night.
- Ruppert: enigma inside of a puzzle. Go figure.
- Something big has been moved at Lock 7.



Fall Workfest: A little rest from hard labor.  
—Photo by Dave Winer