



# *The Sycamore Islander*

*January, 2003*

*Volume 82 No. 1*

## **January 2003 Meeting**

Our annual meeting at Peggy Thomson's house was a wonderful evening. At the meeting, we covered some very important topics in a very efficient manner, the budget, election of new officers, and a raise in dues. One of the key events for me was the review of the caretaker's performance. The very warm and positive response to Joe's performance over the past four months bodes well for the Club over the coming year. The Hage team has settled in to their new job, and seems to have fit right into the life of the Island. They will be good stewards for the Island. After the business was concluded, we adjourned to some very wonderful refreshments provided by Peggy and others, and we had a very pleasant opportunity to socialize.

I was honored to be elected president at this meeting, but I have to admit, when Dave Winer said that he was looking to find someone else to take on the role of Editor, I considered declining the presidency. The editorship is a very creative position, and one where you get to play with lots of electronic toys. But the best part is that you get a particularly close perspective on the Island and the members. Since I can't possibly handle the presi-

dency, my day job, and the editorship, I would heartily encourage you to consider apprenticing under Dave and Jane. I realize that they're a tough act to follow, but they would provide lots of help and guidance to ensure that you were a success.

A Trail Manager with the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club sent me an email. He was gathering information related to the Potomac Heritage Trail on the Virginia side of the river, just across from Sycamore, and the history of this part of the river. This led me to contact several long-time members, to see if they would be interested in sharing some of their experiences and knowledge of local history with them. It was fun chatting with these people, and hearing their stories. Things like this just might be the best part of the job.

Our next meeting is likely to be another sociable occasion, in a very different atmosphere. Nell Hennessey and Frank Daspit will be hosting it at the Irish Channel, a pub and restaurant operated by Nell's brothers-in-law (who grew up above a pub in Ireland). I hope to see many of you there on January 8. (Directions: p. 3)

—Ann Marie Cunningham, President

*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 Jan. 31. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

## Minutes of the December 2002 Meeting

The meeting was brought to order at 8:25 p.m. at Peggy Thomson's house in Bethesda. Those present were Carl Linden, Nell Hennessy, Alan Gelb, Peggy Thomson, Tryon Wells, Renee Dunham, Richard and Penny Doolittle, Brad Coolidge, Johnna Robinson, Jim Drew, Jane and David Winer, Gerald Barton, John Stapko, Jeff Komarow, Ann Marie Cunningham, Holly Syrrakos, Charlotte Brewer, and Larry Heilmann.

**Budget Report for 2002:** Alan Gelb reported that overall, we were right on budget through the end of November and we project the same through the end of 2002. Some items that came in lower than budgeted were offset by some unusual costs related to caretaker-change, such as advertising, paying substitutes, and a farewell gift to Doc and Phyllis. For the year as a whole, we expect that the spending will have been around \$60,500, with \$3855 in addition for construction project costs spent before the construction project was frozen. In November, we had \$50,000 in CD's in the bank plus cash. By the end of the year there should be enough cash (\$6-7,000) to tide us over the first month or so before dues come in.

**Construction project:** We have spent about \$12,400 over the 2001-2002 period, of which only \$3800 reflect actual improvements (kitchen). The rest is plans, surveys, engineering reports, etc. This does not include \$2400 of Doc's improvements to the quarters in 2001. We need to assemble a complete history and record of construction project activity so there as to ensure informed continuity whenever the project resumes. (Currently we do not know when this will happen.) The Club discussed ways to achieve this.

**Budget Report for 2003:** The overall budget for 2003 is the same as in 2002, despite a general inflation adjustment. The closing of the waiting list means no sign-on fees, resulting in about \$1500 less income than in 2002. The main question for next year will be the cost of the well, which is budgeted for \$10,000 as an exceptional item, *i.e.*, it will exceed our budget.

The budget was unanimously approved.

**Dues increase:** After discussing various means of meeting expenses, Jeff Komarow made a motion to increase (by one dollar per month) member dues to \$276 a year (a number evenly divisible by 12 to simplify partial year computation). The motion was passed. Dues and fees based upon regular membership will change accordingly; senior member dues and waiting list passes will be \$138, and inactive member dues will be \$69. Other Club fees – application, canoe rack, locker, party, initiation – will remain the same.

**Captain's report:** Tryon Wells reported that the river level is rising due to recent snow and rain. A list should be made of items to move and attend to in case of flood. He recommended that we establish a file where this information is readily accessed and where past flood histories may be found. Also, our ferry float has a leak – the downstream-side pontoon needs pumping out and repair. Our Captain will address the issue.

**Editors report:** David and Jane Winer reported that it is time to seek someone to take over the Editor's job after 2003. Currently, no one from within the Club has expressed an interest in taking take over the outstanding job that the Winers have done. Forthcoming *Islander* issues will display an ad for this challenging job. David suggested a means of recruitment if there is no response to the ads: a "service member" might become a member while performing a necessary task which cannot be filled by a member or waiting list person. This suggestion may be discussed at future meetings.

**Archivist:** Holly Syrrakos reported that the Washington Historical Society, where our records are stored, is closed for the time being and will reopen at the site of the former Carnegie Library at the Mount Vernon site in May 2003. There is limited access to our records during the transition period. Holly will keep all 2002 records in her possession until the new site is ready.

**Canoes:** The two canoes for sale have been sold – one for \$50 and the other for \$100.

## December Minutes, continued...

### New Business:

**Officers for 2003:** The proposed roster of officers and supervisors for 2003 was unanimously accepted. George II and Shelley Malusky will assist the Loebes who are the supervisors for Entertainment. See p.8 in this *Islander* for the roster of elected officers, supervisors, and directors.

**Caretaker:** The Club expressed great pleasure with the work and sociability of our new caretaker, Joe Hage. Much has been fixed and added on Joe's own initiative. For example, there is now a neat rack for the canoe paddles; the rough part of the hill trail leading to the wooden canal bridge is now filled with gravel and the jutting rock slabs in that portion of the trail have been reduced by brawn and sledge-hammer; plumbing talent has been displayed in fixing the toilet in the woman's changing quarters. Thank you, Joe. We couldn't be luckier. And a thank you was expressed to the hiring committee who supported bringing on a caretaker who would bring his daughters. Joe will receive a cost-of-living raise and a bonus from the Club and the girls, at Gerald Barton's suggestion, will receive a Christmas present from the Club. Peggy Thomson donated three Sycamore Island patches to be presented as well.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m. to Peggy's dining room where we found more food for discussion in apple bake, pumpkin/mince pie, cookies, lemon squares, wines, cider, ... If I missed any goodies, please amend the minutes next month.

—Renee Dunham, Acting Recording Secretary

## January Meeting Locale

Frank Daspit and I are hosting the Jan. 8 meeting at the Irish Channel Restaurant at 5th and H Streets, NW in DC. We're part-owners and we'll

supply beer and munchies for the meeting. My brother-in-law and his brother, who grew up above their parents' pub in Ireland and trained as chefs in Europe, run the restaurant. The restaurant is 2 blocks from the MCI Center and can be reached easily by subway:

From the Chinatown Exit for the Gallery Place stop (7th & H), walk straight ahead along H Street until you reach the Red Roof Inn at 5th Street (the restaurant is in the Inn). If you come up at the Building Museum Exit for Judiciary Square, turn left and walk to the next corner (which is 5th) then turn right; the restaurant will be on the other side of the street just before you reach H Street.

If you drive and have trouble finding a parking place, call the restaurant at 202-216-0046 and they will open the gate to the church parking lot across the street (entrance is on H Street, just past 5th Street if you are heading east).

—Nell Hennessy



### Dues notices are in the mail.

It's that time when we must renew our memberships or places on the waiting list.

Please send in your checks promptly. Let our Financial Secretary, Lisa Kliefoth, know if you have reason to be late in payment or if you wish to resign this year.

## Water damage to canal towpath in our area.

In late November, the Park Service closed the canal towpath near Lock 7 for several days, bringing in heavy machinery to save the canal bank and towpath from washing out completely. According to the news, the action was just in time to avert a disaster. Our Caretaker kept us informed through his log on the Club's website. Messages such as these appeared from time to time: *Work continues on the towpath above Lock Seven so that part of the canal is still empty. ... Unfortunately the canal is still drained, the repair job to the towpath seems completed but they still haven't refilled the canal.*



**“This just in...” (very late December)** Repairs are not yet complete on the break, but the towpath is passable through the area. Passable, but very muddy at times and quite narrow at the repair site. In conditions of snow, ice, or just plain slippery mud, the Park Service's warnings seem especially appropriate.

In the meantime, the canal is drained and we again suffer the all too frequent decline in quality of recreational activities along this popular stretch. Let's hope for completed repair and refill before ice skating weather hits.



## *In touch with Joe...*

**This has been an exciting month down here on the island, high-lighted by a few firsts...**



—photo by David Winer

The most noteworthy event this month would have to be the visit we received from the Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton. I don't agree with many of her policies but it was still a lot of fun to host her and her staff for a meeting. There were many beltway insiders here but the best part for me was meeting Fran Mainella the Director of the National Park Service, who was very friendly and seemed genuinely concerned about the issues surrounding the Park Service. They asked me to give a short presentation about Sycamore Island and I managed to get through it without getting political. The afternoon was capped off with photographs of the girls and me posing with some of the nation's big decision makers.

The other exciting event this month was the arrival of winter. Yes, winter started officially with the solstice on the twenty-second but it was earlier in the month that we got our first real winter weather of the year. Six inches of snow covered the Island in a blanket of white. The snow made the Island look so beautiful but more importantly it closed the schools for two days, which was cause for much celebration among the younger inhabitants of the island. We spent the days playing in the snow and clearing it from the boardwalk and ferry. I also paddled around the Island in the snow for the first time. I was wishing I had a pair of cross-country skis because the towpath had become the perfect ski trail. The trail up the hill was a little treacherous as the snow turned into packed ice, but some ashes from the wood stove helped with that problem.

Well if you get a bunch of snow and then you get a warming trend with a lot of rain, you get..., High Water! Yes, December brought me the highest river levels I've had to deal with yet. The river was so high (6.7 feet at Little Falls) that I had some real difficulty pulling the ferry across. I know that 6.7 can't be called a flood but I feel like I've been initiated and now I know what it means to have high water. I did devise a system, using my climbing equipment, that made it much easier to run the ferry and I'm happy I'll be able to use the ferry, even if the river gets a little high. I enjoy the challenges of living on the Island but I'm still hoping I don't get too many high-water days.

Finally, a big "thank you" to everyone for the surprise gifts that were left by our door and in the mailbox. It has been wonderful meeting everyone and to be associated with such a great club. It's great to be appreciated for trying to do a good job.

Wishing you all the best in the New Year!

—Joe Hage, Caretaker

## Log or Letter?

— by Renee Dunham

*On Tuesday, December 10, I had the opportunity to be substitute caretaker for over 24 hours. I wrote Joe a letter during my stay in his quarters, as I wasn't sure whether I was to keep a log or not. It is more a letter of appreciation than a log. Joe agreed that I might submit it to the Islander, as he also wasn't sure whether it was log or letter. Now it is an article and the problem is solved.*

Dear Joe,

Alas! I overslept and arrived at the Island at 10:30 a.m. This being a chilly, cloudy day, I was not fearful of standing up morning visitors, but I felt naughty nonetheless. The ice film on the water crunched crisply as I pulled the ferry to dock at the Island. Just off John Matthew's float were the same sort of long, crystallized strands of ice, cross-hatching the water surface. Interspersed were plate-sized frozen disks holding air bubbles. It looked as if the water had developed a neural network.

I returned to your cozy, colorful quarters and enjoyed browsing your bookshelves, thinking I could happily hole up here for the winter with your naturalist guides and literature. Waiting for my tea to boil, I ran across "What Bird Did That?" with the cover illustration showing a view from the inside of a car looking out through a bird-poop-splattered windshield. Well, I got hooked on avian *dejecta* (new term for me!) history, photographs, and descriptions of windshield treasures, e.g., "Common tern description: A splood. Summery, light, precise..." A vocabulary of descriptive nouns amazed me: splood, splay, schplutz, bob, sklopic, splash,..." So delightful to have such a guide presented with such lighthearted accuracy.

**2 p.m.:** The bell is ringing. Marianne Ross came to visit me, as scheduled. In only a few hours, my senses had so relaxed in the muted tones of the landscape that seeing Marianne in her red and blue cap and bright pink scarf felt like a blow between the eyes. The silence had also changed my perception and our cheerful chatting on the ferry sounded so LOUD.

Soon after, Gerald Barton came to visit. Gerry quietly strummed guitar while we enjoyed tea and conversation, missing only Joe. Marianne brought a badminton set for the Club's use.

**5 p.m.:** It is darkening. Freezing rain is expected tonight. If I can get the ferry across tomorrow, I shall then have to learn to slide uphill to my car. I watered your plants and discovered that what I thought was frost on the living room windows was really wax or rice paper for your privacy. What a good idea. It feels odd eating dinner alone at the table and imagining my husband eating alone opposite "me" at another table. Betty Burchell called to advise me to be a sissy about the expected ice tomorrow morning and to stay put. She remembered a very treacherously icy walk to the Island when Peter Jones was Caretaker. Comparing then with now, we agreed that the killer ice was at the same places. We'll see about the weather and whether it will start at 4 a.m. as predicted.

**10:45 p.m.:** Nighttime walk in the snow. Bedtime.

Next morning: I'm staying put on the Island. The freezing rain is here. I'm wondering even whether you'll make it back this afternoon, Joe. I don't mind staying another night if you don't return, but I'll have to raid your peanutbutter jar. A Pileated Woodpecker disappeared into the armpit of the sycamore branch just outside the window. Is that its headquarters? Its presence blessed my decision to stay.

**11:00 a.m.:** Tryon Wells called to advise me to bring in the ferry lock so it won't freeze shut, and then, when I leave and lock the ferry to shore, to wrap the lock against the snow or freezing rain. I never would have thought of that myself. It is a little warmer right now. The icicles hanging from the sycamore tree are beginning to melt. I will take this opportunity to leave the Island – reluctantly, as I am so cozy here and finally getting some homework done. I am leaving you some leftover lamb chili. Thank you so much for this wonderful opportunity.

Love,

Renee

## A Proposal: Service Membership

—by David Winer, Co-editor

At the December meeting last month I announced that Jane and I have been looking for someone to take over the editorship of the *Islander*. This is an important job and a demanding one, and after five years, we would like to step down. We must find a well-qualified member of the Club to replace us and, of course, we would be available to help, support and show the new Editor what we know about what we do. And I would still hope to contribute as an unofficial photographer for the newsletter.

Jane and I cannot continue in this capacity indefinitely. If no one from within the Club steps forward as Editor--and so far, no one has--we propose a solution to the problem that entails searching beyond the present membership, which means that there would be a change in the way the Club has operated heretofore. We propose a class of membership that we call "Service Member," *i.e.*, offering membership to someone outside the Club in return for service. The Service Member would agree to serve (in this case, as Editor) the Club for a fixed period of time, upon successful completion of which his/her status would change to that of Regular Member. A Service Member would include full membership privileges and responsibilities during his/her tenure.

This new membership category would require a change in the By Laws, which means that we would have to have advanced notice of text, discussion, and a vote on this proposal. Please consider the following rationale for Service Membership:

Status of the Service Member would be contractual in nature, so that, for example, a Service Member Editor would be selected after consideration of candidates and their qualifica-

tions by a nominating committee. The committee's selection, period of service and terms of service would be offered in the form of a contract approved by majority vote in a regular Club meeting. The contract would include provision for ending a Service Membership if we find the Service Member's performance unsatisfactory, or if the Service Member has to give up the position. A former Service Member in good standing who cannot complete the contract would, if he or she chose, be placed on the waiting list.

Most of us realize how important it is to have a high-quality newsletter. If we can't find a member to serve as Editor, then we could seek a highly qualified replacement by offering membership. You might ask why we can't simply hire a professional to do the job, and the answer is simply cost. The duties such as Jane and I have been carrying out for the last several years would require a real budget-busting outlay should the Club "outsource" the newsletter.

We have found some highly qualified people outside the Club, however, who are not only willing to do the job but who would also like to become active members. Hence our proposal. There may very well be someone currently on the waiting list who reads this proposal and steps forward to offer service. A "Service Membership" could be the solution in that case. But best of all, someone from within current membership may read this proposal and decide being Editor of the *Sycamore Islander* is a great job, which it is. What do you say, Islanders?



There's snow time like the present...



Caretaker Joe Hage delights in one of our pre-Christmas snow "storms" to keep his paddling skills tuned. Note to the Cold Water Police: Joe has a PFD under his parka.

## Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

### MONTGOMERY SYCAMORE ISLAND CLUB OFFICERS AND SUPERVISORS 2003

#### OFFICERS

President **	Ann Marie Cunningham	703-876-9165
Vice-President **	Jeff Komarow	301-897-5996
Recording Secretary	Carl Linden	301-229-2398
Treasurer **	Alan & Caroline Gelb	301-229-5969
Financial Secretary	Lisa Kliefoth	301-229-2158
Membership Secretary	Bill Marmon	301-654-7893
Editor	David & Jane Winer	301-229-8963
Archivist	Holly Syrrakos	301-891-4940
Captain **	Tryon Wells	301-320-6762
Deputy Captain * **	John Stapko	301-953-1949

#### SUPERVISORS

Finance **	Bill Eichbaum	301-229-1713
Law * **	Maurice Tobin	202-232-0220
Clubhouse	Karl Kosok	301-589-0034
Grounds *	Penny Doolittle	301-229-5632
Painting/Carpentry	Charles Pill	703-524-8254
Website	Tryon Wells	301-320-6762
Entertainment	George & Marcia Loeb	301-652-4229
Camping/Parties	John Noble	301-320-3554
Canoeing *	Jim Drew	202-462-3836
Swimming *	Tove Elfstrom	703-533-5537
Relief Caretaking Scheduling	Candy Means	301-320-5270

#### CARETAKER

Joe Hage	7023 MacArthur Boulevard, Bethesda, MD 20816	301-229-4921
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#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jessie Bakeman	Bill Eichbaum	George Malusky
Blair Bower	Richard Fellows	John Michener
Warren Brown	William Kugler	Clifford Russell
Betty Burchell	Carl Linden	Jack Sanders
Bradford Coolidge	George Loeb	John Schubert
Richard Doolittle	David Lyles	Tryon Wells



## Sunday Relief Caretakers January 2003

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
January 5	11:00 a.m. - dark	Elissa Free & Bill Nooter	202-537-1434
January 12	11:00 a.m. - dark	Stephen and Sally Herman with Richard and Judy Edelson	301-229-9172 301-951-0195
January 19	11:00 a.m. - dark	Whitney Pinger and Roger Pollack	202-686-5443
January 26	11:00 a.m. - dark	Jinny and Stan Fowler	301-299-3734
February 2	11:00 a.m. - dark	Norman Metzger	202-546-1034
February 9	11:00 a.m. - dark	John and Susan Membrino	202-726-6372
February 16	11:00 a.m. - dark	Tom Hylden and Shelly Davis	301-951-4156
February 23	11:00 a.m. - dark	Terry Murphy	301 263-9766

**\*\*\* Caretaker Volunteers \*\*\***

To volunteer for Sunday relief caretaking, call Candy Means: 301-320-5270.

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

## Large Parties January 2002

Date	Time	Who	What
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**No Large Parties are scheduled for the month of January.**

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*

6613 80th Place  
Cabin John, MD 20818

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>

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

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### January 2003

- A change in *Islander* editorship looms.
- January meeting in downtown DC.
- New dues and fees scheduled.
- New Officers elected.
- A Substitute Caretaker's experience.



Warm room to the rescue. Caught on the river by a sudden squall on a wintry day, Gerry Barton's daughter and her children recover from the chilling experience.

—photo by David Winer