



The Sycamore Islander

November 2003

Volume 82 No. 11

President's Message

The threat of the 15 to 20 foot river levels from Hurricane Isabel forced us to consider the damage that might have occurred. Had the flood been that high, water would have been throughout the main level of the caretaker's apartment. The living room addition had been placed at a height that would have kept it above almost all floods, so Joe's belongings that were moved into that room would have been safe. But the stove, refrigerator, washer and dryer would have been flooded. The floor suffered severe damage in 1996, with some of the supporting structure having washed away, and the floor itself buckling and rotting. Tryon has studied the flood data over the last century, and said that a flood at a level that would enter the caretaker's quarters occurs, on average, every seven years. The last two were in 1996. Since it happened twice that year, I don't know if we're safe for another seven years, or if we're now overdue.

But better to be prepared. There have been attempts to significantly change the quarters in the past, which have all encountered roadblocks of one sort or another. The last committee learned that it was necessary to get the well repaired before proceeding. That has now been done, so it's again time to begin plans for improving the quarters, and relocating them above the flood plain. Jack Sanders, a former club president, has agreed to chair the new committee. The committee will have its first meeting on Sunday, November 23, at 2:00 on the Island. A task as important as this needs the help and support of many people. Please come for the initial planning meeting, share your expertise, and offer your support.

At our last meeting, Stephanie Flack of The Nature Conservancy gave a wonderful talk about the biodiversity of the Potomac River Gorge that resulted from its location between two geological regions – the coastal plain and the Piedmont, and the many rare and endangered species that live here. She challenged us to help preserve the biodiversity and had many suggestions as to what we could do. She offered her support if we wished to accept her challenge. I hope that we could meet that challenge, perhaps by including in our fall and spring work fests an activity to eliminate invasive species, or by helping to protect our trees from English ivy, as Phil Thorson and John Matthews have done in the past. She had many other ideas. If you are willing to help lead an activity, please contact me.

The fall work fest has been scheduled for Saturday, November 8th, with a rain date of November 15th. Please come help get the Island ready for winter. The next Island meeting will be at 8:00 p.m. on November 12, on the Island.

Hope you can come.

-- Ann Marie Cunningham

The Sycamore Islander is the 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 Editor, Norman Metzger, 638 G Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003-2724 or by fax to 202/544-6027. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to nm2@bellatlantic.net. **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the December issue is receipt at the Editor's address by November 20th. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

Minutes of the October 8, 2003 Membership Meeting

Present: Carl Linden, Norm Metzger, George Maluskey, Jane Winer, Sally Strain, Jim Drew, John F. Stapko, Ann Marie Cunningham, Tryon Wells, Bill Bays, Joe Hage, Star Mitchell, Peggy Thomson, Johnna Robinson, Brad Coolidge, John Matthews, Stephanie Flack, Renee Dunham, and Peter Winkler

Call to Order: President Ann Marie Cunningham called the meeting to order at 8:10 p.m.

Minutes: The minutes of the September meeting were approved.

Communications: Ann Marie reported that the Club had received a letter from Samantha Dachick, a journalism student at American University. Ms. Dachick is doing a story on commuting by canoe in the area, and she is interested in speaking with members who have such experience. The names of several members who had paddle-commuted were given to Ann Marie, and Peggy Thomson also agreed to speak with Ms. Dachick. Tryon Wells noted that the topic had received attention in the centennial edition of the *Islander*, which is posted on the Club's website.

Guest speaker: Ann Marie then introduced our special guest speaker, Stephanie Flack of the Nature Conservancy. Ms. Flack heads the Conservancy's Potomac River Gorge Project, and has spent the last 3 years working in this area, focusing on the area's biodiversity. Ms. Flack gave an interesting and informative slide-talk about the Gorge and her work.

Additional information may be found at http://www.conserveonline.org/2002/05/b/public_version.internal&action=buildframes.action

After a short break, during which we consumed Jane Winer's homebaked cake, the meeting resumed.

Budget: Alan Gelb, from Ethiopia, reports that we will most likely spend more than usual this year, largely because of work on the well.

We will need to replenish our reserve fund, but we are within our budget.

Old Business: We took up Tryon Wells' two motions published in the October *Islander*. Tryon asked that the motion concerning electronic dues be tabled, which those present agreed to, because it is too late in the year to have a system ready for the next dues cycle. We then discussed Tryon's motion that we charge members and waitlisters who wish to receive the mailed, hard-copy version of the *Islander* rather than receive it by email. Points advanced during the discussion included: the electronic version has color pictures, and may be downloaded or printed at home; but everyone does not own a home computer (but there are libraries, etc.); the amount of money the Club would save is hard to calculate; the motion, if passed, might reduce the amount of intra-Club communication; and we should treat waitlisters differently, as they already pay a fee, largely to defray the cost of printing and mailing their copies of the *Islander*. In the end, those present voted to table the motion until next month. [Pros and cons re this motion are on page 3 of this *Islander*.

Tryon also advanced a proposal concerning the Club's maintenance of a safe deposit box. The proposal, which calls for three officeholders, the president, treasurer, and secretary, each to have a key, will require a change in the Bylaws, and it will be published in the next issue of the *Islander*.

Fall Work Fest: Those present agreed that, henceforth, the fall work fest will be held the second Saturday of November, with the third Saturday serving as the rain date.

Accordingly, this year, the work fest will take place Saturday, November 8, 2003, 9 to 2. There was discussion about erecting a bulletin board on the Island to advise members of this and other events.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

– Peter Winkler, Recording Secretary

Paying for *The Islander*

The motion by Tryon Wells to charge each member and applicant on the waiting list \$20 annually IF they want a printed *Islander* sent to them in the mail each month was tabled at the October meeting to give members more time to consider it. It will be taken up again at the November 12th meeting. Below are arguments for and against the motion.

For

For the first time since the invention of the printing press, printing and mailing a newsletter is no longer the most cost-effective method of getting the word out to a small group (like our club). With e-mail and the Internet, one can get the word out flexibly, effortlessly, instantly, at almost no cost, and with minimal environmental harm (no trees cut, no paper disposal).

The Sycamore Islander is a critical component of this club and all members and future members will continue to receive it. They just don't have to receive it on paper or in the mail – unless they want to, that is – for an extra \$20 per year.

The charge that it is unfair to charge members an extra \$20 annually who want to receive the print version of the *Islander* is rubbish. What is unfair is that those members who already receive their *Islander* electronically and absorb their own printing costs also have to further share the substantial costs (over \$7,200 annually and rising) of printing, assembling, postage and delivery of the *Islander*, with members who insist on receiving the print version. Most periodicals today, including the *Washington Post*, make available their entire daily content online for free. Only readers who insist on receiving the printed versions are required to pay the printing and delivery costs through their subscriptions.

It is probably only a matter of time before the financial pressure to keep dues down and yet pay for rising club costs will require us to adopt this motion. With the club currently operating at full budget, despite two dues increases in the past two years, the club should take advantage of unique cost-savings opportunities when they appear. Had we made and adopted this motion three years ago, we would have had over \$20,000 more for us to use during that period, and dues would not likely have been raised once. If we wait another three years, we will deprive ourselves of another \$20,000 again and probably more. In light of the Internet's flexible and inexpensive distribution alternatives, our current *Islander* printing and distribution costs are an enormously wasteful use of our limited financial resources.

– Tryon Wells

Against

The *Islander* has always been a privilege of membership, and I think it should stay that way.

The notion of asking members to pay extra for the hard-copy version amounts to a scheme to raise dues at the expense of those who wish to continue receiving their printed copies. Certainly, as Tryon Wells points out, we could use the money as a means of avoiding a dues increase for some years. But that is not really the issue.

Along those lines of reasoning, we might just as well, as an alternative plan, reduce dues for those who choose to give up their printed newsletter. We would not be any poorer as a club if we make the reduction equal to the pro-rata cost of printing and mailing.

The main consideration is enhanced solidarity among the members afforded by the mailed version.

We use the newsletter to acquaint ourselves with the club's enterprises, purposes, members, mores, and activities. By delving into *the Islander* at leisure, whenever and wherever it is convenient for the reader, we increase our sense of attachment to the club. We read the issue when the mood strikes—in circumstances when the *Islander* is likely to receive attention to its news of happenings at the club. The reader may choose any spot in the house, or any other suitable site. It can be at breakfast, or bedtime, or any other time. Further, competing concerns during a computer session distract our focus from the *Islander*.

We already have the capability of receiving the on-line version that includes dropping from the newsletter mailing list.

We now offer saving the cost of postage and the relatively small cost of printing each additional copy. This works well for those who prefer it, so let's not raise dues for those who appreciate and benefit from the traditional mailed version.

— David Winer

The Canoe Consultant

Getting In & Out

Getting in is where it all starts. However, your Consultant believes that many who would enjoy paddling are put off by the challenge of entering one of these apparently tippy craft.

Tippy they are, as anyone will attest who has assumed the canoe is something like a rowboat. No, the rounded hull means you must distribute your weight on entering, center it, and quickly get it low. Never simply step into a canoe. If solo, you will presumably be entering just astern of amidships so start by crossing your paddle on the gunwales and leaning on it to distribute your poundage. This will stabilize the craft while you lower yourself into a kneeling or sitting position. A less satisfactory alternative is to attempt to grab each gunwale. On entering, place your first foot in the center of the canoe. If tandem, each entrant should act in sequence as above, but additional support is available as one paddler can hold the canoe or dock/shore as the other makes their move.

The more the canoe is loaded, the more it will be forgiving of slight mis-steps as the center of gravity has already been lowered by the packs or picnic baskets. Getting out is the reverse, i.e. cross the paddle and put weight on it, but you will have the confidence of seeing how the canoe has performed and likely feel more comfortable.

The most common and amusing disaster is the “splits” where your weight is half on shore and half in the boat - you can imagine the result. A less obvious mess occurred on one of your Consultant’s trips out of state when a canoe, containing a wanigan or grub box, was overturned when loading in 10' of water. By the time the box was recovered all the labels had separated from numerous tin cans and everyone ate “mystery meals” for the next week.

Next Column: The Violette's Lock Route

[Editor's Note: The Consultant's columns will appear bi-monthly in the *Islander*.]

For Sale: the Sycamore Store

In case any club members want to move as close as possible to the Island without actually becoming caretaker, you now have a great opportunity since the Sycamore Store is for sale. Yes, sadly, the Rogers family marked the end of an era by putting their home on the market. The store was opened in 1919 by club member and Captain "Boots" Johnston and purchased by Mr. Rogers in 1953. Listing agent Diane Borngesser reports that most callers are interested in a commercial opportunity, but since the store closed for business in 1995, it has lost all rights for any use but residential. So if you'd like to make this historic home your own, give Diane a call at 301-656-2500.



-- Sherry Pettie

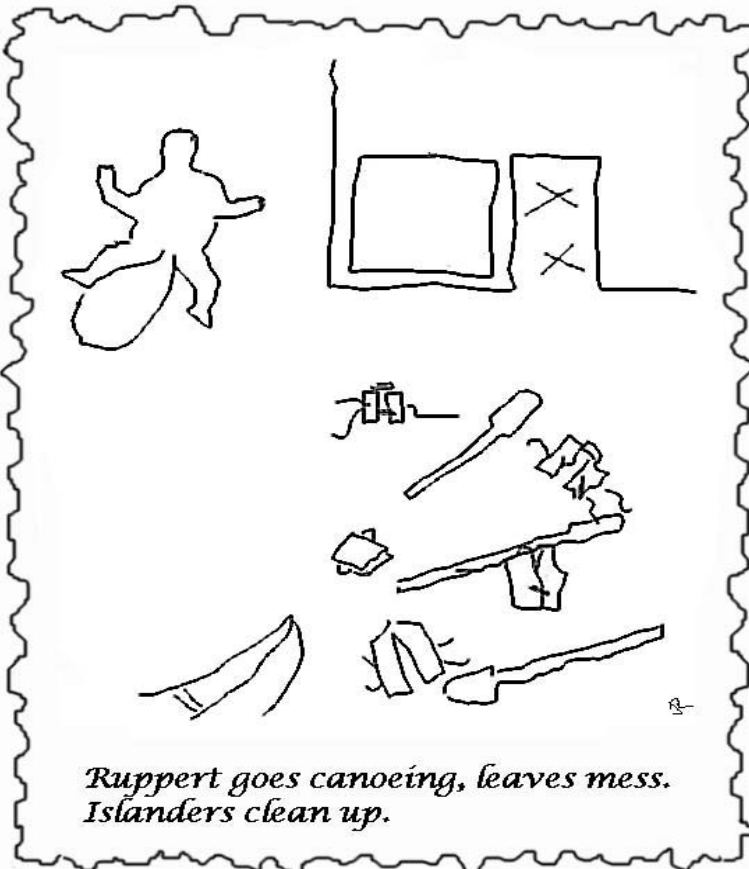
[For the history of The Sycamore Store, see Sherry's *Islander* article at <http://www.sycamoreisland.org/articles/sa199910.htm>]

Holly Syrrakos, our Island archivist, has kindly agreed to provide a monthly glance backward at the Island's history. Another resource on Sycamore history is the Centennial Issue of the *Islander* published in 1985, which includes John Thomson's splendid *Sycamore History in Brief*. See: <http://www.sycamoreisland.org/centenl/sc01.htm>.]

**From the Archives: 75 Years Ago At Sycamore Island
Minutes from the November 8, 1928 Meeting**

The meeting was held on the Island, called to order at 8:25 p.m. by President Wilcox. There were 11 members present, including the President. "The Hallowe'en Committee was congratulated on giving an exceptionally enjoyable party at a smaller expense than customary. The committee appointed to place a gutter about the roof of the side porch reported more and more progress. Moved and passed that the Club give a Christmas dance on Saturday, December 29th. Subscription price of \$2 per couple or \$1 per person to be collected, any profit to go to the building fund. The House Committee plus Edwards and Cole [Captain] was appointed to take charge of the affair. Reese Thomson was appointed to purchase a Christmas present for Mr. Johnston [caretaker]." The club also approved expenditures including \$3.62 due the Sycamore Store, and \$1.19 for gasoline for the "saw." The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m. and the minutes were recorded by Rodger Gessford, Secretary.

Holly Syrrakos, Island Archivist



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

In Touch With Joe...

It's been so long since I've written anything about Sycamore Island that I don't know where to start. The weather has been glorious and I've been trying to soak in these good days while they last. One of my favorite activities is to watch the sunset from the swim float after a cold swim. The sunsets seem more colorful this time of year.



There is still quite a bit of hurricane cleanup left to do but things are getting back to normal here. Having a flood is like having to move and we all know what a big job that can be. Thankfully, the rainfall from the hurricane wasn't too severe and my quarters were spared the dreaded flood of muddy water.

We weren't here during the storm itself and when I canoed over two days later (as the river crested at 11.3 feet) I discovered that we had lost one of our precious sycamores. It's huge expanse spread from where it had stood by the canoe shed, reaching all the way across the field toward Virginia. It lay across the flooded island as the muddy water flowed through its leaves, its giant branches reaching 30 feet up into the sky. I found it difficult to paddle around it, having to cross the strong current on the south side of the island as the big muddy river was carving channels right through the island. The other negatives from the flood were the thick mud (6 inches in places) and the drift-

wood and debris collected in piles by the docks and on the trails.

The mud wasn't all bad however, it was great for mud balls and mud men, (you know, like snow men); it was also the perfect consistency for preserving animal tracks. The beaver tracks became especially interesting because one day we had a beaver expert on the island. He came down to teach the children visiting from Lowell school all about beavers. He was very excited to see all the beaver tracks on the island. In all his years of observing beaver, he had never seen such perfectly formed beaver tracks. He knew a lot about beavers and I learned quite a bit. I think the group from Lowell had a good time too and our electricity was finally working again!



The biggest inconvenience of all wasn't caused by the hurricane but by a little 4-inch rainfall that happened four days later. This waterfall washed the soil away from a large dead tree on the hill above the canal and caused it to come crashing down onto our brand new power line that then pulled down our two brand new utility poles. For the next three weeks there was no power on the island. Luckily my parents own a large house over by Walter Reed Hospital and we were able to stay there. It was strange to have to commute to the island to go to work. It was a relief to finally get back to

normal, well slowly getting back to normal. There is still a tree across the field.

The chain saws have been busy on the island. Gerry Barton and I have been making



use of the island's small saw and John Stapko brought down his big saw and did a lot of the tougher cuts. The plan is to dig out the trunk and make a super-sized Sycamore Island dug-out canoe. Unfortunately a smaller sycamore was damaged when the bigger tree fell; it's the tree that was planted at a wedding ceremony back in the 80's. Hopefully it can be saved. Other projects in progress include new gutters on my quarters and Blair Bower and I are rebuilding a

brick walk and some steps.

Daylight savings time has ended which seems to mark the end of the "busy" season here on the island. No more swimmers coming by for a dip after work, no more fishermen out for a sunset paddle. No more families coming together for a summer picnic. Now, even the monthly meetings will be held somewhere else. We're talking lonely and boring. So let's have a party! I think it would be fun to end the season with a bang and have a big party after the work fest. I'll host (call me) and everyone is welcome to stay after dark for campfire fun. Bring your marshmallows, your graham crackers and your chocolate bars. You can bring your tents and can stay the night! We all deserve to have a good time so come to the work fest and stay for the fun-fest!!

— Joe

Photos by David Winer

**Post-Isabel Workfest: Saturday, November 8th
9 am to 2 p.m., then a pot luck lunch
We Need You!**

“No One Can Answer My Questions?”

David and Sea Langston Sitomer were relief caretakers while Joe Hage was on vacation

So, I said. I like this river, boss. You let me stay here a while.

No, I'm not too old. Well, maybe we could split the job. Jack of Ferries; Master carpenter. That sort of thing. Miss Sea can cook and clean.

You know I think this is the greatest job in the city.

Don't tell Joe? Oh, I think he knows.

If not, he wouldn't deserve to be here. You wouldn't have hired him.

And you? Coming to a mid-August business meeting and no one swims?

Did you see that moon?

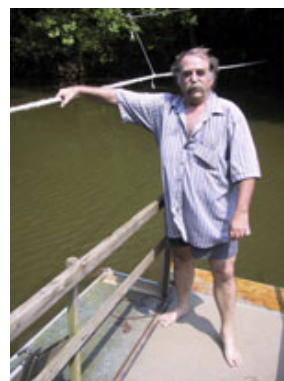
Why are you here in your late summer beans?

When there's midnight paddling to be done.

No one can answer my questions? I get telephone numbers.

I get people I haven't even seen.

— David Sitomer



[This excerpt is taken from the log kept by David. For more, go to the Island website and then through the Caretaker's log until you end up at August 2003. Photo by Norman Metzger.]

The Georgetown University Boathouse (con't)

The August issue of *The Islander* published an article on the proposal by Georgetown University to build a boathouse just north of Key Bridge and adjacent to the Washington Canoe Club. The article quoted from letters and testimony by several members uniformly opposing the University's plans. In response, Ann Satterthwaite, a member and supporter of the proposed boathouse, commented in an e-mail that:

Although it was made clear that the article did not represent any position of the club, it seemed to me an inappropriate article for Sycamore. The newsletter has not gotten into issues outside the immediate geographic area of Sycamore. Even when the easement issue was alive, there were no long, provocative pieces in the newsletter about it. If the newsletter gets into issues beyond the immediate concern of the club, it seems to me we open up Pandora's box. Where do we draw the line?

In this case, there are club members who support the Georgetown University Boathouse, including myself who has been working for 25 years to transform that missing link in the waterfront park system into a park. If an issue is to be discussed in the newsletter, I think there should be an effort to present both sides.

Ms Satterthwaite raises several important issues vis-à-vis the newsletter, and therefore I'm delighted that she has agreed to come to the December general meeting, to be held on the Island (weather permitting) on Dec. 10th at 8 p.m. In Ms Satterthwaite's testimony on May 19th before the DC. Zoning Commission on behalf of the Georgetown Waterfront Park Commission, she observed that

This is a boathouse for collegial crew training. It is not just a place to store boats. Most major universities and colleges today have boathouses equipped with tanks and other facilities needed for crew training. To compete effectively with first class university crews, it is necessary to have a first class training facility and that is what Georgetown University is proposing. [Also] 1) motorized launches for coaches are needed for crew training; 2) Street frontage is not needed in the case of the Georgetown boathouse where it abuts the river and parkland; 3) boathouses limited to use by institutions and public schools for recreational and competitive purposes should be considered a matter of right use; and, 4) parking need not be required as the rowers and staff will reach the site by foot or bicycle.... The planning for this park on the Georgetown waterfront has been a remarkably open, orderly, and public process.In view of this long, open, public planning process, it is surprising that last-minute opposition to the plan has arisen. Where were these people all the years when every aspect of this plan was discussed at Commission meeting after Commission meeting?

All with an interest in this issue and the questions raised should try to attend the December meeting.

-- Norman Metzger

The World Canal Conference, Edinburgh, Scotland

By Carl Linden

Some say that canals are boring and are little more than glorified ditches filled with water. They are wrong. Canals attract our attention in various ways. They are marvels of engineering and technology both old and new. Their creation and careers are intertwined with history, politics and the rise of commercial civilization. Today's canal restoration movement in Europe, the USA and Canada is regenerating communities, opening up opportunities for popular recreation and outdoor activities, and providing opportunities for business enterprises from restaurants to bike shops. People can take voyages of discovery on canals. You can travel at an easy pace on many canals in your own, a rented or commercial boat without the hustle and bustle of modern high speed transportation. You can hike, bike, jog or stroll on canal towpaths.

The annual World Canal Conferences began back in 1988. The conference alternates between the United States and Canada one year and then Europe the next. Last year it was Montreal, the year before, Dublin and the year before that, Rochester (Erie Canal). Next June the conference goes to St. Catherine's and the Welland Canal in Canada linking Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. In 2005 the conference goes to Sweden. The conferences do not overdo indoor sessions and devote much of the conference time to field trips and canal outings. You do not have to be a canal expert to attend. Novices are welcome.



The Falkirk Wheel. Photos by John Winer (l) and Margery Passett (r)

This year it was Scotland's turn to host the conference, held September 24 to 26. The Scots are devoting major resources to restoring their canals. Their ingenuity and inventiveness in coming up with 21st century solutions to characteristic problems of canal engineering is striking. The Falkirk Wheel is just such a solution and was the main attraction for the conferees. (See photos on page 10) Queen Elizabeth pushed the start button of the Wheel at its inauguration several years ago. The wheel lifts and lowers canal boats some 100 feet connecting the Union Canal above to the Forth and Clyde Canal below. The challenge to canal engineers is how to move boats up and down as elevations change. The classic solution is the

lock but when the elevation change is great a long flight of locks becomes necessary and makes slow going for a canal boat. Eleven locks in a row were previously used at Falkirk to surmount the change of elevation. What once took a canal boat hours to negotiate now only takes minutes. The Wheel is a striking example of the new inventions in canal technology. Inclined planes, hydraulic lifts and counter-weight elevators are other means that have been used and, in some cases, are still used for more rapid transfers of boats to different elevations than locks can provide. The Falkirk Wheel is perhaps the most efficient and innovative of these contrivances so far.

Another recent Scot innovation is the “drop lock” which enables canal boats to go under a low highway bridge put across a canal after it had fallen into disuse blocking resumption of canal traffic. Instead of building a costly high bridge over or tunnel under the canal to replace the low bridge, a lock with a pump system is used to lower boats down and under the bridge. This solution is in use at a point on the Forth and Clyde Canal in Glasgow. Here is another example of Scot invention using the principle of the lock in a new way.

In any case, the canal conference in Edinburgh proved to be most enlightening even to a canal aficionado. Shakers and movers in Scotland’s canal revival spoke with the conferees revealing their breath of expertise, know-how and vision. The conference included some delightful social occasions among them a superb banquet at the modern visitors' center next to the Falkirk Wheel with pipers, of course, and musicians present as well as a grand reception at the Great Hall of the Edinburgh Castle hosted by the Minister of Transportation. Of course, Scotland is a wonderful country to visit with its hospitable and witty people, its great natural beauty, intriguing history, and rich culture.

Botched

Carl Linden, in addition to the Falkirk Wheel photographs, also sent along a photo of the cantilever railroad bridge crossing the Firth of Forth near Edinburgh. Carl writes that "it was built after William Botch tried to build a bridge on the same site. It collapsed. Hence we have all heard his name when someone messes up. His successors built the present cantilever in 1892. It has lasted so well because they were able to secure the piers on solid bedrock using Roebling's pressurized caisson method which he devised when he built the Brooklyn Bridge. This was where Botch botched – his piers were not firmly placed on the bedrock. It was hit or miss, and he missed."



Saturday Relief Caretakers November—December 2003

November 1, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Witt Farquhar	301-320-4042
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Whitney Pinger	202-686-5443
November 8, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	John and RG Steinman	301-565-2025
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Morris Coburn	301-563-6435
November 15, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Peggy Clark	301-229-3501
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Bruce Gaber	301-654-7479
November 22, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Roger Herst and Judy Bader	301-320-6436
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Susan Symington	301-229-1058
November 29, 2003	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
December 6, 2003	11:00 a.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
December 13, 2003	11:00 a.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
December 20, 2003	11:00 a.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
December 27, 2003	11:00 a.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	

*** Caretaker Volunteers ***

**To volunteer for Saturday 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 in November

None Reported

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, phone: 301-320-3554, fax: 301-320-4216



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To view this month's Sycamore Islander on the Internet, go to:

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/candy/islander.htm>

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November 2003

- The Falkirk Wheel
- Latest on the Sycamore Store
- Canoeing Ins and Outs
- 75 Years Ago at the Island
- Paying for the *Islander*



So, where's the princess?

Photo by David Winer