



Huddling

Photo by David Winer

# *The Sycamore Islander*

*January 2004*

*Volume 83 No. 1*

## **President's Message**

It's traditional at this time of year to look back upon the past year, and make plans, resolutions and hopes for the next:

**January** found Joe and the ferry stuck in the middle of the channel in water approaching flood stage with debris flowing past. In **February**, Joe and the girls tobogganed down the Island and across the channel, after especially cold weather froze the channel, and snow fell, turning it into a Currier and Ives print.

The Island was closed most of **March**, because snow melt raised the river level to above five feet, leaving Joe, Kelsey and Kaylen lonely at the time of year when Islanders normally start returning.

In **April**, the weather was clear for a long enough period that the well was repaired, bringing clear drinking water for all of us, and allowing us to have our spring flower walk and spring Workfest.

Then **May** brought more rain, closing the Island for three weeks.

The Island didn't re-open until the end of **June**, disappointing many who planned to attend the Midsummer Eve celebration, and delaying the Canoe Cruiser's Downriver Race.

**July** saw the repair of the ferry – water had been leaking into one of the pontoons, causing it to sink at one end, and making it much harder to manage.

**August** saw Joe fly to a much drier environment for his vacation, the high desert in New Mexico. In his absence, the annual Fishing Derby was held on the Island.

The fun and games of the Regatta was held in early **September**, before hurricane predictions forced Joe to tie down the canoes and everything else that was on the Island. Had the water reached the predicted level, the caretaker's apartment would have been flooded, so all his belongings were carried upstairs.

**October** and **November** were spent cleaning up the downed trees and other debris from the storms.

**December** has already been a snowy month, with floodwaters above 11 feet, bringing more downed trees up against the top of the Island.

On an island, obviously, water is a key factor. But this year, we have had over 50% more rainfall than normal. The rainfall, snowfall and river levels have significantly affected life on and around the Island throughout the year. It has certainly made this an interesting year, but next year, I'm hoping for a little less excitement.

During the winter months, the meetings are held off the Island. Star Mitchell will host the next meeting at her home, at 8705 Hempstead Avenue in Bethesda. The meeting will be at 8:00 p.m. on January 14.

— Ann Marie Cunningham

*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 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 February issue is receipt at the Editor's address by January 26th.** Earlier submissions receive priority.

## Minutes of the Annual Meeting December 10, 2003

**Present:** Penny Doolittle, Dick Doolittle, Gerald S. Barton, Lucky Marmon, Bill Marmon, Jim Drew, Jane Winer, David Winer, Bill Eichbaum, Ann Satterthwaite, Brad Coolidge, Mary Vogel, Joe Vogel, John Stapko, Ann Marie Cunningham, Karl Kosok, John Lentz, Bill Bays, Star Mitchell, Blair Bower, Nancy Bower, Marion Schlefer, Mark Schlefer, Norman Metzger, Joe Hage, Renee Dunham, and Peter Winkler

**Call to Order:** The meeting was held at the home of member Peggy Thomson. The meeting was called to order at 8:10 p.m. by President Ann Marie Cunningham. The minutes of the November meeting were approved.

**Communications:** Ann Marie observed that the Club received a mention in the December *Washingtonian Magazine*, its annual Best of Washington issue, as “the hardest club to join.”

**Treasurer’s Report:** Ann Marie circulated the written report by Treasurer Alan Gelb, who was out of the country, and presented a brief synopsis. It contained “mostly good news”: all expenditures other than the *Islander* came in under budget this year. Certain expenditures dropped considerably. After a brief discussion of the proposed operating budget for 2004, the budget was approved. In the discussion, it was explained that funds for proposed improvements to the caretaker’s quarters are separate from the operating budget.

Alan’s report also included a proposal that membership dues (including the cost of the waiting list pass but not the waiting list fee) be increased by five percent. The purpose of the increase is to replenish the reserve fund, cover the cost of construction of the caretaker’s quarters, and account for inflation. In discussion, it was noted that dues were also raised by five percent one year ago, but had been constant before that for about six years. We spent about four to six percent of our reserves this year. Vice President Jeff Komarow spoke in favor of the dues in-

crease: He pointed out that our income was subject to slippage because the waiting list is capped and hence the number of waitlisters is decreasing. He also observed that interest income may be down from this year’s amount. In Jeff’s view, a five percent increase was the minimum amount necessary for responsible management of the Club. It will result in an increase of about \$14 for regular members. The proposal was put to a vote and the increase was approved, by an overwhelming margin. [See pgs four and five for more on these issues.]

Ann Marie also presented the proposal of the Personnel Committee concerning a bonus for Caretaker Joe Hage, in recognition of his excellent work. The proposal was approved unanimously.

**Membership Report:** Membership Secretary Bill Marmon and Lucky Marmon are moving to Singapore for the year, during which time they will be inactive members. Joe and Tammy Belden are taking over the membership duties.

**Editor’s Report:** *Islander* editor Norm Metzger asked everyone to be timely in their submissions to the *Islander*.

**Caretaker’s Report:** Caretaker Joe Hage reported that “everything’s fine” at the Island. He encouraged members to come down to the Island, which gets little use at this time of year. Clubhouse Supervisor Karl Kosok took this opportunity to praise all members and waitlisters who participated in the Fall Workfest.

**Old Business:** The slate of new and continuing officers, previously circulated by Nominating Committee Chair Carl Linden, was formally proposed. Most of this year’s officers have agreed to serve another year. Ann Marie spoke of the great debt we owe to George and Marcia Loeb, who are relinquishing their long-held positions as Entertainment Committee co-chairs. They are being replaced by George and Shelley Malusky. The slate of officers was put to a vote and approved.

Concerning the caretaker’s quarters improvements, Brad Coolidge raised the issue of funding

for the caretaker's quarters. Ann Marie responded that \$50,000 had been appropriated in the past, some of which has been spent. Blair Bower proposed that we contact the US Geological Survey and incorporate their data about flood levels into our planning. Other members agreed that the proposal was a good idea. Peggy Thomson, our host for the evening, spoke of the late John Wiebenson's written statement about building on the Island. The statement will be republished in part in the *Islander*. [Ed: if and when located]

**New Business:** Ann Satterthwaite spoke about the decision to publish, in the August *Islander*, an article about the controversy over the building of the Georgetown University boathouse. She proposed that the *Islander* avoid controversies that have no direct connection to the Club or the Island. In the discussion that followed, there was vigorous give and take concerning the proposal, as well as alternative proposals suggesting that opposing viewpoints on controversial topics be presented in any article. Others, including former *Islander* co-editor David Winer, suggested that we defer to the judgment of the editor. No vote was taken, but Ann Marie and current *Islander* editor Norm Metzger agreed to be more sensitive to the issue in the future.

Jeff Komarow presented his proposal that we raise the number of regular members, from 155 to 160. He asserted that usage of the Island was down and that the Island could accommodate more members. He proposed that after one year, we can reevaluate. Other members responded that usage was down

because of this year's rainy weather. Ann Marie will attempt to have usage data available at the January meeting, when we will vote on the proposal.

Outgoing Membership Secretary Bill Marmon raised the issue of whether we should continue to require that waitlisters with passes present identification cards to use the Island. Captain Tryon Wells, Bill reported, thinks that we should not require the cards. Joe Hage reported that, in practice, they are not checked. It was agreed that we would not send out the passes this year.

**Announcements:** There will be a meeting on December 14 to discuss construction plans. John Stapko thanked Club members for purchasing him a new chain saw. Star Mitchell organized the collection. John's old saw was stolen from his car (at the Clara Barton Parkway parking area) during the Fall Workfest. Peggy Thomson asked that we consider posting the Club's phone number (and ferry combination lock number) on the Club's sign by the canal. Others responded that the number was available on the ferry itself.

**Adjournment:** Ann Marie thanked our host, Peggy Thomson, Caretaker Joe Hage, and everyone who turned out for the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m., and all in attendance repaired to Peggy's dining room for refreshments. The Club's January meeting will be hosted by Star Mitchell, and the February meeting will be hosted by Jeff Komarow.

— Peter Winkler, Recording Secretary

## Motion to Amend Rules Regarding Club's Safe Deposit Box

Currently, only the Treasurer and Recording Secretary have access to the Club's safe deposit box. This motion provides access for the President as well. The purpose is to build in more institutional memory regarding the safe deposit box and the important legal documents it contains (original deed, land patents, Articles of Incorporation, etc.). This motion will be voted on at the January 14 membership meeting.

Additions and modifications are in bold italics:

Add to 16A. President:

***d. With the Recording Secretary and Treasurer, have charge of and access to the safe deposit box of the Corporation.***

Modify 16C. Recording Secretary, h:

With the ***President and*** Treasurer, have charge of and access to the safe deposit box of the Corporation;

Modify 16F. Treasurer, j:

With the ***President and*** Recording Secretary, have charge of and access to the safe deposit box of the Corporation.

## Issues for the Club

Two Sycamore officers, Tryon Wells and Jeff Komarow, address issues facing the Club, issues that were discussed at a very lively December membership meeting, but need fuller and wider examination over the next several months. The *Islander* very much welcomes your views, via e-mail, or even snail mail. Addresses at the bottom of the first page.

### The Future of the Sycamore Island Club

Behind the scenes of the Club's monthly meetings there is a lot of hand wringing over the long waiting list, the Club's threadbare budget, and competing visions of the future of the Sycamore Island Club. The Club finds itself at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, offering an oasis of natural calm in the heart of a cacophonous, ever-expanding modern metropolis. It's no surprise that people want to be members, and considering the demographic realities of the region, there's no reason to think this desire, and their numbers, won't increase over time.

Tight Club budgets and rising costs have been an internal pressure to expand membership for over a decade. The Club has raised the dues instead. Now, a couple of rainy years of underutilization of the Club, a long waiting list and the afore-mentioned budget pressure, are combining to be an almost irresistible excuse to expand the Club's regular membership.

It may be that the Club can expand its membership without changing its character. Or maybe, its character should change as an adjustment to a highly populated 21<sup>st</sup> century future. Several members have long wanted to change the Club's character from a quiet, sleepy, secluded retreat, to a more lively, active, and dynamic Club.

Whatever your opinion of the Club's future character and culture, keep an eye on the progress of the debate in the coming monthly meetings. Again, if it is inconvenient to attend the meetings, the *Sycamore Islander* will accept letters to its editor. Member input is critical, as potentially momentous decisions will probably be made by less than 15 members (a typical monthly meeting attendance). No less than the future character of the Club is at stake.

-- Tryon Wells, Captain

### The Club Asks You Your Age

The Club is in the dark about one critical piece of demographic information regarding members of the Club – member's ages. The Club has never before collected this information or ever needed it. Today however, members are living longer and keeping their memberships longer, while some maintenance activities (like workfests and relief caretaking ferry duty) include difficult physical tasks that are increasingly burdensome on a more elderly membership. These considerations will likely impact future budgets and membership decisions if the Club cannot find members able to fulfill these tasks, a trend that is already well underway.

The Club is requesting all member's birth years in this year's dues notice. This information will only be made available to the Membership Secretary, who will use it to build a demographic profile of the Club's membership, and the Weekend Relief Caretaker Supervisor, who, contrary to rumor, has little appetite in nagging elderly members to risk their lives operating the ferry.

-- Tryon Wells

## Looking Ahead to 2004 and Beyond

As we enter 2004, the Club continues to be in good shape operationally and financially; but we will have to confront a number of significant issues. Historically, revenue from dues and fees has been less than budgeted expenses. The difference was made up from interest on the Club's reserves. With interest rates at an all time low and the likelihood that the Club will dip into its reserves for improvements to the caretaker's quarters, club members will be called upon to decide how to fund the Club's operating and capital improvement requirements.

The Club has done a very good job controlling its expenses. Budget increases for the last few years have been held to the rate of inflation notwithstanding increases in property, casualty, workers compensation and healthcare insurance over which the Club has no control. The proposed budget for 2004 likely will be approximately \$64.5 – \$65 thousand. Our revenue from dues and fees at 2003 rates would likely be in the \$61 – \$61.5 range. An increase of five percent is necessary to close this gap.

The Club members previously had voted to reconstruct the caretaker's quarters. For various reasons, this project was put on hold. A committee is now looking at options for renovating and raising the caretaker's quarters to decrease the risk of having the quarters flooded out. The Club will need to decide how to fund this project, whether in the form of temporary or permanent dues increases or a building fund assessment.

The Club officers will be addressing membership issues in 2004. We will be seeking census information as part of the dues statement for 2004 so we can get a better idea of the age profile of the regular members and the waiting list. In the interim, I believe that the Island can accommodate a modest increase in regular members and will submit a motion for debate at the January meeting to increase the regular membership from 155 to 160. It is, however, not too early to begin thinking about what the membership process should be once the applicants on the existing waiting list are accommodated. I have long been a proponent of first-come, first-served because of its simplicity. However, I have become convinced that it would not be good stewardship to work through the existing waiting list only to create another long waiting list once the Club decides to take new applications. The officers will be looking for input from the membership on how to reform the application process.

--Jeff Komarow, Vice President

### **From Holly Syrrakos, Island Archivist: 75 Years Ago At Sycamore Island Minutes from the January 14, 1929 Meeting**

President Wilcox called the meeting to order at 8:40 p.m., with J. Earle Hummer "acting as Secretary." There were seven members present, including the President. "The Christmas party Committee rendered its report and was thanked for its services. A deficit was incurred by the party held at the Island, attendance being somewhat poorer than would have been the case had it not been for the prevalence of grippe. The deficit was \$19.95....Captain of Canoeing Ackad reported that the ferry had been taken from the river for the winter." The club also moved to pay bills that included \$8.35 for the Islander, \$3.00 for envelopes, and \$4.50 revenue tax.

The acting secretary didn't note the time the meeting adjourned.

## The Canoe Consultant

### Great Local Route: Violette's Lock

Paddling around Sycamore Island is fine, but if you're interested in a different and moderately challenging route, your Consultant recommends the Violette's Lock or Seneca Riffles circuit.

From the center of Potomac Village at the corner of River Road and Falls Road, take River Road west 7.7 miles then turn left on Violette's Lock Road 0.7 miles to the parking lot beside the Potomac. At the turn is a historic marker noting that Confederate General J.E. B. Stuart crossed the river here on June 27, 1863, as he reconnoitered Federal strength before the battle of Gettysburg. In that era, it was called Rowser's Ford, but was later renamed for the last lock tender, Mrs. Alfred L. Violette.

The put-in is across the canal and about 30 yards upstream where you enter slightly moving water. Paddle up another 100 yards then cross the Potomac well above the rubble dam. The downstream phase begins to the left of a white building. It continues for about 1.5 miles through a fascinating tracery of small channels passing beside myriad islands. No need to just press on downstream, but take time to play in the rapids, try a few upstream sections, and look out for wildlife (your Consultant has sighted beaver, deer, and turkey). Whitewater is Class I-II so you should have basic skills. Good water for teaching or with kids.



A memorable lunch or photo stop is near the stonework that survives as the last remnant of a fringing or skirting canal (left photo) built by George Washington's Patowmack Company, founded in 1785 and active (Jefferson was a board member) until taken over by the C & O Canal Company in the 1830s. This type of canal was an early attempt to bypass the impediments to westward navigation thrown up by the Potomac River at the fall line.

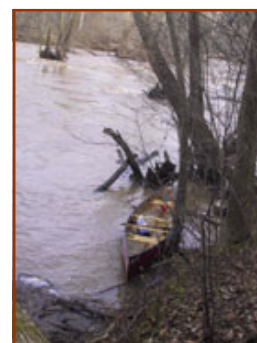
Continue until your bower of foliage disappears and the stream slows. It's now time to return by ferrying directly across the Potomac to a clearing from where

your canoe can easily be carried to the canal for a scenic paddle back to the parking lot. A car shuttle is unnecessary; while another advantage is that the route seems to hold its water well even in mid-summer.

Hint for those Islanders who dislike carrying directly to Clara Barton Parkway: paddle up the canal to Lock 7 where portaging is much less arduous.

*Next Column (March): A few basic strokes, necessary even for this route.*

Photos by the Canoe Consultant's Special Photographer



## In Touch with Joe....

Photo by David Winer



First of all I want to send a great big THANK YOU out to everyone in the club for the generous gifts that the girls and I received for Christmas! I've said this before but it's really great to be here and be appreciated.

Happy New Year everyone! It has certainly been a memorable year for us here on the island. I'm sure we'll never forget our first year on Sycamore Island. Did you hear we had record-breaking rainfall? It's been wet, but it has been a great year! The kids have adjusted to their new schools and seem to be taking the island lifestyle in stride. We're feeling like we're part of this community here by the river, too. I think they like it here, but of course, they don't appreciate it like I do. They don't understand the joy of not being disturbed by the sound of the neighbor's lawnmower, leaf blower, etc. They don't appreciate walking out the

front door and not being surrounded by houses full of people. But I think they do share my joy when we're crossing the river on a December morning and the sky is ablaze with the red, pink and orange of the sun's first rays -- awesome. And we all agree that close encounters with wild animals help keep things interesting.

The news on island maintenance is that we now have piles of trash and debris left by the last flood on December 12<sup>th</sup>. There are logs jammed into the canoe shed and the logs piled up in front of the canoe float are causing the river to dam up where the club canoes are kept. I've been fighting the flu for most of this past month but I'll be getting out there to tackle that problem soon. Some people have offered to help and if you would like to join us we could use the help. It looks like we're going to have to replace the old chainsaw; recently, I've been helpless without one. The steel cable on the swim float needs to be replaced since it was damaged in the last flood.

I finished reading a history of the Potomac River by Frederick Gutheim and I wanted to share this paragraph.

*From the Fairfax stone, where the Potomac rises, to Point Lookout, where it flows at last into the Chesapeake, the diverse yet unified Potomac region has changed in the three hundred years since white men began to settle here. One cannot but conclude that it will change further. This we can learn from history: of the making of Potomacs there is no end. Each age and even each man makes his own. The plastic river is ever shaped anew by a restless nature and a dynamic society. What it has been we have seen: fishery granary, harbor, route, homesite, plantation, hunting ground, mine, power source, factory, capital, swamp, pleasure ground, and more. What it can be remains for us to discover. As men have shaped the river, so it has shaped them. It has made traders, trappers, planters, clerks, miners, farmers, drovers, merchants. What manner of men history will beat out of this anvil no man today can know? But the Potomac will be known for the men it makes. [Frederick A. Gutheim, *The Potomac*, Johns Hopkins University Press; Reprint edition (May 1986), p. 380.]*

Peace, Joe

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From the October/November inaugural issue of *City Musings*, the bi-monthly newsletter of the Kiplinger Library at the City Museum.

“Volunteer Marianne Gill remembers that while riding the Cabin John streetcar from her home in Maryland to school in the District, she saw many children who began and ended their school day using a rowboat ferry. Residents who lived between the Potomac River and the C & O Canal pulled themselves across the canal as illustrated in this John Wymer photograph dated June 24, 1950.”



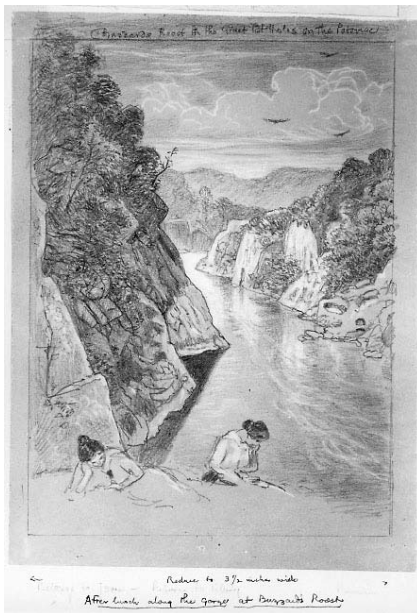
## Windy Run, Cupid's Bower, and other Potomac Places: Help Needed

In 1917, New York physician Robert L. Dickinson came to Washington, D.C., to serve as Chief Medical Officer for the War Department. In his free time, he hiked along the Potomac and drew its spectacular scenery. His idea was to write and illustrate a so-called Washington Walk Book, but instead, World War I ended and Dickinson left Washington. In the 1940s, he donated his drawings to the Library of Congress, where they sat unnoticed until recently discovered by Gail Spilsbury during her research for her just published book *Rock Creek Park* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

"Dickinson's charming pictures show his great love for nature's beauty and mysteries," says Spilsbury. "Once I got into the research behind his art work, I saw that I had a Potomac River book." Spilsbury has spent the past six months making field trips to the sites Dickinson drew—Great Falls, Widewater, Stubblefield Falls, Scott's and Difficult Runs, Sugarloaf, and Seneca. "There are places I haven't pinpointed on a map," she says, "and seek Potomac experts to help me and to tell me any history or stories I might not find in archives."

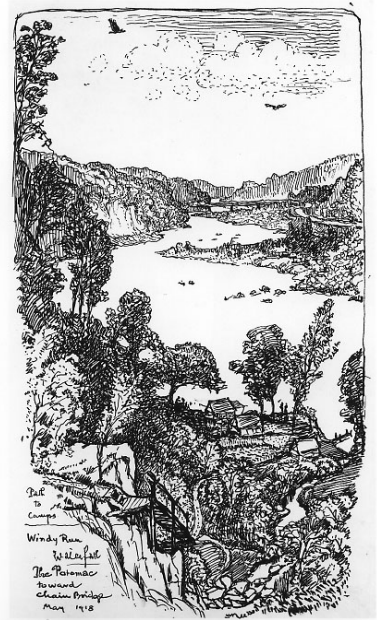
*Castle Passage in Cleft Island* and *Windy Run* are two of those places. Another spot—*Buzzard's Roost*—is on Dickinson's personal map, but Spilsbury seeks anecdotes and personal stories about it. "Most importantly," she says, "a section of this book covers the old summer camps along the Potomac. Dickinson drew them but archives don't have articles or books about them. I was lucky that the Sycamore Club had a newsletter from 1921 with recent anniversary issues elucidating this subject, but I still need to know more about the variety of summer camps along the river—the ones like Trammels, which had proprietors and dining services—and the rustic ones with shacks and hammocks that were probably on private property. Could anyone use another person's private property, or did owners give permission to friends and friends of friends? What social groups came to these camps? What made the camps disappear?—the automobile, the end of the C&O Canal in 1924, the Depression, World War II, land sales, or a combination of all these changes?"

Spilsbury seeks interviews with natives or experts who might shed light on these early-century summer camps along the Potomac and on the images mentioned above. Please contact her at [spilsbury@starpower.net](mailto:spilsbury@starpower.net).



*Buzzard's Roost*, by R.L. Dickinson, 1918. Courtesy the Library of Congress.

*Castle Passage in Cleft Island*, by R.L. Dickinson, 1918. Courtesy the Library of Congress.



*Windy Run Waterfall*, by R.L. Dickinson, 1918. Courtesy the Library of Congress.



## Saturday Relief Caretakers January - February

January 3, 2004	11:00 a.m. - dark	Renee and George Dunham	202-686-6451
January 10, 2004	11:00 a.m. - dark	Dick and Pat Roth	202-686-0270
January 17, 2004	11:00 a.m. - dark	Whitney Pinger	202-686-5443
January 24, 2004	11:00 a.m. - dark	Mike and Anne Savage	703-620-5746
January 31, 2004	11:00 a.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
February 7, 2004	11:00 a.m. - dark	Paul Wohlford and Claire Blanchard	703 848-9440
February 14, 2004	11:00 a.m. - dark	Lousie Meyer	202-328-6834
February 21, 2004	11:00 a.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
February 28, 2004	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!

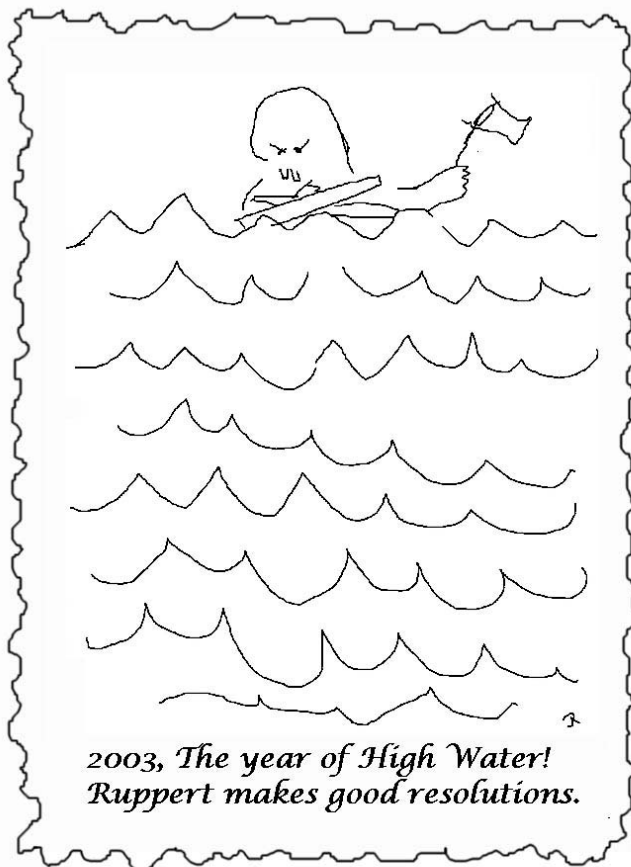
### Large Parties in January

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



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### January 2004

- Violette's Lock
- Island Future
- Sycamore 75 Years Ago
- Cupid's Bower, Etc.



Snow-Docked

Photo by David Winer