



Cold Duck, Anyone?

Photo by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

March 2004

Volume 83 No. 3

President's Message

A member sent me an email expressing her concern about the future of the Club. She referred to an article in the *Islander* that said "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," and expressed distress at the possibility that the Island could lose its character. It occurred to me that perhaps many of you don't know of the pressures for change that are being felt, and how the leadership is responding.

We have gotten a lot of feedback from people on the waiting list about the long wait (one person who was just admitted to membership at the last meeting had been on the list for 9-1/2 years, and the list is longer now than when he got on the list, even though we haven't accepted new applicants in a few years). We have done a few things in the last year to make the wait easier (and possibly quicker), but we are proceeding slowly in order to be sure that we don't adversely affect what makes the Island special.

The first action was the survey that was conducted last spring. The people who responded agreed that something should be done, that the Island was under utilized, and that we could admit more members while still preserving the character of the Island. The survey results led to other questions, though. For instance, how many new members could be admitted without affecting the character of the Island? And how should we do that? Should we just admit new members? Or should we have a new class of membership for people of a certain age? The question on the membership renewal notice about year of birth is intended to see how many members would be affected if there were a new type of senior membership based upon age, so

March Meeting

Wednesday, March 10, 8 p.m.

Diane and John Noble
7024 Arandale Road
301-320-3554

From Glen Echo, go upriver on MacArthur Blvd. Turn Right on Wilson Lane. Turn Left on Broxburn Drive. Turn Right onto Arandale Road. House is on right.

From River Road, Turn toward the river onto Wilson Lane. Go to second right intersection (Laverock) turn Right. Turn Left onto Arandale Road. (First Left turn.) House is on left.

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 e-mail attachments to nm2@bellatlantic.net. **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the April issue is receipt at the Editor's address by Monday, March 29th. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

based upon age, in order that we could control the impact. The second action was taken at the January meeting, when the maximum number of regular members was increased by five. This will slightly shorten the wait, and shouldn't have a major impact on the usage of the Island.

The third thing that was done to make life on the waiting list easier is to allow applicants who volunteer -- as relief caretakers, at workfests, or who support committee efforts -- the use of the Island in exchange for and in appreciation of their efforts. This has the benefit of helping the Island, and helping the applicants become committed to the life of the Island.

This last action will hopefully help to create members that will fit in the “more lively, active, and dynamic Club” that I would like to see. These are members who care about the Club, not only as a place to go for a quiet respite, but care enough to support efforts to maintain and preserve it. This includes the natural environment through such efforts as the Potomac River cleanup, and helping to eradicate invasive plants and promoting the native species. In addition to the natural environment, it includes repairing and improving the clubhouse and caretaker's quarters. It has been quite a few years since significant maintenance has been done to either. And over that time, Mother Nature has taken a toll, most devastatingly in the form of floods. Some repairs have been made after each flood, but it is now time for a major overhaul, as was done to the well last year, which resulted in clear water for all of us.

Of course, major repairs and improvements will cost more than our annual dues can support. One funding plan suggested by a member to me last month was to admit new members, and set their dues aside for the building expenses. The number he suggested was larger than the five that we actually admitted; but we had decided to increase the number slowly, and then determine next year whether we could safely increase the number again, without obvious adverse impacts to the character of the Island. While we will try to set aside the dues from the new members for the building expenses, it will only be a small portion of the total expense. After the building costs are known, we will consider other ways to raise that money, and it will probably be from a number of sources in order to minimize the impact on each member. If you have any suggestions, I'd welcome them. Please come to the next meeting and share them.

— Ann Marie Cunningham

Annual Club Orientation
Sunday, April 18th, 10 am to 1pm

The Sycamore Island Orientation Program for Spring 2004 will be held on the Island on Sunday, April 18th from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Completion of the orientation is mandatory before membership can be offered. All those on the waiting list who have not yet attended an orientation are urged to attend. The program will offer a great deal of information about the island and the Club--and includes lunch. Volunteers from the membership are also needed to help set up, run the ferry, etc., during the orientation. To RSVP, volunteer, or for more information, contact Tammy Belden or Joe Belden, Membership Secretaries, at 301-320-2884 or tbel@loc.gov.

Minutes of the February 11, 2004 Meeting

The meeting was hosted by Sandi and Jeff Komarow

Present: Ann Marie Cunningham; Jeff Komarow, Sandi Komarow, Norman Metzger, Joe Belden, Faith Earll, Jim Drew, Gerry Barton, Alan Gelb, Brad Coolidge, Blair Bower, Nancy Bower, Jane Winer, John Stapko, Renee Dunham, George Loeb

Call to Order: President Ann Marie Cunningham called the meeting to order promptly at 8:00 PM.

Minutes: The minutes of the January 2004 meeting were approved as published in the February 2004 *Islander*.

Communications: Ann Marie Cunningham reported on a communication from Luther Carter, who while supporting improving the caretaker's quarters was also concerned about the increases in dues in the last few years and the prospect of further increases to support the construction. He favored increasing the membership by 40 members and using the additional dues to pay for the construction cost. There was a general discussion of the budgeting process and alternatives for funding construction costs should that become necessary. It was noted that the construction projects after the 1972 flood were funded through special assessments. This is one of several options that will be examined and discussed at future meetings once the Club's plans firm up.

Gerry Barton reported that he repaired the Island's chainsaw by purchasing a part to connect a spark plug wire at a cost of \$1.12 and left a spare part. The labor, priceless! The Club thanked Gerry for his efforts.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Alan Gelb reported there was nothing of note. A question was raised whether the Club was conducting financial audits for the sake of good order. Ann Marie stated that yearly reviews have been conducted and that she would check with Bill Eichbaum, Supervisor of Finance, to make sure that the review of the 2003 books would be performed in the near future.

Membership: Joe Belden, the Membership Co-Secretary, proposed ten new membership candidates, including two from the January 2004 meeting that were conditionally approved. The memberships were approved unanimously. The new members are: Ralph and Betsy Stephens; Darina and Allan McKelvie; Miguel Otero; Phoebe Hamill; Lee Gravette; Elizabeth Gravette; Abby Morrison; Molly Peter and Jeffrey Jay; Mark Feldstein and Kathy Sessions; Carole Trippe and Kit Bigler.

They averaged approximately nine years on the waiting list. It was noted that several waiting list applicants were skipped over because they had not met the requirement to attend a new member orientation.

Building and Planning Committee: Ann Marie Cunningham reported that the Committee did not meet due to inclement weather. The Committee hopes to meet on the Island in March to review the site. Blair Bower reported that he contacted the National Small Flows Clearinghouse to obtain information about wastewater disposal practices. The NSFC is a non-profit organization that helps small communities and individuals solve their wastewater problems to protect public health by providing objective information about onsite wastewater collection and treatment systems. It is associated with West Virginia University and is funded by grants from EPA. Fortunately, two engineering scientists from NSFC planned to be in the area and agreed to visit the Island. They walked the Island on January 9, 2004 with Blair and John Matthews. They stated that the existing septic system should continue to work well with a few suggested improvements. They recommended that the laundry and shower be tied into the septic system; two new drainfield lines be laid in the existing drainfield, and the Club should have the septic tank pumped out. Their recommendations are included in a letter, which will be retained in the Club's files. A lively discussion with colorful anecdotes ensued on the finer points of removing waste from a septic tank. [Editor's note: Oddly, the word "honey" recurred in this discussion.] Ann Marie said that she would ask Tryon Wells and John Matthews to get estimates on having the septic tank pumped out and making other improvements. The Club thanked Blair Bower and John Matthews for their efforts. [Excerpts from the NSFC letter next page.]

Editor's Report: The Editor commented (with good humor, the Acting Recording Secretary believes) that he was raising the grade of the Club's officers from a "D" to a "C" for timeliness in turning in their reports for publication in the *Islander*.

President's Comments: Ann Marie Cunningham reported that Lisa Kliefoth, as Financial Secretary, has been providing to Tryon Wells the information on the ages of club members, which the Club requested on the dues notices. Tryon Wells provided partial results to the officers, which Ann Marie, Dave Winer and Tryon turned into charts and circulated. It was observed that the age distribution of club members and applicants on the waiting list appears to be weighted heavily to people 40 and older. Detailed information will be included in a future edition of the *Islander* when the outstanding responses are received.

Old Business: There was no old business to complete.

New Business: The Club set April 18, 2004 as the date for the next new member orientation and April 24 or 25 for the spring Workfest. [Now settled for Sunday, April 25th] The Membership Secretary will attempt to contact personally the applicants who are high on the waiting list but have not yet attended an orientation. Jane Winer agreed to look into arranging for the spring flower walk. [Quite successfully: See page 7] George Loeb raised the question whether the caretaker has taken a first aid course. Ann Marie will check with Joe. Jane Winer proposed having a club digital camera for use by the caretaker to take pictures of the Island for the Islander and the website.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM. Refreshments were enjoyed and the Komarow family cats were duly admired.

-- Jeff Komarow, Acting Recording Secretary

Excerpts from a Site Assessment Report done January 9th, 2004 by Edward Winant and Andrew Lake, Engineering Scientists at the National Small Flows Clearinghouse
<http://www.nesc.wvu.edu/nsfc/>

As background, the club owns a 5-acre island in the Potomac River near Washington D.C. The island holds a clubhouse, living quarters for the caretaker and his family, picnic tables and boats. The membership totals about 150 people, and while the island is open year round, most use is seasonal, from May to October. There are perhaps 2 or 3 large events each year with crowds of up to 100 using the island at one time. The caretaker's residence frequently gets flooded from the river, and the club would like to relocate it and raise the elevation to the second floor level to help protect the dwelling from floods. They are concerned that the current septic system will not be acceptable for such relocation.

Currently, the onsite wastewater system consists of a 1,000-gallon fiberglass septic tank and 100 feet of drainfield. The drainfield area passed a perc test at 20 minutes per inch. There is ample room to add one or two new drainfield lines, each 100 feet long, keeping the lines 25 feet or more from the river. The caretaker's laundry facility is not tied into the system and should be. The entire system is in a floodplain, but there has been no noticeable erosion, loss of cover, or damage to the septic tank from flood events.

It is our recommendation that the septic system should be "repaired" by adding two new drainfield lines of 100 feet each in the area of the existing drainfield. The laundry facility of the new residence should be connected to this system, along with all other plumbing appurtenances. The septic tank should be inspected for structural and watertight integrity, and should be put on a pumping schedule as needed by the use of the system.

Pumping the tank is a concern, as there is no vehicle access to the island. A septic pumping truck could be brought along the C&O Canal Towpath (subject to National Park Service agreement) and a long hose snaked across to the tank. On a USGS Topographic Map (Falls Church, VA quadrangle) the distance is less than 500 feet from towpath to tank, which is possible to do with a septic tank pumping truck.

....The club would have to contract with a suitable septic pumping service willing to undertake the somewhat unique conditions.

From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist: 75 Years Ago At Sycamore Island

Sycamore Islanders vs. Oysters Oysters Lose in Oyster-Roasting Contest of March 10th

“A thrilling battle was staged at the Island on Saturday, March 10th when some out-of-town oysters, brought to the Island with all their expenses paid by the members who came to view and join in the bout, were annihilated by the Island talent. Our victory was made possible by the attendance of a few Islanders who had never before attended one of our roasts and who were usually skilled at swallowing oysters. At first we placed the new players in the rear rank but they soon showed their mettle at ‘gulping’ oysters off the hot shell and were soon placed right in front of the fire-place, so that they could prevent any oysters from sneaking around the goal-posts.

“As soon as every oyster had been baffled by our technique, balloons were distributed among our younger members and the boom of bursting balloons soon vanished all thought of the defeated oysters. That is one good feature about our Oyster-Roasts. No one ever sits around looking sad about the fate of the oysters, — everyone immediately moves on to the Atlantic City buns or sweitzer cheese, knowing full well that something will pop pretty soon, either a trick cigar handled by Whipple or a balloon handled by Jack or Charlie.

“Then Cole took his place at the piano and sounds came forth. Perhaps we ate one oyster too many, but we regret to say that the singing was not up to standard,—the boys seemed to want to sing too loud. Too much quantity and poor quality. As one of those who was making some of the noise, we feel free to criticize our fellow-singers. At this Saturday’s oyster roast we hope that all the chorus will do better and thus do more justice to Brother Cole’s music. Less Tempo, and more feeling, especially on that one about Yale. Remember, the boys behind the stove sing the first chorus; the brunette ladies, the second; and all the wooden-legged men behind the pool-table sing the third with their hats on.

“Aside from the above, only one untoward event marred the evening. Aubrey Hummer conducted a private penny-roast and egged a number of trusting souls to pick up his hot penny for him. A rule will be passed at the April meeting to prevent the use of anything but cold cash on Sycamore Island or in the waters about the Island.”

The Canoe Paddles from Canada Will Soon Be Here

“Dick Ackad will have the canoe paddles ordered from Canada in about two weeks. If you have already paid for your order, Dick will give you your paddles. If you have not paid for your paddles, please don’t ask Dick for them until you have the cash in hand to give him...”

— From the April 1929 *Sycamore Islander*

[Holly: “So that’s how all those oyster shells found their way to the Island.”]

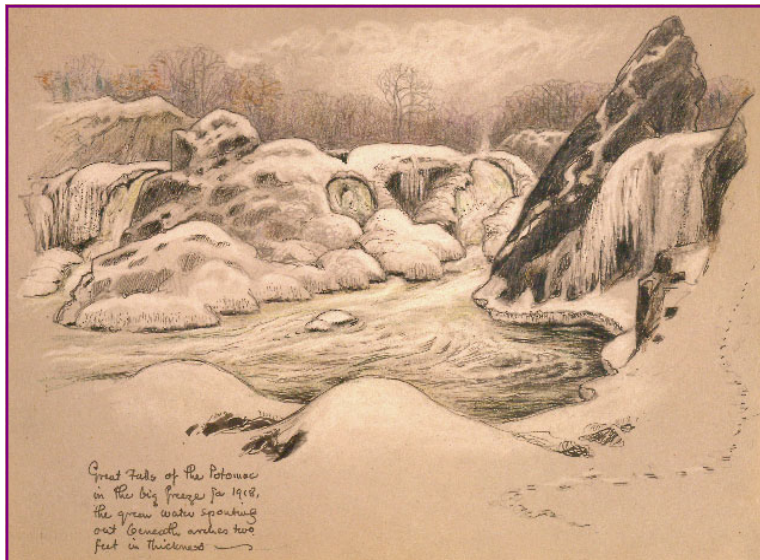
Island Workfest Sunday, April 25th, 8 am to 1 pm

No one needs a reminder that after this winter the Island is in urgent need of serious attention, certainly not after reading Joe's gripping account of the "mini-glacier" that ripped through the slough, playing with the barge and the Captain's float as if they were toys. The Workfest will be on Sunday, April 25th, from 8 am to 1 pm, followed as always by potluck lunch. Please mark your April calendar. The Island needs you!

In Touch With Joe...

It has been a month of icy adventures. We saw the river freeze five inches thick and we enjoyed two weeks of boatless river crossings. One Saturday there was a party here and we all ventured onto the ice on the Virginia side of the Island. It was thrilling to see how far from the Island we could get, cautiously chopping holes in the ice every twenty feet or so. Alas, the warmer temperatures returned and the rain and melting snow caused the river to rise and rise quickly. I was curious to see how the high water would react with the tons and tons of thick ice everywhere. What was going to happen to the floats? When will it be unsafe to walk across the channel?

I woke up one Sunday pondering these questions and, as is my habit, I looked out at the river. Its liquid form was creeping under the ice and flooding the lower reaches of the Island. To my delight I then saw a pair of FOXES playing on and around the fallen Sycamore, right next to the boardwalk! The sun had just broken above the horizon and the trees were casting long shadows as I watched the frolicking silhouettes of the foxes chase each other through the snow. Were they trapped on the Island by the rising river? Why were they still out at daybreak, could they be a mating pair throwing caution to the wind? It does seem to be breeding time; just the other day I was investigating a very strange noise on the hillside above the bridge where I was embarrassed to find two raccoons mating high up in the crotch of a tree.



Great Falls Big Freeze (1918) by R.L. Dickinson. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Many thanks to Gail Spilsbury for providing the sketch.

the steps I watched as tons of frozen water and trees filled the entire slough. The buckling debris stood three feet above the surface of the water. Finally, with the slow deliberation of a river, the ice dam broke and this mini glacier began to move. My first hint that something was happening was when I heard the ferry bell ringing violently. The ferry looked like a mere toy as the ice passed authoritatively. The railing was crushed, the chain broken, and the pontoon dented as the ferry was slammed against the trees on the far shore. This massive ice flow, moving at four or five MPH, took the canoe float on a ride and dumped it two hundred feet from its moorings. The most humbling event was what happened to the Captain's float. Lumber and plywood are no match for this power and I found the float with a big tree standing in the middle of it with splintered wood all around, the picnic table tossed into the river.

John Matthews came down and he helped me fix the broken pulley on the ferry. He bought a new pulley and all we had to do was somehow get up high enough to put it on the cable that holds the ferry. John, with his wealth of knowledge and experience about such things, explained the technique. If you put a tall ladder against a tree near the shore you can just barely reach the cable. Of course if the ladder slips you're going into the cold river! I'm making it seem simpler than it was; when it comes to Island projects there is always a lot of fooling with ropes and chains and lots of trips back and forth to the tool shed. It was a little precarious reaching the pulley from the ladder, but we got it done. It was fun working with John, his know-how and my legs made a good team. It also seemed like the elder was passing on valuable lessons about the way things work on the Island.

I made it safely off the Island that Sunday morning, I needed a canoe to reach the ferry that was still frozen in place, and then needed another canoe to pull myself over the partially frozen channel. Most of the channel was quite thick but where the current was strongest it was clear water for twenty feet. Jumping from the ice pack into the water and then back onto the ice was an exciting adventure but easily managed while holding the rope.

When I returned that afternoon the river had taken on a much different character. No longer was there flat ice with a channel of open water, but a gnarling, twisting, crunching jumble of huge ice blocks with whole trees mercilessly trapped in an onslaught of drifting ice. It was AMAZING!

The Channel between the mainland and the Island had become dammed and everything coming down the river was slowly piling up in front of the towrope. Standing on

Annual Wildflower Walk
Sunday, April 11th, 10 am to 1 p.m.

John Parrish, a botanist with the Maryland Native Plant Society, and RG Steinman will once again lead this very popular event. Starting time and place is 10 am at the Sycamore Island landing, followed by about a half-mile walk to Lock 7, and then on to Cabin John Island. Latecomers can meet the group at 10:30 at Lock 7. Jane Winer cautions that parking is limited at Lock 7, and suggests "folks could meet in the parking lot across from Sycamore Store & car pool to Lock 7. Drivers would cross the (one way) Meigs bridge, turn left at the stop sign, cross the parkway, & drive back downriver to Lock 7."

As to what's in store, John and RG will "seek out bluebells, trilliums, trout-lilies, toothworts, dutchman's breeches, blue phlox, spring beauties and other early spring wildflowers. Trees will be identified too!"

Not least, lunch on the Island will be on immediately after the tour. You need to bring your lunch and drinks; but David and Jane Winer (bless 'em) will lay on the dessert.



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

The Canoe Consultant

Basic Whitewater Strokes

Your Consultant's prior columns presumably enabled readers to enter and exit their canoes (November 2003) and some may even believe they are ready for the recommended Violette's Lock route (January 2004). For many, the answer is "not quite". There remains mastery of a few basic whitewater strokes that are essential, even in Class 1-2 water.

First are the bow strokes: the draw and cross-draw. They are best accomplished from a kneeling position and are intended to move the bow to the right (assume that's the side the bow paddler is on) or left. In a draw, the bow paddler simply leans well out over the gunwale, with the paddle blade parallel to the hull. Don't be concerned about tipping as your partner in the stern should be making a complimentary move on the left. Then it's a series of short, chopping pulls until the bow has been moved to its desired position. Avoid the pry stroke, where the paddle is placed next to the hull which is levered directly, as this stroke is hard to fine-tune and can destabilize the canoe.

Another reason to avoid the pry is that the bow draws often flow seamlessly into cross-draws, while this is not the case with the pry. Your desire with the cross-draw is to move the bow to the left. This is a little more tricky, but not complex. Withdraw the blade from your right side position and cross it over above the hull to the left side. Lean to the left without moving your hands on the paddle. Your left elbow should be pretty much under your chin with the paddle blade as straight in the water and as parallel to the hull as possible. Again, the stroke itself is the same short chop used in the draw. These strokes can be performed in quick succession, as in "Draw, Cross-Draw, Draw". If solo, execute as if you were a bow paddler.

You may be able to guess what a left-paddling stern paddler is doing as a related move. For your draw, the stern does a sweep; for a bow cross-draw a draw of its own. The stern never crosses a paddle over the canoe as the blade might hit a passenger or part of the load.

Your final move for this session will be the forward ferry. The objective is to cross a river that has pronounced current or moderate whitewater. If your canoe, for example, is at the Sycamore Island steps and you want to cross directly to the Island, don't just try to paddle over with your hull broadside to the current or you will surely lose lots of distance and may roll in high levels. With bow upstream and both canoeists kneeling, the stern paddler angles the bow out far enough, not more than 10 or 20 degrees, to let the current press against the right hull and "ferry" you over. All the bowman does is to keep up an easy forward stroke. The stern is in charge with control of the canoe's angle. Practice a bit to get the feel of different angles at varying river levels.

Effective communication is vital. Your Consultant was on a safety boat some years ago when the CCA was running a popular downriver race on the North Fork near Petersburg, West Virginia. Positioned below a heavy drop in the Hopewell Canyon, it became easy to figure the correct "line" through the rapid. Then along came the Episcopal Minister from town and his wife in a beat-up Grumman. They had a bad line so a rescue might be coming up. In mid-rapid he yelled at her, "Draw, Goddammit, Draw!" The good lady quit right there, planting her paddle across the gunwales, then turned and said, "Don't you talk to me that way!" But the river gods smiled on them and there was no dunking, only more dents in the Grumman.

A Sycamore Neighbor: The Washington Aqueduct

By Norman Metzger



A fire on Christmas 1851 destroyed the Library of Congress, then in a single room at the West front of the Capitol. Washington's water supply at the time was a mélange of springs, cisterns, and wells feeding water into wooden or cast iron pipes to government buildings as well as to frequent "diversions" for private uses. That was fine in 1800 when Washington's population was about 3,000 but not by 1851 when some 58,000 lived there. The low water pressure that doomed the Library of Congress punctuated the problem: Washington needed a reliable water supply. Within a year, Congress voted funds for a study and then actual construction of a new source for its water. Study and construction were both put in the hands of Lt. Montgomery C. Meigs, an engineering graduate of West Point, where he had been fifth in his class of 49 (and also above two-thirds of the class in conduct demerits).

Meigs picked a site at Great Falls for his source of water. Water could flow from there by gravity into the city and, with a little assistance, to upper Georgetown. A dam originally reaching about halfway across the Potomac pooled water that flowed through a gate house at lock 20 hard by the Crommelin Hotel (now the Great Falls Tavern). The gate house, which contained 20 iron gates to filter debris, is still there. The water then flowed into a 10-mile brick-lined, and often leaky, conduit that traversed 11 tunnels, 26 culverts, and four stone bridges, moved part way along Conduit Road (now MacArthur Boulevard), and spilled serially into two reservoirs: A receiving reservoir at the District Line formed by damming Little Falls Branch and a distributing reservoir two miles downstream on the Potomac Palisades above Georgetown. The total length from Great Falls to the Navy Yard was 18.6 miles. Records were set along the way, famously the construction of the Union Arch Bridge (now the Cabin John Bridge) linking Cabin John and Glen Echo. Constructed with Quincy Granite, it was when built the longest single-span stone arch in the world, with a 220-foot clear span and a key height of over 57 feet.



Great Falls Tavern, formerly the Crommelin Hotel. Here on November 8, 1853, the President (Pierce), and other officials celebrated the start of work. As Meigs noted in his diary, "The Mayor and the Council of Washington provided a cold collation of champagne, greatly enjoyed by the company. I was compelled to make the introductory address...."

It wasn't easy. Some of the obstacles are familiar, such as stop-go Congressional funding. Others were singular: Not only the Civil War but also the lack of a sheriff. Much of the land along the conduit had to be condemned, and in Montgomery County condemnations had to be approved by a jury of at least 12 locals summoned by the sheriff. But Meigs found that "considerable delay was caused by there being no legally qualified sheriff in the county of Montgomery."

Meigs was very much a hands-on manager, regularly visiting the aqueduct sites from his office at the U.S. Capitol. "He frequently made the two-hour trip to Great Falls, either on his horse Corbo on the towpath or in the Washington Aqueduct carriage, that was, in the hard winter of 1856, equipped with runners." He did that while also managing the extensions to the US Capitol that became the Senate and House chambers as well as building the Capitol's cast iron dome. The aqueduct and the Capitol projects together accounted for about ten percent of the federal budget.

Work on the aqueduct started in 1853; Great Falls water entered the Washington mains early in 1859, spurting out through a fountain below Capitol Hill to the height promised by Meigs in his proposal for the system. Water went to Washington homes about five years later, albeit for limited use – it was turbid and not drinkable until about 1905. Meigs retired after his tour as Quartermaster General for the Union, but returned to design and build the Pension Building at Judiciary Square, now the home of the National Building Museum.

To all his works Meigs brought a forceful temperament and enormous capacity for getting things done, best set out by two comments about him. His mother described her six-year old son as "high-tempered, unyielding, tyrannical toward his brothers, and very persevering in the pursuit of anything he wishes." And Abraham Lincoln, two months after the firing on Fort Sumter and given a military supply system that was chaotic, hugely inefficient, and riddled by corruption, was determined to put Meigs in charge. He wrote to his military chief that "I very much wish to appoint Colonel Meigs Quarter-master General....I have come to know Colonel Meigs quite well for a short acquaintance, and so far as I am capable of judging, I do not know one who combines the qualities of masculine [*sic*, I'm afraid] intellect, learning and experience of the right sort, and physical power of labor and endurance, as well as he." Modesty was not Meig's strong suit: He put his name on every riser of the Georgetown gate house steps and on the plates on the buried pipes. The barge to ferry workers and supplies was, of course, the *Montgomery C. Meigs*.



The Lock 20 Gatehouse.

For much more on this work, there is now *The Washington Aqueduct: 1852-1992* by Harry C. Ways, Chief of the Aqueduct from 1972 to 1991. It is a thorough history, deeply researched and well written. Ways masterfully sets out the difficulties faced in building the aqueduct, the technical (and, at times, daring) ingenuity demanded, and, not least, the strong hand of Montgomery Meigs in getting it well started before he was "diverted" by the Civil War. The book is excellent but its availability is not. It was published sometime in the 1990s by the Baltimore District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, but

I'm told supplies are very limited. However, the *Islander* Editor, generous soul that he is, will be happy to loan his copy out to those interested. Let him know. Other sources for this very cursory story of the early history of the Aqueduct included: "Montgomery C. Meigs and the Washington Aqueduct" by Harry C. Ways, in *Montgomery C. Meigs and the Building of the Nation's Capital*, Washington: Ohio University Press, 2001, pp. 21-48. The quotes in this article come from the Ways chapter. Also C&O Canal National Historical Park: The Washington Aqueduct (http://www.nps.gov/choh/co_aqua.htm) and *A Tour of Dalecarlia Reservoir* from the Palisades Newsletter (<http://www.palisadesdc.org/2000-NL/0600-NL/New0600-2.html>).

Photos by Norman Metzger

Saturday Relief Caretakers March-April

March 6, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Elizabeth and Thomas Gibbon	703-243-9620
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Wayne and Susan Limberg	703-533-8639
March 13, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Leslie Lipschitz and Susan Schadler	301-656-6403
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Paul Hagen and Christine Jahnke	703-533-8639
March 20, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Iris and Larry Miller	202-244-0772
	2:00 p.m. - dark	John and Ann Marie Cunningham	703-876-9165
March 27, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 2:00	Greg Hitz and Mary Quigley	301-229-2998
	2:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
April 3, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
April 10, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
April 17, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.m. - dark	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
April 24, 2004	10:00 a.m. - 3:00	<i>Call to volunteer!</i>	
	3:00 p.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 March: 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

Island Dates

March 8: March Meeting (page one)

April 11: Wildflower Walk (page seven)

April 14: April Meeting

April 18: Orientation (page two)

April 25: Workfest (page five)

May 16: Downriver Canoe Race
(details in April issue)



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

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

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March 2004

- How the Island Got Its Oysters
- The Right Strokes
- The Washington Aqueduct
- Glaciology on the Slough
- Septic Issues
- Wildflowers, Workfest, Orientation



A Bridge Over Frozen Water

Photo by David Winer