



Paddling the Tree

Photo by Kelsey Hage.

The Sycamore Islander

January 2005

Volume 84 No. 1

President's Message

There was a large turnout for the last meeting. It was wonderful to see so many of you. Star Mitchell prepared a feast for us, which was complemented by donations from many of the other attendees. The business that was essential to beginning the Club's next year was completed quickly – the budget was passed, new officers elected (or, in most cases, reelected), and members showed their appreciation to the superior job that Joe is doing as caretaker by voting a larger bonus than the Personnel Committee had recommended.

Because there were many people who do not usually come to meetings, there were many questions driven by curiosity and concern about progress on building plans. Here are a few of them:

Has the Club ever voted to indicate that something should be done about the caretaker's quarters? The building project began about eight years ago, after the two '96 floods that deposited inches of mud throughout the lower level of the clubhouse. There have been two sets of architectural drawings made for two previous failed attempts to fix the problem. The prior attempt ended when we learned that the well had to be repaired and a few other things had to be addressed before a building permit could be issued. While I do not know if there was a vote to begin the project eight years ago, there have been votes on aspects of the project ever since, including appropriating funds (although not nearly enough).

Why do we need to change the location of the quarters? The Potomac River floods at a level high enough for water to enter the lower level of the clubhouse on average every 7 years. And there are predictions of floods at levels high enough that the lower level of the clubhouse has to be evacuated more often, even though the flood may not materialize. The caretaker has a lot to do to protect club and member property when a flood threatens. It is unreasonable to expect that he should have to carry major appliances upstairs to protect them. While I know there are some who disagree with me, I believe that it is also unreasonable to expect that he

Upcoming Sycamore Events

January Meeting: Wednesday Jan. 12th @ 8 p.m. at the home of Alan and Caroline Gelb, 6824 Millwood Road, Bethesda. 301-229-5969.

February meeting: Wednesday Feb. 9th @ 8 p.m. at Carl Linden's home. **Special Guest:** Roy Sewall will talk about his forthcoming book, *Our Potomac, from Great Falls through Washington, DC*. More details in the February *Islander*.

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 normanmetzger@verizon.net. Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell). **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for the February issue is receipt at the Editor's address by Tuesday, January 25th.**

also carry all his personal belongings upstairs. The 1996 floods were the reason the caretakers at that time left. It is in our best interest to keep good caretakers from leaving for preventable reasons. While floods are not preventable, the amount of work and the amount of ensuing distress can be significantly reduced.

When will the members get to vote on the building plan and the financing plan? I can't answer that, because I don't know. I don't know how quickly the Building Committee can meet and bring the plan to a level of detail that will give us a good cost estimate. I don't know how quickly the Building Finance Committee can develop a plan that will raise the needed funds, restore (or maybe even increase) the reserve, and do it in a way that it doesn't have an adverse impact on our members.

Let me tell you what I do know and can promise you.

- At the first meeting of the Building Committee more than a year ago, I told them that my role was to keep communications flowing, to keep you informed of what is going on, to give you the opportunity to ask questions, and to have your viewpoints considered. I have taken this role because I believe that the only way to finally get construction underway is to have all of you feel that you understand the need and the plans, and have had the opportunity to have your viewpoint considered.
- I promise that if you come to meetings or call me, you will get answers to your questions.
- I welcome opinions that may not be the same as my own, so that you will understand the alternatives and the decisions.
- Notice of all key decisions to be made by the members will be published in advance in *The Islander* so that you can attend the meeting and participate in the decision.
- Once a decision is made by the members, I will try very hard to continue to move forward, so it is very important that you ask your questions in a timely manner. We cannot, as has happened in the past, revisit decisions that have already been decided by the membership.
- And, because I don't want to waste your time, or the time of the people who are working hard to make this a reality, I will try very hard when we meet to consider the recommendations of the Building Committee and its financial subcommittee to hold to the agenda, and to restrict the discussion to the topic at hand. Otherwise we risk, as has also happened in the past, riding off in several directions at once. So, if you want to talk about something outside of the main topic, please call me in advance.

I hope that these few meeting rules will make the next meeting, which will be held at Caroline and Alan Gelb's house at 8:00 on January 12th, more productive and more enjoyable for all who attend it.

— Ann Marie Cunningham

Minutes of the Annual Meeting December 8, 2004

Present: Bill Bays, Laurence C. Heilman, Jim Drew, Gerald S. Barton, Norm Metzger, Johnna Robinson, David Winer, Jane Winer, Phoebe Hamill, Ann Marie Cunningham, Harvey Resnik, Dorothy Fall, Carl Linden, John F. Stapko, Bill Eichbaum, John Lentz, Tryon Wells, Judy Lentz, Alan Gelb, Renee Dunham, Jeff Komarow, Joe Hage, and Peter Winkler

Call to Order: President Ann Marie Cunningham called the meeting to order at 8:15 p.m., at the home of Star Mitchell. Ann Marie expressed the Club's thanks to Star for hosting the meeting.

Minutes: The minutes of the November meeting as published in *The Islander* were approved by voice vote.

Election of Officers: Nominating Committee Chair Carl Linden presented the slate of officers, previously published in *The Islander*. There is only one outgoing officer, Recording Secretary Peter Winkler, whom Ann Marie thanked on behalf of the Club. Peter has agreed to continue serving until a replacement can be found. The slate was approved by voice vote, and Ann Marie thanked Carl for his service.

Caretaker: After discussion of Caretaker Joe Hage's services to the Club and the recommendation

of the Personnel Committee, the Club approved a year-end bonus for Joe by voice vote.

Annual Budget: Treasurer Alan Gelb presented the proposed budget for 2005. Alan also observed that, as of now, we are well under budget in our spending in 2004: we have had no major capital expenditures, and Joe Hage's efforts have helped keep costs down. The surplus at year's end will go into the reserve fund. Alan would like to see the reserve fund keep pace with inflation.

The proposed budget is similar to the budget for 2004, with upward adjustments for inflation and larger insurance costs. The proposed budget assumes no increase in dues. Overall, there is a 4 percent increase in projected spending. After discussion, the budget was approved. Ann Marie conveyed our gratitude to Alan for his efforts.

Captain's Report: Captain Tryon Wells reported that the shingles on the roof of the clubhouse are worn out, and will need to be replaced. Tryon is exploring several alternatives, including the possibility of a membrane roof.

Building Report: President Ann Marie Cunningham provided an update on the Building Committee's activities, in particular, the recent meeting of Club representatives with top county zoning officials. The county has at least tentatively approved our enclosure of the stairway area for use as stairs and hallway, a very beneficial development for the Club. Ann Marie will follow up on that meeting with a confirming letter. Ann Marie also reported that the clubhouse is now legally "non-conforming,"

so we can proceed to obtain a building permit when the time comes.

Ann Marie stated that Building Committee Chair Jack Sanders would like to prepare a more detailed version of the previously approved construction plan with the help of Certified Engineer Dick Way, who is donating his services to the Club. After that, Club approval will be sought, and only then will an architect be hired to prepare plans.

There was an animated discussion concerning the proposed construction. Concern was expressed that the membership has the opportunity to vote on the size of the expenditure and the plan itself. Ann Marie stated that the Club at regular Club meetings would make those decisions, and everyone would have the opportunity to be heard and to vote. There was also discussion of how the decision-making process would proceed, and whether consideration would be given to the non-majority building proposal. Ann Marie stated that those decisions had yet to be made, but emphasized that the decision-making would be an open process.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m., after which members gathered to enjoy Star's cuisine and the culinary contributions of fellow members.

The January meeting of the Club will be held at the home of Alan Gelb. The February meeting will be held at the home of Carl Linden.

-- Peter Winkler, Recording Secretary



Madame President aka Ann Marie delivering surplus kitchen cabinets for the Island.

Photo by Joe Hage.

Feeling a Bit Bare on Top?

Star Mitchell reports that "someone left a baseball cap at the meeting at my house. It is tan with a green bill and has the caption of 'Thomas Jefferson Poplar Forest.'" Yours? Contact Star Mitchell at 301-530-3252 or kayakingvstar@aol.com.

The Canoe Consultant

A Pocket History Of The Canoe – Part II

In Part I [*Sycamore Islander*, October, p. 6] your Consultant established the canoe as a basic vehicle for early French exploration of Canada and the U.S. When the British took over North America in 1759 after conquering Quebec, this role continued with the epic cross-country journeys of Alexander MacKenzie in 1789 (to the Arctic) and 1793 (to the Pacific). The Royal Navy even employed canoes, to their regret, for an 1819-21 reconnaissance along the Arctic coast. It was a disastrous expedition led by Lieut. John Franklin in which almost half his party perished. Part of the problem was that frail bark craft were ill-suited to the Arctic Ocean, well beyond the limits of birch trees that might have supplied repair material.

During this period, the fur trade reached its zenith and with it the canoe's essential role in transportation of men, supplies, and pelts. Sometimes paddling 18 hours a day (3 hours before breakfast), the voyageurs covered prodigious distances on the Great Lakes and major rivers, while also penetrating minor waterways in search of beaver and muskrat. Portages involved toting two "pieces" or 180 lbs. of fur at a dog trot. Pride was high and hernias commonplace. When VIPs were aboard, they shared little of the canoemen's daily labors, even being carried ashore to keep their feet dry.

As the middle of the 19th century approached, both exploration and the fur trade were waning in importance. Canadian and U.S. boundaries had become pretty well sketched out, while fur-bearing animals were in decline due to over trapping. Yet, a funny thing happened to the canoe on its way to supposed oblivion – recreation.

On August 31, 1846, Henry David Thoreau left Concord, MA, on the first of his three canoe trips into central Maine. No explorer or trapper, he was seeking the wilderness experience, an increasingly common motivation as the pressures of industrial society led to a greater appreciation of wild places. Thousands of paddlers followed, including Eric Sevareid who, just out of high school, took a 1930 canoe trip from his home in Minneapolis to Hudson Bay, and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau of Canada, an experienced wilderness canoeist. Along the way, some very entertaining books were written, close friendships developed, and paddling clubs formed. The American Canoe Association was launched in 1880 and the Sycamore Island Club only five years later.

The canoe adapted well to these new demands. Birch bark and spruce root were replaced by canvas and wood, aluminum, fiberglass, then Kevlar; however, the canoe's fundamental design continued to be that first viewed by Champlain at the Lachine Rapids near Montreal in 1603. Likewise, paddle materials went modern, but its shape stayed put.

Today, we have jetliners and 18-wheelers to carry us and the nation's produce, but this wasn't always the case. Next time you canoe around Sycamore Island just remember that the little craft has been around for quite a while.

Editor's Note: However, the Canoe Consultant won't be around for a while. The Consultant is taking a well-deserved break but will be back in good time .

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

Selections from the January 1930 *Sycamore Islander*

In January 1930, there were two issues of the *Islander* to publicize the remodeled clubroom, announce a house-warming dance, and remind members that it was time to pay their dues.

The piece that follows harkens back to a time when dogs were allowed on the Island, and perhaps explains why this is no longer the case.

“Big Dog Fight Stopped on Sycamore Island”

“Last Sunday was a nice day, a day on which anyone might well be at peace with the world, and eleven Sycamore Islanders were gathered around the logsaw waiting until the engineers got mad enough to get the engine going. Cole’s dog Jeeves (now know as ‘Jawmauling Jeeves’) and Reese’s dog Chubby (now known as ‘Chawmauling Chubby’) were also at peace with the world and at each other and gamboled lightly hither and yon and back again to hither. But suddenly out of a clear sky, their sunny dispositions turned to what the talkies call stark hatred and they went for each other. Perhaps one called the other the short and ugly word; perhaps one noted some bar sinister on the other’s escutcheon; who knows? At any rate they certainly agreed that the only thing to do was fight it out without waiting to shake hands before starting.

“Messrs. Cole and Thomson immediately whistled and called to their furry friends but were absolutely ignored,—imagine that! Within fifteen seconds we feared that one battler might do the other serious injury and all being humanitarians at heart, we grabbed sticks to wale them and swung our boots heartily on the backs and sides of the struggling contestants, to dissuade them from scratching each other. There were two dogs and eleven peacemakers and we were all bunched together there, the dogs biting and the rest of us kicking and hitting and trying for a hind leg and yelling for buckets of water to throw on ‘em. Those of us who had on more than two pairs of trousers and two pairs of socks tried to get our legs between the hounds but they kept getting from beneath our feet and the forest of legs never seemed to confuse either of them as to the whereabouts of the other’s neck. Well, it was finally ended by several of us getting hold of each collar and dragging them apart and then their owners tied them up with steamboat hawsers to emphasize their fierceness.

“Neither dog seemed badly hurt and they apparently itched to get going again but several of us had bruised shins from wild kicks and we were all pretty well out of breath. If you didn’t see that fight, you missed a good peacemaking.”

In Touch With Joe...

Happy New Year everyone. What a year it's been for me: Two ice climbing trips in the White Mountains, a summer vacation in British Columbia, many canoe runs including Bulls Falls and some great times on Sycamore Island. The best part about this past year is that we had no major floods. I feel so fortunate that even though we were threatened by numerous hurricanes the Potomac remained mostly unaffected. We did have some bad ice last winter, but this year we have all the docks safely on shore away from the power of the ice flows. I hope we get more of that river-freezing cold again this winter so we can go ice-skating. It's great to get a winter crowd of ice-skaters in the clubhouse, warming themselves by the wood stove.

It's been a quiet month here, though there is one member I can always count on to come down if it's sunny and above forty degrees. It looks like there was a small crowd here while I was away on the 18th but most of the time it's just me and the kids, and the beavers.

Speaking of the beavers, they seem especially ravenous this season. They seem determined to cut down every tree that isn't protected by chicken wire and drag it back to their den under the towpath. I want to try to keep all the trees we have. It's terrible to see all our young saplings piled up at the entrance to the beaver den just up river from the ferry landing. I try to keep them away by leaving the outdoor lights on, but they don't seem to slow them down.

The big news on the wildlife front is that I saw a flying squirrel!



Yes, it's Joe in what for some of us would be a moment of self-inflicted terror.

Photo by Duncan Thomson



*Ruppert sights the Solstice
Islanders dream about Summer.*

Ruppert

*Created by
Johnna Robinson*

Saturday Relief Caretakers January -February

January 1, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	David and Jane Winer	301-229-8963
January 8, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Call to volunteer!	
January 15, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Call to volunteer!	
January 22, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Call to volunteer!	
January 29, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Call to volunteer!	
February 5, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Call to volunteer!	
February 12, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Call to volunteer!	
February 19, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Call to volunteer!	
February 26, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Call to volunteer!	

*** Caretaker Volunteers ***

To volunteer for Saturday relief caretaking, contact Candy Means
301-320-5270 or candymeans@comcast.net.

Large Parties

No Large Parties Reported for January

A large party application form may be printed from the Club's web page at
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systems.htm>

— or —

To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, John Noble
e-mail: johnoble@shs.net, phone: 240- 747-4810, fax: 301-320-4216



Winter 2004. And Winter 2005?

Photo by David Winer



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January 2005

- Thoreau, Severeid, and Trudeau
- Why No Dogs?
- Joe on Ice
- Delivering the Cabinets



Red-Leaf Maple.
Painting by Joe Hage.
Digital processing by Jenny Denney.