



In for the Winter?

Photo by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

November 2005

Volume 84 No. 11

President's Message

It's that time of year when I'd like for you to think back to all the special moments that you have had on the Island this past year. Think about the peace and pleasure it has brought into your lives. And think about ways in which you can help to make it more special next year.

Carl Linden is searching for candidates to fill the Club's leadership positions for next year. Most of the current officers will be returning to their positions, which is a testament to how satisfying, rewarding, and just plain fun it can be to serve the Club. Most of the positions require only a small time commitment. One that has been quite demanding is being restructured so that it will demand less time from the supervisors, but more volunteers to accomplish all that has been done in the past. That position is the Supervisor of Entertainment. Almost all social activities fall under that position; and Shelley and George Malusky have been there, behind the grill, for all of them during the last two years. This year, we plan to have others lead individual events, with Shelley and George providing assistance and guidance. This will result in a greater variety of activities and more fun for the members.

Another position that had previously been held by one person but has been handled by a team this year is that of recording secretary. Carl Linden has had the title, but Peter Winkler and Johnna Robinson have also served.

There will be a new president next year as well. I've found it to be a great experience these past three years. It's been quite fun to meet so many members who have such wide interests and experiences, some of whom I now feel are good friends. While I will continue to be active in the Club, I believe it's time for someone else to take the lead.

Please call me at 703-876-9165 or Carl at 703-229-2398 to talk about ways that you might become involved that would fit into your busy schedule. Or, come to the next meeting, the last one to be held on the Island this year, on Wednesday, November 9, at 8:00. You will find it very rewarding to be more involved in Island activities.

— 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 normanmetzger@verizon.net. Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell). **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for the December issue is receipt by the Editor by Wednesday, November 30th.**

Sycamore Island Meeting Minutes, 12 October 2005

The Island meeting was called to order at 8:09 pm by President Ann Marie Cunningham. Twelve members were present: Tryon Wells, Jane Winer, Jim Drew, Larry Heilman, Tove Elfstrom, Gerry Barton, Dave Winer, Alison Levine, Norm Metzger, Peggy Thomson and Ann Marie Cunningham. Joe Hage, the caretaker, was present for part of the meeting.

Norm Metzger reported that he had received a letter from Mark Schlefer, who now lives in Vermont, saying that he and his wife Marion were resigning. They have been members since 1967. Mark was instrumental in revising the by-laws, was the Law Supervisor for a while, and instigated the flood insurance policy. A motion to move them to Honorary Membership was approved.

The Treasurer Alan Gelb was not present, but sent word that expenditures have been within expected limits.

The Captain, Tryon Wells, reported that he had been to Montgomery County offices to discuss procedures for going ahead with the remodeling of the caretaker's quarters. The county officials need 'plans' in order to make any judgments. An architect has been engaged to draw new plans according to the approved upstairs/downstairs version. Only after the plans have been drawn will we go for bids. The architect will specify the materials, and may have a mechanical engineer review the heating/AC design. The architect's fee will not exceed \$2500. There was a discussion about how to proceed past this point. A question was raised about the initial allocation for 'building' (\$50K), and how much of this has already been expended. Ann Marie will get the numbers from Alan. [See the note on page five from the Building Committee co-chairs.]

Old Business: The offending-tree-limb problem has not been resolved, as no arborists have agreed to check the trees for the paltry sum of \$100. We will keep trying. In the meantime, it was suggested that we should increase the amount of our building insurance to cover the possible cost of repairing any tree limb damage. John Matthews is also concerned about the leaning trees that threaten the canal bridge. Although we built the bridge, it was given to the Park Service in the 50's and the trees are on Park property. It is not clear what happened to the access easement we had from the Baltzeys when the Park was established. [Note below.]

New Business: It was moved by Tryon Wells that we get a DSL line for the Island (301-229-4921). The motion was seconded and passed. There was a minor communications snafu over the past weekend when the river was expected to rise and the substitute caretakers were not notified. We will get this smoothed out in the future. Joe's cell number is in the RED notebook. The Workfest, which is scheduled for Saturday, November 13, will address the kudzu problem, and, provide labor to build the new, small canoe rack. Jim will supervise this project. There was discussion of the canoe dock float, its current condition (poor), and possible replacement schemes.

[Editor's note: Norm Metzger moved that Ruppert be asked to come back to the *Islander*, soon. The motion was not acted upon despite murmurs of support; Ruppert's creator, however, was optimistic that Ruppert would soon be back.]

The next meeting will be November 9 on the Island. The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

-- Submitted by Johnna Robinson, Acting Recording Secretary

N.B. Who are the Baltzeys, you ask? So did the Editor. And Johnna of course had a thorough answer: "The Baltzey's were brothers who owned property locally in the 1880's. They had a restaurant across from the Sycamore Store and built two large castles on MacArthur Blvd. They sold lots in the area and advertised local building stone and views 'like the Rhine'. The Club got an easement from them to access the island. The issue is,

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

Selections from the November 1930 *Sycamore Islander*

The lead article, “The Hallowe’en Dance,” opens with, “There’s really no good reason why we should write an article about Saturday’s Hallowe’en Party, practically everyone was there, and it was such a successfully conducted party that nothing exciting happened.”

Nonetheless, a long article followed talking about hot dogs, costumes, and the polka, and mentioning the large number of attendees.

We are reminded of a slower time when we see that the featured story in November was that of the demise of a piece of equipment:

“The End of the Log Saw”

Our gasoline log saw terminated its career on Sunday, October 26th after an eventful career of seven-and-a-half years service during which it sawed up all the club’s firewood but nevertheless came in for some fiery language. However, it’s important to note that the mean things that were said about the saw by those who worked at starting it on cold winter Sundays were simply remarks which were directed in a general and haphazard manner. All in all, it was a good saw and saved us lots of work in getting together our winter wood supply.

Those of us who’ve devoted winter Sundays to loading the saw on the swimming float or on a rowboat and pulling it up to the upper Island really got quite a kick out of the old saw. When it was submerged in the flood of 1924 we cleaned all the mud out of it and put it in running shape again and when parts flew off we sadly gathered the parts together from about the club’s real estate and put them back with loving care. Many members objected to the racket which the saw made but we developed a sort of sign language to use in its presence and were soon able to swear strange and dreadful oaths with just a flip of the hand or a twitch of the nose. We could generally tell when the old girl wasn’t herself by a certain different quality or tone about the clanking and banging. We knew something was wrong on the Sunday when it finally broke down for good and we stopped it time after time—or it would stop itself—to see what could be done. We’d tinker with it and apply household remedies, thinking the complaint was only some passing ailment. Sad to say, we never suspected that it was in the throes of its final illness and that the end was near. So, suddenly, the end came—the main supporting casing split, and clutch went blooey and a few gear teeth flew about. Sadly we gathered up parts and mourned our little Ottie.

We’re now dickering for the same kind of a saw rig but may use an electric motor instead of a gas engine and members [with] jumpy nerves may then come to the Island the year round.

At the end of the *Islander*, the Editor notes, “With this issue the Sycamore Island[er] completes its ninth year of issue. Nine years is a long time and suggestions and comments come once in a blue moon.”

In Touch With Joe....

October brought the rain and after a long dry summer the Island has changed from dusty to its more typical state of muddiness. Amazingly, despite all the rain, the river never rose above five feet and the ferry never had to close. The rain did spell the end of the swimming season; I took my last swim on the 19th.

Lowell School was here and all the kids had a great time. I really love teaching the kids about the Island; I think we should do more environmental education here. We also had a wedding on the Island, the second to ever be held on the Island. Forty guests came down in the rain and had a lovely ceremony complete with French horns.

The beaver have begun their annual harvest and the geese are reclaiming the docks. Strangely, I haven't seen that big buck since I took its picture last month. It's funny, as I get ready for my fourth winter on the Island, the animals down here have become less of something to marvel at and more like neighbors I've learned to live with. Soon the winter waterfowl will arrive.

I'm looking forward to the Workfest and remember that if you get here early you may get to taste some of the Maluskys' barbequed bacon. There is a canoe rack to be built, docks to haul in and leaves to rake. I also want to work on the invasive vines, and there is painting that needs to be done as well. See you on the 13th!



Photo by Joe Hage

Four Poems From a Caretaking Day

What I Think About Sycamore Island

by Si Ross, age 4

I think about canoes and playing pirates in canoes.

I think about playing pirates in the tree house.

I think about seeing two turtles at Sycamore Island.



Turtles

by Garth Ross

Searching for turtles
We lay in the sun
Over the water
On a fallen tree
like turtles

Untitled

by Eva Ross, age 2 ½

Sycamore! and fairies and princesses and princes.

I like the water
and the tree house
and the ferry.
And I like to stand
on the Captain's Float

The Sounds of Sycamore

by Christy Ross

Thump! Thump! Thump!

A woodpecker!

Red head pecking

The piliated eats his bugs above while we picnic on cheese and bread.

Honk. Eerp! Honk. Eerp!

The geese float

downstream

in a crooked line.

Sssssssssssshhhhhhhhh...

The long branches of Sycamore trees sway in the wind.

Softer. Louder.

Swaying.

Clang-a-clong-clink!

The sound of the bells

As we are beckoned to the ferry

to bring visitors

to the Island.

The Ross Family is a veteran waitlister, having applied early in 1997. Photo is by Christy Ross to whom Si and Eva dedicated their poems.

Fall Workfest

Sunday, November 13th

9—2, Pot Luck Lunch

Be There!

Rain date, November 20th



Photo by Joe Hage

Building Progress

The Caretaker's Quarters Building Committee is finalizing the construction documents and bid requirements. We will soon apply for a permit, provide bid documents to several contractors, and envision that we can have the project out to bid by the end of November. We hope to have a discussion on bids at the December meeting.

—Ned Goddard and Chuck Pill, Building Committee Co-Chairs

Ding Dong Replaces Tink Tink

Text and Photos by David Winer

Early in the summer we were talking on the deck, when Jane said, “I’ll get it.” I had no idea what she meant until she started down to the ferry in answer to the bell summons. I hadn’t heard the ring at all. Later, I realized how hard it was for many of us to hear the ferry bell, and thought to look into the possibilities of what could be done. The little cowbells that had been used for as long as I remember just didn’t seem to have the needed loudness. Wouldn’t a larger bell work better?



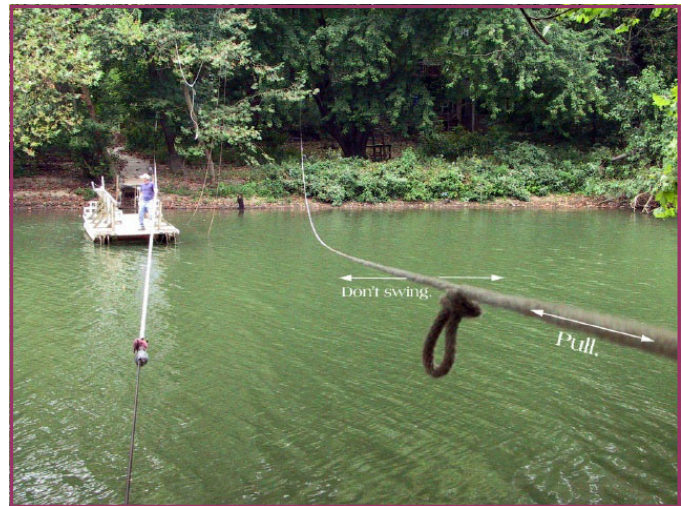
After researching possibilities to replace the cowbell, I discovered that large cast iron bells have been the traditional means to signal such activities as meal-time on the farm, or start of class in school. That ought to be about right for our Island. But where does one find a cast iron bell these days? Why, eBay of course—you can find anything there. Sure enough, there were several listings for such bells, in various sizes ranging up to the ridiculous. Most were in dubious condition. It was interesting that each of the offerings seemed to have a story about the bell’s past in a church or school or some such use. However, there were even new ones available at more attractive bidding than the ones that had histories.

Tryon Wells, our Captain, agreed that we should seek one of these bells and we set a max price for our bid. Here is the eBay description of the auction item:

You are bidding on a new #2, 13 1/2" black cast iron farm dinner bell. It is 8" tall, over all 20" tall and about 30 lbs. You can hear the ringing from a long way off. A good way to call the kids to come home, or the old man in out of the field.

My winning bid was \$29.95, well under our budgeted figure. The cost of shipping such a heavy object was approximately the same. In due course, the bell arrived and I painted it with Rustoleum products, a primer and two coats of flat green enamel. Next a trip to Home Depot for a 6x6 post and hardware to mount the bell—this massive baby was going to need sturdy underpinnings.

Caretaker Joe Hage seemed pleased to assist in the installation. As we dug the post-hole we encountered a thick layer of oyster shells and speculated that this may have been the site of one of the oyster roasts that used to take place “in the old days.” We found a bag of concrete mix to add to the post collar. This was enough work for one session. A couple of days later I managed to attach the bell and test its ringing. The sound effect from as far away as I could reach was pleasing and seemed loud enough.



Joe found the time later to disengage the old cowbell system and rig up the new bell to make it work from the ferry landing by the canal. The attachment geometry turned out to pose a rather difficult problem, but with some trial and error, we got it working properly. Even though this bell is large, it isn’t so loud that it can be heard anywhere on the Island. It seems to reach the swim dock though, and easily alerts the canoe dock and Captain’s Float.

Members should be aware that this bell requires a new technique for calling the ferry. Instead of swinging the rope back and forth, you need to pull the rope along its length. A shock cord at its Island end will yank the rope back. It’s not difficult to pull the rope because the mounting system uses leverage to swing the bell... which then strikes its clapper. Happy clanging!

Saturday Relief Caretakers November — January

November 5, 2005	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Amanda Cannell	301-229-8658
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
November 12, 2005	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.		
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Fran Rothstein and Steve Wolk	301-588-5976
November 19, 2005	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Marianne and Phil Ross	301-229-6690
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Wayne Coy	202-686-5778
November 26, 2005	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
December 10, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
December 17, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
December 24, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
December 31, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
January 7, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
January 14, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
January 21, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
January 28, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		

**** Caretaker Volunteers ****

To volunteer, Maxine Hattery at 202-362-1361 or hattery@aol.com

Looking for a few peaceful moments away from the coming frenzied holidays? There are still a few holiday openings for relief caretaking: 11/26, 2-dark; 12/24, 11-dark; and 1/31, 11-dark. Contact Maxine! Help the Island!

Large Parties

No Large Parties reported for November

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

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



The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818
ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
BETHESDA, MD 20817
PERMIT NO. 1172

FIRST CLASS MAIL

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

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Upcoming Sycamore Events

November Meeting, Wednesday, November 9,
8 p.m. at the Island

Fall Workfest, Sunday, November 13th;
Rain date, November 20th

December Meeting, Wednesday, December
14, 8 p.m. (location tbd)

N.B. Monthly meetings are held on the
second Wednesday of the month.



A closer look at last month's mystery
plant, identified as a Cleome by the Edi-
tor's gardening consultant, who also
noted that it spreads voraciously
like....uh...kudzu. Photo by Joe Hage