



Now about the geese “contributions” to the Island....

Photo by David Winer

# *The Sycamore Islander*

*January 2006*

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## **President’s Message**

As the new President of the Club, I want to thank Ann Marie Cunningham for her leadership and dedication to the Club as President for the past three years, after serving two terms as Vice President when Carl Linden was President. In addition to the issues regularly faced by the President in guiding the Club’s operations, Ann Marie spent countless hours on the project to reconstruct and move the caretaker’s quarters to a higher level – talking to club members about the issue, working with the committees involved in the project, and meeting with county administrators to obtain a special exception or variance that would permit the construction to go forward. Ann Marie guided the Club skillfully through a period of heightened visibility, and the Club is in her debt.

We are starting 2006 in good shape financially and physically, due in no small part to the efforts of Ann Marie, Alan and Caroline Gelb (Treasurers), Lisa Kliefoth (Financial Secretary), Tryon Wells (Captain), John Stapko (Deputy Captain), and all of the handy people who have volunteered their time to work with Tryon, John, and Joe Hage in maintaining the Island. I should also mention our Entertainment Supervisors, Shelly and George Malusky, who have organized and shopped and fired up the grills at our Workfest and new member orientation lunches, and at many other events – all this in between driving their children to soccer games and other activities too numerous to mention.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of members becoming involved in all aspects of the life of the Club. The turnout at the Fall Workfest was just fair, especially since we had terrific late fall weather. Although the members, waitlisters and friends made up in enthusiasm for what we lacked in numbers, the mediocre turnout is a concern. Our membership is not large in relation to the need for participation of a club that operates largely with volunteer help from the members. Expect more publicity of Club events, more communication from the Club and, oh yes, personal calls from me for help.

***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](mailto: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 by the Editor by Wednesday, January 25<sup>th</sup>.**

The Club has had a history of being overly reliant on a few key members – John Matthews, for example, who was the Captain for so long that nobody but John can remember who he succeeded (see p. 6); Marcia and George Loeb, who were the Entertainment Supervisors for nearly as long; and Tryon Wells our current Captain and Webmaster and a past President. This state of affairs is not sustainable. I will be looking for ways to broaden participation in the Club’s activities and am open to suggestions. The Club’s officers decided, for the first time, to use the “Service Membership” to invite a person from the waiting list to serve as Recording Secretary, one of the Club’s most important positions and one that we have had difficulty filling in the past few years. The members approved the decision at the December meeting. For 2006, the Maluskys gave into Carl Linden’s pleas and reluctantly agreed to continue as Entertainment Supervisors. But they need help. This may provide another opportunity for an applicant on the waiting list to work their way into membership.

At the December meeting, the Club accepted with regret the resignations of Blair and Nancy Bower and Brad Coolidge and unanimously voted to make them Honorary Members. Blair and Brad are among the legends of the Club. Their presence of the Island and at meetings, their knowledge, enthusiasm and good judgment will be sorely missed.

Spending a winter day on the Island can be magical – great views of waterfowl and other winter wildlife, stoking up a fire in the heater, some hot chocolate, a walk around the Island. Volunteer to be a relief caretaker on a winter’s day. You’ll be glad you did. Leave your cell phone and Blackberry at home and feel like you’re deep in the wilderness instead of a few miles from the heart of the free world (at least if you ignore the McMansions on the Virginia side).

Best New Year’s wishes.

— Jeff Komarow

### **DUES NOTICES ARE ON THEIR WAY**

Dues notices will be sent out early in January. As discussed in the Minutes of the December meeting, the Club voted to raise dues and fees by approximately five percent to cover increased costs. The Club did not raise dues last year. The dues and fees for 2006 are shown below. Please keep an eye out for your dues notice and pay your statement promptly.

		<u>Other Fees</u>	
Regular Members	\$300		
Senior Members	150	Application	100
Inactive Members	75	Initiation	58
		Canoe Rack**	28
		Non-Rack Boat Storage	15
Waiting List Fee	23	Large Party Fee (21—35 guests)	30
Waiting List Pass*	150	Small Party Fee(11 to 20 guests)	12

\*Waiting List Fee waived for purchasers of Waiting List Passes

\*\*No charge for reg. members.

### Amendment to the Standing Rules

At the November meeting, a motion was made that was known to have strong opposition within the Club membership. Advance notice had not been given, so those in opposition were not represented at the meeting. Knowing that there were strong feelings on the subject, Norm Metzger moved to table the motion to allow fair and balanced discussion. Unfortunately, his motion did not pass.

Throughout my term as president, I tried to be fair to all sides in all actions that were being considered. I am very disappointed that, so close to the end of my term, I was unable to do so in this case. In order to prevent such an occurrence in the future, I propose adding the following subparagraph to paragraph 16A of Standing Rules, the section that defines the responsibilities of the president:

e. Have the authority to require that notice of new business be published in the *Islander* prior to voting.

— Ann Marie Cunningham

12/11/05

Ann Marie Cunningham  
President, Sycamore Island Club

Dear Ann Marie,

There's a time for comin'; there's a time for goin'. For us, the time to go has come.

After 34 years of backpacking, starting when I was 38 years old, encompassing: Copper Canyon in Chihuahua, Mexico, the Gila and Pecos wilderness areas in New Mexico, 11 trips in the Grand Canyon, 4 trips on the Pacific Crest Trail in the Marble Mountains of northern California, Rogue River trail in Oregon, 3 trips in the Olympic Mountains of Washington, Glacier Peak area of Washington, Hells Canyon trail in Idaho, the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana, and the C&O Canal from Cumberland to Washington, my knees are gone. They no longer can take the trail to the Island, nor perform needed work on the island with requisite efficiency.

Now, after 35 years as members, it's time to sit by the fire and reminisce: good times, tough jobs, i.e., digging deep hole for trash disposal, laying brick inside and outside the club house, emptying the sewage container system, being Vice-President during the 1972 hurricane and the aftermath thereof (because the president was in New England), and working with some excellent caretakers.

And so, as of 31 December 2005-----

Adios Sycamore,  
Blair and Nancy Bower

**Fishmonger's (Dallas, Texas) Bread Pudding**  
 (Slightly modified by Dave Winer and served at the December Meeting)

1	long baguette	1 can (8 oz) crushed pineapple
3 ½	C milk	4 eggs
2	C sugar	1 t vanilla
½ to ¾	C raisins or dried cranberries	

- Preheat oven to 350° F.
- In a large (very large if doubled) mixing bowl, break bread into small pieces. Add vanilla to milk, stir mixture into the bread, allow to soak well.
- In a large bowl, beat eggs with sugar, then with pineapple and raisins (or dried cranberries, or both up to ¾ C total dried fruits—these may be soaked in rum first); then stir this mixture into bread mixture.
- Pour into a 9x12 pan OR two 8” cake pans. Bake at 350° about 45 to 50 minutes or more to golden brown. (Recipe may be doubled: 9 ½ x 14 x 2 pan works well. Adjust bake time for a deeper pan; one hour or more will be necessary.) Serve warm, with rum sauce.

**Rum Sauce**

1 stick butter	dash of vanilla extract
1 C sugar	4 ounces of rum (or half bourbon)
Juice of 1/2 lemon	

- Heat first 4 ingredients in a saucepan until well combined.
- Remove from heat. Stir in rum (or rum-bourbon mixture).
- Serve warm with bread pudding.



*Ruppert*

*—Created by  
Johnna Robinson*

**Ruppert raises money for  
the remodeling.**

**Islanders need to cough up.**

## **From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist: 75 Years Ago At Sycamore Island Selections from the January 1930 *Sycamore Islander***

For those of you who remember the December plea for attendance at the fundraising Bridge Party, you'll be happy to know that "the net profits to date total \$65.55—by far the greatest profit made on a Sycamore event since the Civil War."

Nonetheless, January was a quiet month, save for skating (and swimming) adventures.

"A few days ago Richard F. Ackad, our peerless captain of canoeing, was almost forgotten among the ranks of those who fall overboard at Sycamore. Yet within the space of a few minutes, last Sunday, he literally booted his way to fame as a 'sinker.' [If you've been reading long enough, you'll know what that means.] Here's how:

"A bunch of the boys were skating on some ice which had formed in the lagoon above the Gonnick Dock and all was going well. The ice was plenty thick...but Dick, being an inquiring soul, wished to know the thickness of the ice at various points, so he skated over toward Midway Island (the little island between Sycamore and Upper Sycamore [Ruppert's]) to make an official test. Some folks throw big rocks on ice to see how thick it is [this does not work] but Dick believes in the personal touch so he advanced cautiously toward the edge of the ice. And when he reached a point where the ice was thin, he still wanted to be right and he plunked right smack down through the ice into water up to his armpits. Eyewitnesses have said that Dick had a most peculiar expression of surprise on this face as he went through the ice and this would seem to indicate that Dick didn't really intend to kick the ice so hard.

"As so often happens, Dick no sooner got through the ice than he wanted to get out and he did get out right quickly. He must have thought that no one had been looking because he started skating about with a baffled air of unconcern, but as soon as he appreciated that his clever foot-work had been observed, he gave up and rushed to the club house and changed his clothes. A little later he was out skating again and by that time he was ready to announce that he only touched the bottom with one foot, but we don't know whether it was his testing foot or the other foot.

"So Dick is the first one in the water for 1931 and no one at Sycamore has ever tried so hard to get in."

*Archivist's note:* A few weeks ago, I was in my dentist's waiting room and picked up Roy Sewall's book, "Our Potomac." It is a most beautiful collection of photographs of the river, from Great Falls to Washington, D.C. I know others have mentioned it in these pages but I want to add my endorsement as one who lived on this section of the river and saw it in all its glory, at all times of the year. Other than walking on its banks or paddling it, this book is the best way to keep our Potomac close. You can reach Roy at [roysewall@mindspring.com](mailto:roysewall@mindspring.com), if you are interested in purchasing his book.

## A Sycamore Profile -- John Matthews

By Gerry Barton

He's always been "The Captain" to me since I became involved with Sycamore Island in about 1988. John Lee Matthews has been a pillar of the Club for over 30 years and has been responsible for the maintenance and improvements of Club facilities. The ones that stand out in my mind are the raised Caretaker's Quarters, the deck on the river side of the clubhouse, the ferry, the repairs after the floods (especially the current canoe sheds after the '96 flood), and the Captain's Float. Here is the one person who has been most dedicated to the Club and we should treasure him.

John was born in Akron, Ohio on November 22, 1920. It is hard to believe that he was out on the river in his ancient canoe almost every evening until this year. John spent his early years in Akron and Columbus, Ohio, and then moved with his family to Georgetown. His dad had a franchise in Georgetown and later, just before World War II, they lived on 38<sup>th</sup> Street near Georgetown Hospital. He attended Holy Trinity Grade School, Western High School (now Duke Ellington High School), and Catholic University.

When he was about 16 he bought his first canoe for \$35, quite expensive at that time. It was the same model as his current canoe, made of wood with a canvas cover. He went up to Harpers Ferry, lived on a farm, and used the canoe on the Shenandoah River. The 1942 flood took a shed and John later found the canoe in a tree 15 feet off the ground.

John was in the Army during World War II, and spent time in Anzio, Italy, with the 85<sup>th</sup> Division Field Artillery. When he came home in 1945, John bought an Old Town 15-footer with wood frame and canvas, the canoe he still has, albeit with fiberglass and epoxy now covering the canvas. Every winter he epoxies the scrapes and dents to keep it in shape. If you had frequented the Island on weekday evenings over the years, then you would have seen John paddling his 1945 vintage canoe. He paddles in a distinctive kneeling position, and often goes up river to the Beltway Bridge.

The Captain joined Sycamore Island in 1974, and has been the Club Captain for almost half

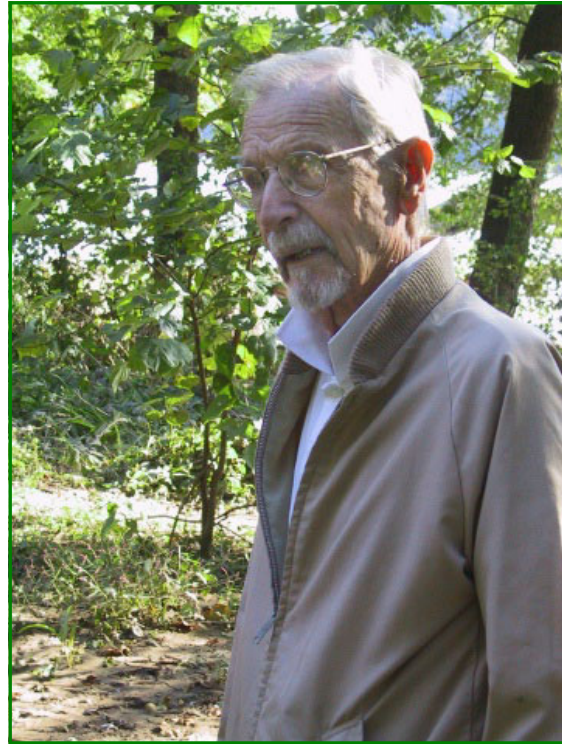


Photo by David Winer

of his membership, over 15 years. He stepped down a few years back but is still concerned with the Club facilities. Recent examples are his work with the current Caretaker's Quarters Committee, the replacement this summer of three windows in the caretaker's living room, the new roof on the clubhouse, the mid-island float by the picnic area (i.e. the Captain's Float), and the new canoe sheds rebuilt after the old sheds were destroyed in the 1996 flood. Other major projects include the addition to the caretaker's quarters in about 1994, the clubhouse deck in about 1997, the magnificent tool shed on telephone poles behind the clubhouse.

John was a contractor who built many houses in the Glen Echo area and in the District and Virginia. His building experience started when he was working as a carpenter in Potomac. He met two other carpenters and they stayed with him until he stopped building. He became partners with a friend who had a sawmill and excavating machines. John built about 500 houses, including over 50 contemporary houses in Glen Echo Heights, a few small subdivisions in Potomac, three townhouse projects in Virginia with about 10 to 20 houses, about 15 townhouses in Silver Spring, and the Timberwood complex in northwest DC. Timberwood was my first contact with him. In 1975 my wife and I were looking to buy a house in DC and we discovered these beautiful contemporary houses built into a ravine just north of Arizona Avenue on MacArthur Boulevard. It wasn't until about 20 years later that I learned that John had built the houses.

Over the years John has owned a number of rural properties around the area. He has a 60-acre place on the Cacapon River in West Virginia. In the late seventies he purchased a five-acre island on the Patuxent River near Benedict, Maryland, on which he built a five-bedroom contemporary house where his mother stayed until the early 1990's. Transportation now included an eighteen foot Albacore sailboat and a small catamaran. After he sold the island, he bought a property on the south shore of the Potomac in Virginia west of the Route 301 bridge. It has a few hundred acres with pine trees and sits about 100 feet above the river with a 2 ½ mile view across the Potomac. Strangely, here is another of my unsuspected connections to John. I had a 21 foot trailerable sailboat, an Aquarius, that I sold to a friend who lives in Glenmont, Maryland. He kept the boat in DC for a few years and then moved it to a friend's property on the lower Potomac. That friend turned out to be John Matthews.

John raised two boys and three girls with his first wife, Jean, who passed away in 1987. He once told me about a vacation trip to Michigan with **all** the kids in one car. Jean was a pathologist and John traveled with her to conferences and meetings in Japan, China, and several times to Europe. John married Barbara Cannon Mathews in 1989. Barbara was a secretary to federal circuit court judges.

Besides his canoe, John spends time listening to classical music and reading. He enjoys reading about World War II, especially about General Patton, General Eisenhower, and the capture of Rome and Anzio. The Captain also has a love affair with his car, a little Ford Fiesta that a treasured local mechanic keeps on the road. Try to schedule some time on the Island to meet and talk with the Captain. If you are lucky he might even show you his canoe. With even more luck you may be able to paddle into your eighties just like John.

## In Touch With Joe....

First of all I'd like to thank everyone in the Club for the generous bonus I received and for the nice gifts that the girls received. My daughter put it so well when she saw her gift certificate: "This Club is awesome!" Thanks for another great year and we wish all of you a super 2006.

This month started with a little reminder of the fury of this river when the Little Falls gauge hit 8.2 feet. I had to scramble to get all the picnic tables tied down before the flood and the receding river left tons of slimy mud on the dock, but, besides that, not too much trouble. It did force us to do a little pre-dawn canoeing to get to the bus in the morning but that's a good thing, right?

I have a bit of bad news; our new bell is broken. It happened when a tree, floating by on the flood waters, grabbed hold of the bell rope and pulled it with such force that the cast iron bell-holder broke off where it was bolted to the 6x6 post. I had to reinstall the old bells temporarily until we come up with a new solution.

We've had a full spectrum of weather conditions this past month. We had a beautiful snowfall that tempted me to break out the skis and had me shoveling the snow from the boardwalk and bridge. We had temperatures cold enough to freeze the canal and I even saw some brave souls ice-skating by Lock House Seven. (The canal didn't freeze here by the Island and rarely does because Walhounding Creek flows directly into the canal. Most creeks are diverted under the canal.) We also had some incredibly mild weather. On December 18<sup>th</sup> the Island was busy with people canoeing in short sleeves.

On a sad note, I saw a deer drown. I was biking home from the community center when I noticed something in the river between the Island and the towpath. It wasn't a giant beaver but a deer. This deer, a young buck with a set of tiny single-point antlers, didn't seem healthy; it was writhing around in the water and sometimes slipping under the surface. It was very close to the mainland shore as I pulled the ferry across and I thought for sure it would get itself out of the freezing water but it just kept struggling and drifted back to the middle of the river. I wanted to get a picture of a deer swimming so I ran to get the camera. By the time I returned, the poor animal was floating motionless with its nose under water. I pulled the ferry out to the animal and watched helplessly as the young deer disappeared.

The winter diving ducks have arrived. It's amazing how they seem to show up right on the first day of winter. I've seen pied-billed grebes, buffleheads and mergansers. I see brown creepers and white-throated sparrows everyday now and the eagles seem to be hanging around again too; but the exciting news is I saw a peregrine falcon! I was paddling around Ruppert's Island when I noticed the large falcon perched on a tree above a group of ducks by the shore. I stopped paddling and tried to drift past the ducks without startling them. The falcon then took off from its perch and swooped right towards me, giving me an excellent view of its distinctive marks. I'd heard reports of peregrines possibly nesting along the river but this is the first time I've seen one here.

I hope to see some of you during these colder months. Let me recommend a winter hike on the Heritage Trail. It's an excellent trail and it's only a short paddle away on the Virginia shore.



Photo by David Winer

The Caretaker is justifiably eager to tuck into Dave Winer's terrific Fishmonger's Bread Pudding. (see p.4)



## Saturday Relief Caretakers January —February

January 7, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Joe McBride	301-564-0235
January 14, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Leslie Lipschitz	301-656-6403
January 21, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	David and Jane Winer	301-229-8963
January 28, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	John Lentz	301-229-4968
February 4, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark	Jeremy Symington	301-229-1058
February 11, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
February 18, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
February 25, 2005	11:00 a.m. - dark		
March 4, 2005	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		

### \*\*\*\* Caretaker Volunteers \*\*\*\*

**To volunteer, Maxine Hattery at 202-362-1361 or [hattery@aol.com](mailto:hattery@aol.com)**

A quiet time at the Island, splendid views, maybe some hot apple cider and just-baked cupcakes—Bliss! Contact Maxine! Help the Island!

### Large Parties

No Large Parties scheduled for January and February.

**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](mailto:jnoble@shs.net), phone: 240- 747-4810, fax: 301-320-4216**



Ann Marie winds up her presidency, Peter Winkler notes it all in his last stint as Recording Secretary and Peggy Thomson likely looks forward to the feast to follow the meeting.



## *The Sycamore Islander*

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Internet, go to:  
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/hesternal/islander.htm>

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### **Upcoming Sycamore Events**

January Meeting, Wednesday, January 11, 8 p.m.. Larry and Anne Heilman, 46 Grafton Street, Chevy Chase, MD 301-657-3953. Grafton Street is one of the spokes radiating off the western side of Chevy Chase Circle, between Magnolia Parkway and Western Avenue. The Heilman's house is about midway between the Circle and Cedar Parkway, and across the street from Peggy Thomson's.

February Meeting, February 8, 8 p.m.. Hosted by Carl Linden

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



John Matthews (see p. 6)  
Photo by David Winer