



Whee!

Photo by David Winer

# *The Sycamore Islander*

*June 2006*

*Volume 85 No. 6*

## **President's Letter**

The heat and humidity of summer swept in with full force over the Memorial Day Weekend. I hope that many of you cooled off by visiting the Island. Perhaps our June meeting will generate more light than heat. Ann Marie Cunningham and our architect are scheduled to meet with Montgomery County's Department of Permitting Services before the next meeting. With any luck we will know whether the plans for the reconstruction of the caretaker's quarters and renovation of the Clubhouse can be permitted without further revision.

One of the Club's singular events, the annual Solstice celebration and sleepover, is scheduled for Saturday, June 24<sup>th</sup> (weather permitting). Club members, waitlisters and guests are invited. There will be a barbeque, potluck dinner, a bonfire, and songs and skits well into the night. Before air conditioning, club members regularly camped on the Island to escape the summer heat. This is your chance to carry on the tradition. [Page six for more]

See you at the June meeting: Wednesday, June 14<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 P.M.

-- Jeff Komarow

***The Sycamore Islander*** is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. 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).

**The deadline for the July issue is Thursday, June 22**

## Minutes: May 10, 2006

The May meeting was held on the Island. Bowls of fresh grapes were passed around as the meeting was called to order in a timely fashion at 8:05 p.m. by President Jeff Komarow.

**Present:** Ann Marie Cunningham, Jim Drew, Renée Dunham, Bill Eichbaum, Tove Elfström, Larry Heilman, Jeff Komarow, John Matthews, Barbara McCoy, Norman Metzger, John Noble, Sherry Pettie, Chuck Pill, Johnna Robinson, Peggy Thomson, Tryon Wells, Dave Winer, Jane Winer, Stephen Wolk.

**Minutes:** A motion carried to adopt the March minutes with no changes. (The April meeting had no quorum.)

**Large Party Report:** John Noble reported that a member had asked to be invoiced for the use of the Island so that her organization could pay in excess of the Club large party fee. This concept was discussed, but the group felt that the Island is not available for commercial purposes of any kind.

**Two motions carried** to approve larger parties that may run over the attendance limit. The parties will be hosted by Barbara McCoy and Alan Gelb.

**Membership Report:** President Jeff reported that there is one vacancy, which the membership secretary will handle. [Your recording secretary, still a wait-lister, was delighted to learn a few days later that this vacancy was being offered to her!]

**Canoe Report:** Jim Drew reported that 13 people attended Frank Daspit's canoe class on Saturday, which was quite successful. Renée, who attended, said they covered a lot of material from basic safety to white water strokes. Everyone agreed that Frank is a very good teacher.

**Captain's Report:** Tryon reported that the heavily attended Workfest was successful and all the floats are out. And also that Joe had single-handedly repaired the ferry prior to the work day.

**A motion carried** that the club authorize a sum of \$50 to reimburse the Caretaker for his insurance deductible for the cost of replacing his tires that were slashed in the MacArthur Boulevard parking lot.

**Swimming Report:** Larry Heilman asked whether the swim float was too far out in the river. Some of those present thought it too far out, some thought not far out enough, some thought too far downstream, and Tryon said it was anchored in the same spot where he puts it every year.

**Building Committee Report:** Chuck Pill reported that the committee had met at the end of the Workfest, and was moving to finalize plans with the architect. Ann-Marie is working with the architect to shepherd the plans through the county permitting process. The committee had responded positively to Pat Berry's recommendation that the architect should be used to prepare the bid documents so that the contractor bids will arrive in a consistent format that the Club can more easily compare. In addition, the architect can separate out pieces of work that the Club itself can perform in order to reduce costs. The committee intends to approach the architect's list of contractors for signs of interest in bidding. When the permit is in hand, the bids are in and the costs are known, that will be the time for the membership to give its approval to go ahead.

**The Club's Approval Process:** A discussion followed on the process for approving the financing scheme and initiating construction. Jeff Komarow and several others voiced the opinion that it was a problem for the small number of members who attend meetings to make this big decision. The process should be transparent, widely publicized, and with a system for maximum participation that might include a longer period of time in which to vote. Everyone, whether or not they agree with the outcome, should feel that the process is fair.

**Gerry Barton's Letter:** The final item on the agenda was to open the floor for a discussion of Gerry's letter in the *May Islander*. Members present voiced opinions both in support and in opposition to Gerry's concern that the building design leaves part of the Caretaker quarters exposed to flooding. As no motion was proposed, no action was taken.

**Regatta:** Norm Metzger announced that the Regatta would return this year because Vicki Judson and Anne Waidman had agreed to take it on.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

-- Sherry Pettie, Recording Secretary

## Report from the Building Committee

The Building Committee continues to push the project forward!

The Building Committee provided its final comments to the architect. The design plans can now be completed, submitted to the County for comment, and an eventual building permit obtained. The Committee is very grateful for the valuable contributions of several club members and their advice in meeting with the county, using the architect to "shepherd" the final drawings through approval, and other fine ideas for proceeding with obtaining county approval.

In the next month, we expect a pre-planning meeting with the County, to seek any comment they may have, make any last minute recommended modifications, and then submit formally for approval. Permitted approval of the design plan will allow the committee to seek formal bids using a bid template developed with the architect to allow for a "level playing field" for all interested parties. This bidding process will then provide a cost basis that our financial committee may review, so the club can proceed in an informed and responsible way on the next steps. Stay tuned for further progress over the summer months as published in the *Sycamore Islander*.

-- Ned Goddard and Chuck Pill, Building Committee Co-chairs

## “The Rules About Building in a Floodplain”

By Ann Marie Cunningham

Last month's *Islander* contained a letter by Gerry Barton that questioned the direction that the building renovation was heading, and suggested alternatives. Those who have been actively following this matter know that both of his alternatives were considered and rejected. [N.B. The Editor's Note accompanying the letter listed the major reasons for the rejection.] I'd like to provide you with some of the background.

The original goal was to do exactly what was suggested in that letter: to raise the quarters above the likelihood of flooding in the quarters. The project began after the two 1996 floods that entered the clubhouse and damaged the caretaker's quarters. The late John Wiebenson, an architect and member of the Club, designed an addition on stilts that would have connected to the clubhouse at the second level by the kitchen, extending back from the caretaker's living room. This plan was rejected six or seven years ago because it provided less living space for the caretaker than the current quarters. A second, similar plan was then designed. It was rejected because we learned the rules about building in a floodplain.. Section 19.45.01 of the Code of Montgomery County Regulations is entitled Floodplain Regulations. Here are two of many discouraging passages:

- A. *In the One Hundred Year floodplain the following regulations will apply:  
All new residential development is prohibited.*

It would be necessary to obtain a floodplain permit rather than the usual building permit. The application must contain:

*Copies of the permit or a written statement from the issuing authority indicating that a permit is not required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wetlands Division, and/or Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Waterway Permits Division where applicable.*

Despite the fact that there is no text in the regulations that hints of any possibility of obtaining a special exception or variance, I reviewed all the variances that were granted by the Montgomery County Board of Appeals in 2005 and 2006 to see if any were in a floodplain. There was none. There were, however, two variances that were relevant to our situation, but both adversely so. In one case, a variance was granted to build a structure on the side of the property rather than rear, because the back yard was near a stream. Construction is prohibited in a stream buffer, which is defined as 100 feet from a stream. The other case allowed the construction of a pool closer to the property line than normal. This was because the requirement for a 30-foot setback from a well was considered to be more important than the setback from the property line. Both the Wiebenson plan and the second plan would have placed the quarters directly above our well.

Dean Brennehan, an architect who wants to use the Sycamore Store as his office, came to a meeting at the Club more than a year and a half ago, and discussed his plans. As of May 17, he has been unable to get a special exception to allow a professional office in a residential zone, despite the fact that the law allows that, because three neighbors have objected. In our case, if we were to try to obtain a variance, the people who might object are not neighbors, but organizations whose goals I support, and some of which I might actually belong to. Organizations like the Potomac Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy, and others that promote the preservation and restoration of rivers and wetlands might well oppose us in a hearing. For these and many other reasons, the Club voted in October 2004 to stay within the existing footprint of the clubhouse and to pursue a renovation plan that would achieve our goal of providing a better home for the caretaker. The plan that the building committee then selected and recommended to the members of the Club was the second alternative that Gerry listed in last month's article.

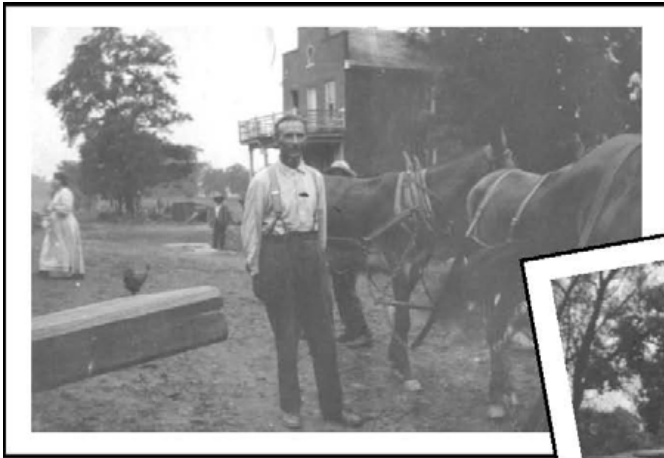
After three very tempestuous Club meetings, the members voted in April 2005 to reject the committee's recommendation (and my personal preference) and instead to select the current plan. Many of you know my frustration about being a leader in the club. There are regular and repeated efforts by people who are not happy with decisions (and not just about the building effort) to try to overturn them. This has been a big part of the reason that there have been at least four people who have led efforts to renovate and improve the quarters, and that it has taken so many years.

I think it is important to consider what the approved plan does provide. By moving the kitchen upstairs, it provides more living space for the caretaker above the flood level. It provides for much improved facilities (Have you seen the bathroom in the quarters?). And, while part of the apartment is on the ground floor, there is much more total space for the caretaker. It also provides improvements for the club members. There will be a bigger space for meetings and parties. The club kitchen will be improved. Our bathrooms will be improved as well.

An architect has completed the details of the design, and we are about to take it to the County for permits and to seek bids. We do not yet know what this will cost. While considering the two plans, the committee sought outside expertise to provide estimates on the cost. A professional engineer and a building contractor provided estimates on each plan that ranged from \$130,000 to \$180,000. At that time, the plans had little detail, as an architect had not yet been hired. As soon as we secure a building permit, we will seek bids from contractors interested in doing the work. You will be kept informed of our progress.

## From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist: 89 Years Ago At Sycamore Island

In July of 1917, a small group of Islanders made their way up the C&O Canal by barge. They took their canoes so they could return from the Monocacy Aqueduct by way of the Potomac River. These photos serve as a reminder of the many years Sycamoreans have enjoyed the river.



(Left and below) Capt. William Fisher of [barge] U-67. He piloted the barge from Glen Echo to the Monocacy Aqueduct.



(Left) Islanders Howard Schladt, Paul Cathcart, Bill Conboye, George Schladt.



(Above) Sycamoreans and the Fishers on the rear deck.



(Left) In the Seven Locks above Cabin John.

*Next month: The Potomac trip.*

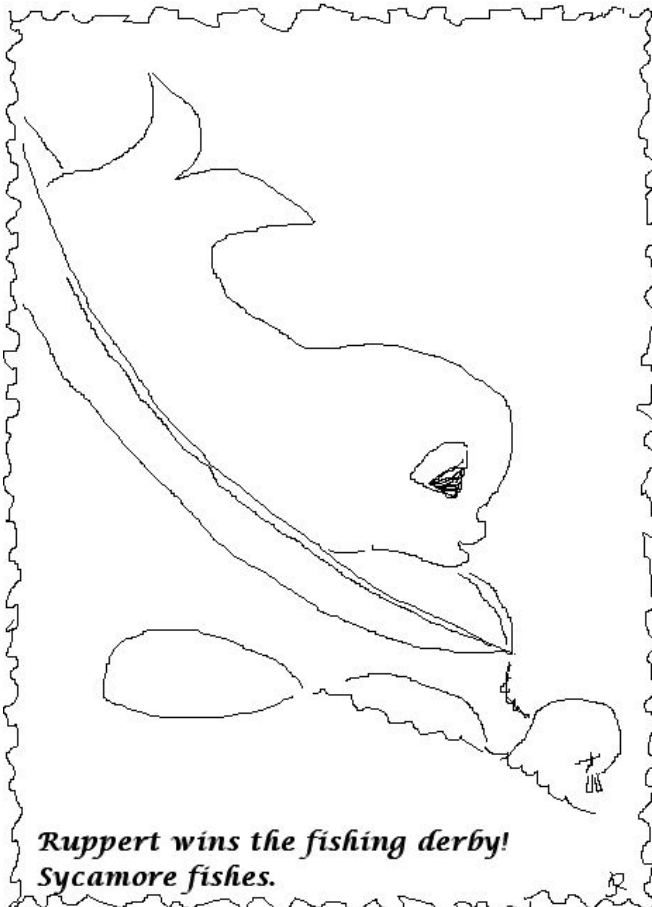
## Summer Solstice River Song Party and Sleepover Saturday, June 24

Come to the Island to celebrate the longest day of the year with swimming, canoeing, barbequing, singing, and a bonfire. All members, their guests, and waitlisters are welcome. We will begin at 3 pm, grills will be grilling by 5, and music begins around 7. Bring a potluck dish to share, things to grill, and drinks. Bring songs about rivers to sing. Come enjoy the Island and all its magic and beauty on this wonderful solstice time, and camp overnight if you wish. Since the Caretaker will be away, breakfast will be hosted by Sherry Pettie (please call her to RSVP at 202-965-5366).

Reminders: The Island is dog and alcohol free; no glass bottles. Please pack out your garbage and help clean up. No unaccompanied children. All members and guests, please sign in on the ferry board.

See you there!

— Whitney Pinger and Sherry Pettie



*Ruppert*

*—Created by  
Johnna Robinson*

## In Touch With Joe....

### Wednesday -- May 3, 2006

We got the swim dock out on Sunday; but these cool nights are keeping the river from warming up to a comfortable bathing temperature. Maybe I'll jump in before the end of the week. I just saw another ground hog! How many can there be?! I saw two northern orioles yesterday and I think I heard a Prothonotary warbler. It must be May. The eagle chicks are growing fast and their grey downy feathers have changed to black flight feathers.

### Tuesday -- May 9, 2006

Now that all the goslings have hatched, I'm trying to encourage the geese to go somewhere else. I chased some geese from the lawn but instead of flying away they just waddled as fast as their webbed feet would carry them. I was puzzled at first but then realized that they must be molting their flight feathers and simply can't fly right now. Once they can fly again I hope they leave; I'm tired of cleaning up the docks after them. Today, I'm going to take a cruise on the Schooner Sultana. It is a schooner used for environmental education and it looks really cool, like a big pirate ship. I'm going as part of my "Weather and Climate" class and it should be a lot of fun.

### Thursday -- May 11, 2006

I'm pleased to report that I figured out what made the smoke alarms fail. I installed all the new smoke detectors and the system still didn't work. I then discovered a damaged input jack, replaced it and now we can all sleep safe again. The young squirrels are big enough to roam around on their own now. They're only slightly smaller than the adults but jumpier and not as good at climbing. I saw one fall from a tree yesterday. I paddled up to Minnie's Island last night as the sun went down and then paddled back in the moonlight; it was beautiful. On the way I saw two crows chasing a barred owl as it flew off with one of their offspring.

### Monday -- May 15, 2006

There was a mix-up on Saturday and we had no relief caretaker here until 3:00. It was suggested that a reminder e-mail be sent to all the relief caretakers. Saturday morning I had my coffee down at the captain's float. It was so nice to sit in the sun and watch the pink fog burn off the river while the multitude of birds welcomed the day with their joyous songs. Cedar waxwings filled the trees above us. I have one ground hog living at the head of the Island and another living near the house under a big sycamore. That's at least two that I know about. I guess I'll leave them alone as long as they don't try to move in under the house.

### Friday -- May 19, 2006

I often see solitary sharp-shinned hawks but I have never seen two together as I did yesterday. They circled around me several times like two jets in perfect formation. Can one wood duck lay and hatch 18 eggs? That was the question I had this morning as I stood on the captain's float and watched a lone female scurry off with her long parade of tiny offspring. Maybe they have ducky daycare. The nighthawks are out in force. It is really incredible and hard to believe just how many of these streamlined fliers congregate over the river at sunset. I've seen nighthawks before and it is not uncommon to see six or eight of them over a field in Rock Creek Park or down at the beach, but to see nighthawks swarming like mosquitoes is rare. I counted sixty from my chair on the captain's float! There was another tame pigeon on the Island yesterday; it had bands on its legs and didn't seem afraid when I bent down to pet it. Two years ago there was a white pigeon that stayed with us for a couple of days as well. I saw a pair of common mergansers during my paddle last night, could they be nesting nearby? I know the weather has been cool but I thought all the mergansers headed north two months ago; very strange. There is a northern oriole nest visible from the towpath near the steps. The nest is really cool; it looks like a tiny, hanging basket. The mulberries are in and I see cedar waxwings feeding there daily.

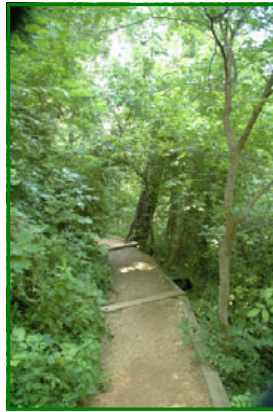
### Friday -- May 26, 2006

I bought a new toilet for the women's bathroom yesterday, carried it all the way down here and realized that it was missing parts. I wasn't going to carry it out and return it so I had to go to the hardware to replace the parts I needed. I'm ready to install it today. I wasn't sure that we needed two toilets up there but last week's large parties convinced me. I just hope that having another toilet doesn't double the number of backed-up clogs I have to fix. No sooner had I fixed the toilet upstairs than another one in the men's room started leaking. It looks like the bolts holding the tank need to be replaced. The toilet is another one of the old five-gallon ones (the new one needs only 6 liters to flush), but I'll try to repair it anyway.

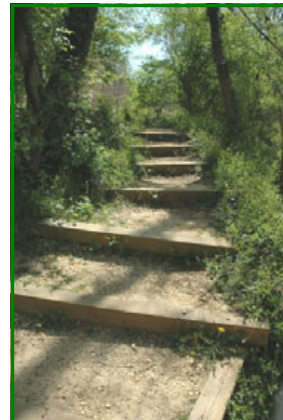
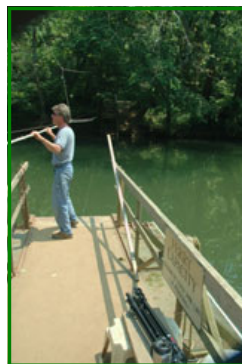
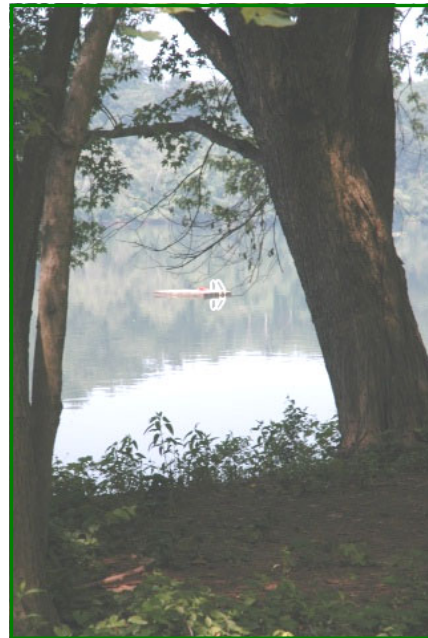
### Canoe for Sale

Mad River Explorer, 16.5 ft,  
Kevlar; Olive Green, 54  
lbs. \$950/ negotiable, Call  
Warren Brown at 202-625-  
7773 or 443-454-3079

## A Visit to Sycamore



Photos by Norman Metzger





## Saturday Relief Caretakers June — July

June 3, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Ann & Witt Farquhar	301-320-4042
June 10, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00	Howard and Susan Weiss	301-320-3766
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
June 17, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
June 24, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark	Ginny Fowler	301-229-3734
July 1, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
July 8, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
July 15, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
July 22, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		
July 29, 2006	9:00 a.m. - 3:00		
	3:00 p.m. - dark		

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

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

## Large Parties

Date	Time	Who	What	How Many
07-Jun	noon-5pm	Alan & Caroline Gelb	Faculty Party for Son's Grade	35
10-Jun	11-2 pm	Eric Simpson	Cub Scout Picnic	20
11-Jun	3 pm-dusk	Norman & Nancy Metzger	Playreaders	15
24/25-Jun	3 pm	Whitney Pinger	Solstice & River Song Party- all members	30
01-Jul	12-7 pm	Marianne & Phil Ross	Birthday Party	35-45

**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: 301-468-6433**



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*Internet, go to:*  
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### Upcoming Sycamore Events

June Meeting, June 14, 8 p.m. At the Island

Summer Solstice River Song Party and  
Sleepover, Saturday, June 24, 3:00 p.m.

July Meeting, July 12, 8 p.m. At the Island

N.B. General Meetings are always at 8 p.m. on the  
second Wednesday of the month.



Get your terrific T-shirts!  
Courtesy of the Hage sisters,  
Kelsey (left) and Kaylen.  
Photo by David Winer