



Beaverling Along

Photo by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

September 2006

Volume 85 No. 9

President's Letter

I have already received several newsletters with reports that begin "I can't believe that the summer is over already." So I won't begin that way. There is still plenty of warm weather ahead, and the water temperature in the Potomac is continuing to stay above 80°. There is no time like the present to come down to the Island and go for a swim. Also, I hear that the fishing has been great. The fishing derby was held in mid-August and was a rousing success. I expect that we will hear stories at the next meeting about the one that got away! By the time you get this issue, the rejuvenated Sycamore Island Regatta will have been held on Labor Day. I hope the river gods favored the event with good weather.

I received a telephone call recently from a local historian who is writing an article on the history of Sycamore Island for the September 2006 issue of *élan*, a local magazine that focuses on Northern Virginia writers and artists. The writer became interested in Sycamore Island when she came across the photo collection of George Steiger while helping a family take care of materials from the estate of someone who had recently passed away. George Steiger was born in 1869 and was a member of the Club. His photo collection includes seventeen pictures of Sycamore Island, including pictures of a canoe jousting tournament. The collection was donated to the Fairfax Public Library. I am hopeful that the Club can obtain copies of the photographs for our archives. Once I get more information, I will be in touch with our archivist. I also have called the magazine's editor to get copies for the Clubhouse and archives.

After failing to get quorums for the June and July meetings and canceling the August meeting, it's about time that we got reacquainted with each other. There WILL be a September meeting on the Island on Wednesday, September 13th at 8:00 PM. The Building Committee is meeting earlier in September, and we will get a report from them on the status of changes required by the County fire code. I also hope to review maintenance and repair issues as a run-up to the fall Workfest scheduled for Sunday, November 12th. Mark the date!

See you in September.

-- 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. Telephone: 202/544-6027 or 202/445-5436 (cell).

The deadline for the October issue is Wednesday, September 27

From the Archives

*Maybe 59 Years Ago At Sycamore Island
From a local Washington newspaper*

Maj. John A. Newman, flew his Republic amphibian [seaplane] to land at Sycamore Island—this news from the *Washington Post* in 1947. More news about Newman and the Island appears in another article. Unfortunately, the clipping has no date or attribution.

Titled: He Just Can't Get Enough Air

How would you like to go climb a tree? John A. Newman, 32, likes it fine and just prove it, that's exactly what he does every night.

Rocking gently to and fro in the arms of a black walnut tree, Newman spends his sleeping hours in a 12-by-9 foot hut 40 feet above Sycamore Island near Glen Echo.

Although the hut seems to be precariously balanced on three logs lashed to the twin trunks of a soaring tree, it is really secure against the mightiest gales, (Potomac variety.)



The article continues but is lost to us. Can you find Newman's tree?



At the Derby

Photo by David Winer

Preserving the C&O Canal – Our Historical Neighbor

By Kent Halstead

Sycamore Island is surrounded by magnificent scenery, the most exceptional being, of course, the immediate encompassing Potomac River enjoyed by members in all its many uses. Almost as close is a “river” of an entirely different sort, a constructed 184-mile, narrow waterway and adjacent towpath, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Taking twenty-two years to build and completed in 1850, the C&O Canal begins at sea level in Georgetown, D.C., eventually rising via 74 lift locks to approximately 605 feet in the Allegheny Mountains at its terminus in Cumberland, Maryland. Despite these dimensions, when finished, the Canal was already out-dated due, in large part, to the gathering momentum of early rail service. Yet the Canal continued in use for 73 years until 1924, providing a most leisurely, if not efficient, means of transportation. While not as majestic as the river, the Canal is every bit a treasure; and, historically, of likely even greater significance and delight to its many users.

This brief article brings to your attention the problems faced by the Department of the Interior’s National Park Service in maintaining this now 156-year-old landmark. Understaffed and facing more numerous maintenance problems than one might expect, the Park Service deserves our wholehearted support and encouragement.

We focus here on one of the Canal’s many feeder sections, the 17-mile length from Violette’s Lock No. 23 downriver to Lock No. 5, 1 ½ miles south of Sycamore Island. A feeder dam next to Violette’s Lock diverts water from the river through a control lock, Inlet Lock No. 2, into the Canal system. A similar 5-mile system extends the Canal through Georgetown to its present day terminus.



Photo by Norman Metzger

The system’s feeder inlets provide continuous river water into each section. Water traverses around each subsequent lock through shallow feeder streams called bypass flumes. You can see these flumes typically running beside each lock. To make up for evaporation and seepage, river water must be continuously fed into the Canal at each inlet lock. Fish accidentally enter here as well and essentially remain captives of the system. Water levels in each section are controlled by drains to the Potomac with the spillway levels set by adding or removing wooden blocking boards.

Without commercial use, the Canal, as with most neglected human construction, has succumbed in part to the impairments of nature. The visible broken tree limbs are easy to see; the more serious leakages are not, and herein lies the difficulty. The major sources of Canal leaks are rotting tree roots which eventually hollow out a space for water. Less frequently, the tunnels of borrowing rodents, moles for example, do the damage. In every instance, a very small leak soon widens through soil erosion to a real outpouring. And usually it takes this sort of break to be noticed. Most small leaks emerge undetected in the underbrush, or, in some instances, actually exit underwater in the Potomac! So, the lesson here is that if you see or hear the slightest indication of running water near the Canal, alert the Park Service.

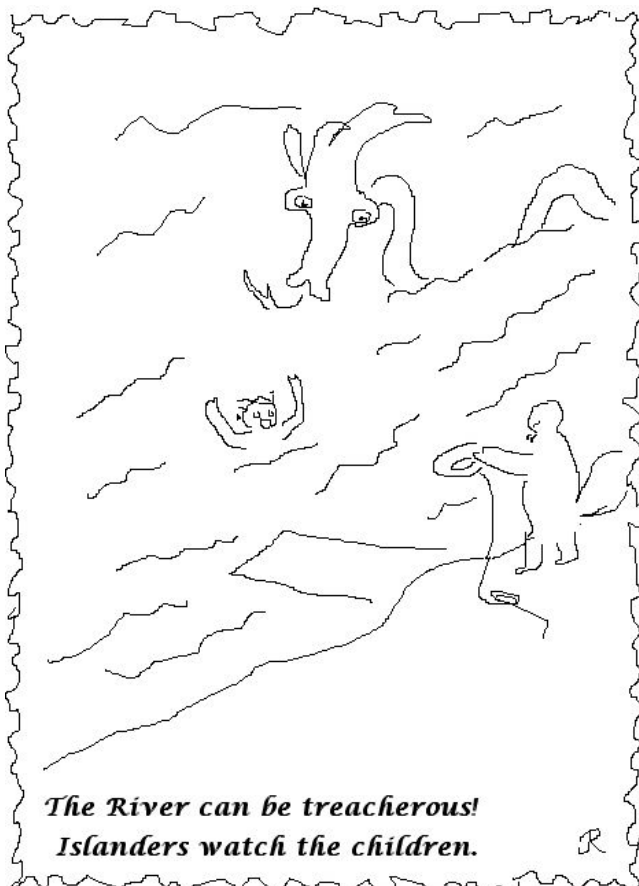
Once a leak is detected, how is it repaired? First, the Canal water must be lowered to dry out the site. In rare instances, when repairs are not an emergency and require a lengthy repair period, a coffer dam may be constructed with bypass pipes to allow water to pass the damaged area and continue in the Canal. Then the hole and adjacent area are hollowed out and filled with sodium bentonite, a sealant mix which, upon wetting by water, swells 15-18 times its dry size creating a permanent plug. The immediate area is then packed with pro-

tective clay, clay being highly resistant to water erosion. All of this — locating, draining, reconstructing, and refilling — is time consuming. Adding to the problem is that not all repair materials may be kept readily at hand and additional help may be needed for major repairs.

The section of the Canal adjacent to Sycamore Island is one of the earliest sections built by the original Canal company. It was rebuilt by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The policy of the National Park Service for this old section is to maintain a full level of water in the Canal during non-winter months. (During the winter the water level is lowered to protect the Canal and minimize the risk to people attempting to get on the ice.) This mandate in our area is, unfortunately, far easier assigned than performed. In May and June of this year, four new breaks occurred: below Pennyfield Lock No. 22, at Mary's Wall at Great Falls during the installation of a new sewer line, between Locks Nos. 10 and 11, and near milepost 7 in the Glen Echo/Cabin John area.

The Park Service has its hands full. It attempts to maintain the water level in the Canal at its historical 1.5 to 2 feet below the edge of the towpath; but years of erosion and an acceptable margin of safety prevents this in many areas. At best, a steady but modest input flow is possible. Large downed trees are removed, smaller ones left as cover for fish and turtle perches. All-in-all, the Park Service's mission is fully compatible with the objectives of the Sycamore Island Canoe Club.

We can support the Park Service and aid in the Canal's maintenance by reporting all possible leaks and speaking up for additional resources to preserve this treasured bit of history. The address for correspondence is: National Park Service, C&O Canal National Historical Park, 1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740. Contacts are: Kevin D. Brandt, Superintendent and Bob Hartman, Deputy Superintendent (301) 714-2201; Bradley Hofe, Acting Chief of Maintenance (301) 714-2239; and Larry Umberger, Maintenance Mechanic Supervisor (301) 767-3705.



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

In Touch With Joe....

The summer is winding down now but it has been an incredible month here on the Island. The river has been clear and low (I saw someone cross the river by walking on top of the dam!) and I've been swimming every day. The fishing has been exceptional as well and the fishermen have been regular early-morning bell-ringers. It has been the busiest month since I started here and it's been fun to see the Island active with people. We've had so many swimmers that I had to buy more "noodles". I also bought a volleyball and badminton birdies to go with the net I put up. There was a good turnout for the Fourth Annual Fishing Derby. Many fish were caught and many Malusky burgers were eaten. It's been four years since I first moved here and, even though I'm preparing for a flood as I write this, I still feel like I won the lottery when I got this job.

It isn't all fun and games, though. We replaced the pulleys on the ferry and I installed a brand new rope across the river to pull the ferry. (No one is sure the last time the rope was changed; but I'm guessing it's been at least twenty years.) I also had to unclog the sink in the ladies room. That might not sound like a big job but it ended up taking me over three hours and left me, and the men's room,

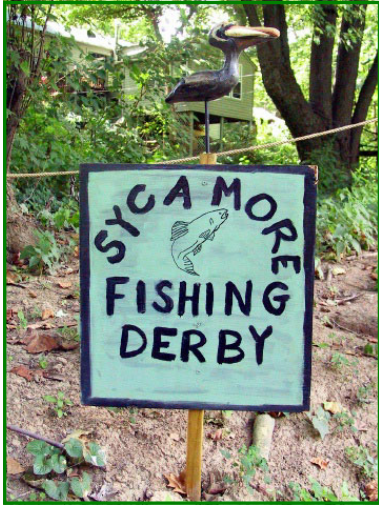


Photo by?

very dirty and soaking wet. Nothing is ever easy in this old place. August has also become the time when I clear out the clutter and try to get rid of anything we don't really need. It's good policy, when you live on an Island, not to have a lot of excess junk once flood season comes. I also built a partition in the girl's room to gain them some privacy and to foster a little family harmony in a small house.

I want to start planning for the Fall Workfest on Sunday, November 12. We had such a good turn out for the last Workfest that I want to get prepared now. I'm looking both for ideas about what needs to be done and for volunteers to help get supplies and organize the work crews.

See you on the Island!



Photos (mostly) by David Winer

Saturday Relief Caretakers September — October

02-Sep-06	9:00 a.m. - 2:00	Mark Brenneman & Ann Kip	301-432-0082
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
09-Sep-06	9:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
16-Sep-06	9:00 a.m. - 2:00	Bob & Penny McNulty	202-887-5990 x 101
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
23-Sep-06	9:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
30-Sep-06	9:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark	Rich Lodish	301-656-2148
07-Oct-06	10:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
14-Oct-06	10:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
21-Oct-06	10:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		
28-Oct-06	10:00 a.m. - 2:00		
	2:00 p.m. - dark		

****** Caretaker Volunteers ******

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

Large Parties

October 7, 2-7 pm, Sue and Greg Super, 60th Birthday Picnic, 30

October 29. afternoon & evening, Cecily Abram, summer end party, about 30

A large party application form may be printed from the Club's web page at
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systeps.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: 301-468-6433



The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
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*<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>
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Internet, go to:
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/epopee/islander.htm>*

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Sycamore Events

September Meeting—Wednesday, September 13, 8:00 p.m. At the Island.

October Meeting—Wednesday, October 11, 8:00 p.m. At the Island.

Fall Workfest, Sunday, Nov 12, 9 am to 2 pm

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



Strong hands
Photo by Joe Hage (maybe)