



Attenhut!

Photo by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

October 2006

Volume 85 No. 10

President's Letter

This month's letter is a reminder – as if Club members needed reminding – of the power of one. The action (or failure to act) of one person can make a world of difference. The September meeting did not happen because we were one member short of the ten members necessary for a quorum. This is the fourth month in a row that we have not had an official meeting because we did not have a quorum. I could flatter myself and assume that everyone is so satisfied with my presidency that they see no reason to attend the monthly meetings. Maybe Club members feel that the Club is like Congress; if there is no quorum, then we can't make matters worse. Or, perhaps, it's the old "let the other guy do it." Whatever the reason, the Club does not run itself. The message I take away from our inability to get a quorum is that the Club cannot continue to rely on the same small group of members to get the job done. We need new and old members alike who have not been active to step up to the plate. It is embarrassing that the Club has four vacancies that have not been filled for four months because we could not have an official meeting to vote them in.

One of the issues to be discussed at the October meeting is whether to allow the *Washington Post* to do a story on the Fall Workfest in return for the right to place the story and past articles on our website. You need to attend the meeting if you want to have input into the decision.

The October meeting is scheduled to be held on the Island on Wednesday, October 11th at 8:00 PM. This is the last meeting on the Island until March 2007. We need members who are willing to host the November and December meetings. Please contact me at 202-492-2003 if you are interested in hosting either meeting.

-- 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 November issue is Wednesday, October 25

From the Archives, Holly Syrrakos, Archivist

83 Years Ago At Sycamore Island From the June 1923 *Sycamore Islander*

I evidently ran across the first official issue of the *Islander*. It is small in size—a half sheet. Numbered as Vol. 2, No. 12, its selling price was 15 cents a copy. Rodger Gessford was the Managing Editor, and the Editor-in-Chief was Aubrey Hummer. Seems like a lot of positions for a small “magazine.”

On page 2, the following appears:

“The *Sycamore Islander* Now A Club Activity”

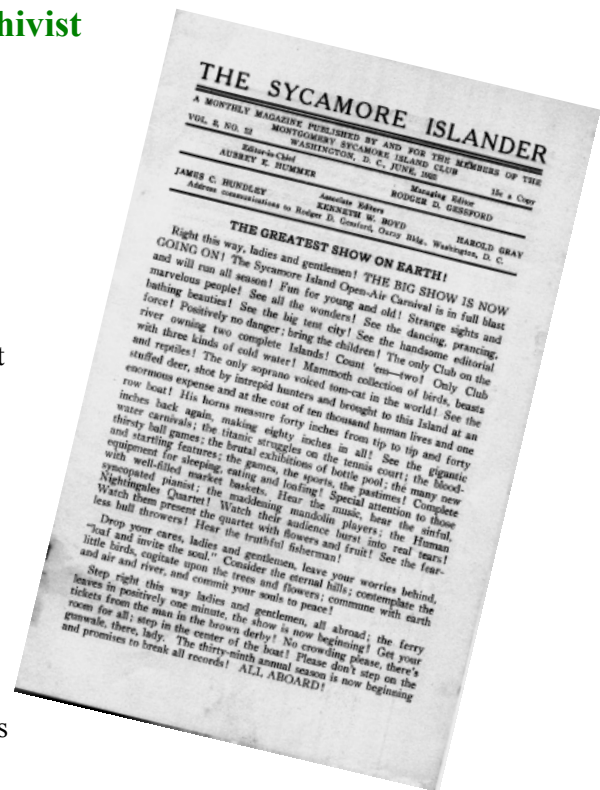
“By vote of the Club at the last meeting, *The Sycamore Islander* was adopted as the Club paper, and it was provided that the Staff should be elected by vote of the Club with the four minor captains also on the Staff by virtue of their positions as Captains.

“The rules adopted to govern *The Islander* stipulate that the meeting notice in *The Islander* shall be sufficient notice of Club meeting and that the subscription price shall be \$1.50 for twelve issues, the Club to shoulder any annual deficit up to \$35.00 out of the General Fund.”

Because this issue was published in the early summer, there was a report of the Island’s condition:

“Five tents are now “up” on the lower Island and the “enthusiasm is running high,” as the shrine publicity man would say.

“Reading up Main Street (facing the River), the tents are the Stodderts’, the Gessfords’, and the Coles’. Mr. E.B. Thompson owns the next tent and the “sheik” tent belongs to the McLeods. Mac has a wireless outfit and hears all the big stations, even those as far away as Washington and Glen Echo.”



The Workfest is Coming! Sunday, November 12, 9 am to 2 pm

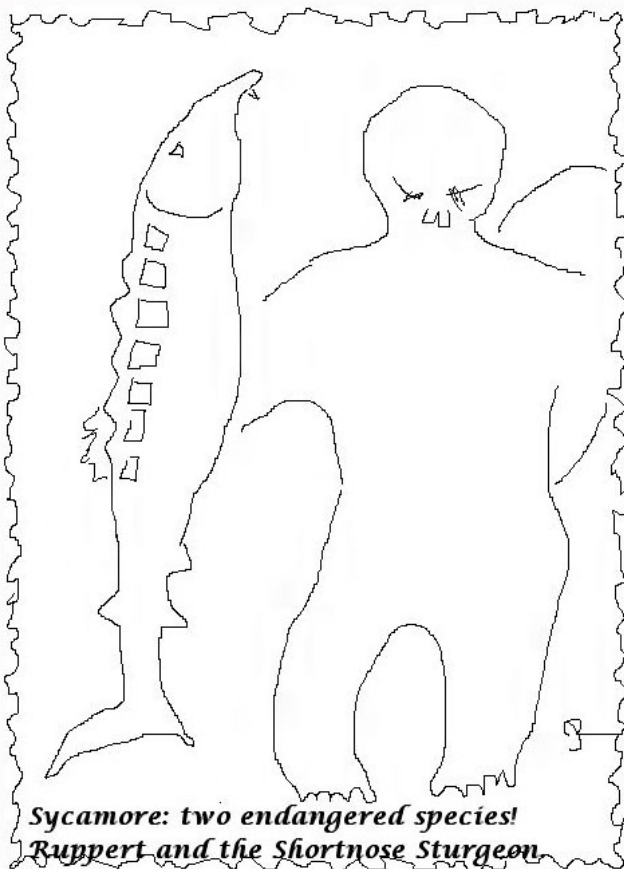
Call or email Joe with your project ideas or, better yet, volunteer to be a Workfest organizer! (301) 229-4921 or joehage@verizon.net

Sycamore Island honorary trustee and former President, John Rockwell Schubert, passed away March 8, 2006 in Bend, Oregon. His wife, Miriam, has relocated to her daughter's home in New Mexico. Our family grew up at the Island in the 60's, finding it an urban refuge for a bunch of Oregon refugees in DC. We have fond memories of our time there with the Thomsons, Coolidges, Burchells, and many others. My canoeing and kayaking skills developed at Sycamore have served me well in many rivers around Oregon and the west. Lots of fond memories of Sycamore Island.

All the best,

John H. Schubert

"We must have a willingness to make peace with the essential paradox of life. Life can't be straightened out, it can only be lived." -- Barry Lopez



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

In Touch With Joe....

I canoed Cabin John Creek on September 5th. It wasn't until after five o'clock that I got the kids squared away and finally loaded the canoe on the van. My concern now was whether there still be enough water in the creek. The rain had stopped and small creeks drop really fast. I decided that it was worth checking out. I drove through the wet streets thinking that it was better to have it a little too low rather than too high, especially since this would be my first time on this creek. I'd say it's a stiff class three in the right levels; it's very technical with lots of drops and turns. And besides I'd rather be on a creek as it was going down rather than have it go up while I was on it.

My other concern was whether I would be back at Sycamore Island before dark or not; if the creek was too low it could be a long trip. Actually, it was amazing that I made it out the door at all considering all the things that I was worrying about before I left: Do I have the skill? Which boat should I take? Is it safe? Should I wear a helmet? How do I get back to my van? Will the van be ok where I park it? Can I make it through the culvert under the Canal? That last one really had me worried. I had tried to scout out the tunnel under the Canal earlier; but there is no clear view from the shore, plus I had heard that the exit from the tunnel is six inches lower than the entrance -- not good. After I arrived at the put-in on River Road and found a nice place to leave my van, I walked down to look at the creek. Not too scary — no trees rushing by. In fact it looked just barely high enough to float a canoe. Perfect. I quickly unloaded the canoe and paddles (I always take an extra). I had my dry bag with water, a snack, and my headlamp -- I also remembered to bring my bailer, which came in handy later in the trip -- and, even though the creek was only knee deep, my life vest.

Cabin John is about ten miles long with head waters in Rockville. It drains everything east of Falls Road and west of Wisconsin Avenue. Wisconsin Avenue actually follows the ridge that separates this watershed from Rock Creek, whose headwaters are also in Rockville. I canoed the last 2.6 miles of the creek with an average gradient of 37 feet-per-mile and a maximum gradient of 80 fpm.

I carried the canoe, a fourteen-foot Old Town, down the newly bulldozed construction road, followed the deep tracks toward the water, and stepped over the erosion control and past the porta-john. I put in down river from the large timbers that formed a ford across the creek. After I jumped in the boat and felt the current push me down stream, I remembered another thing that I needed to worry about: strainers. I had hiked this valley before and I knew of one place for sure where there was a tree firmly wedged across the creek, under the Beltway where the pillars rise up sixty feet from the creek bed. There may be others, so I proceeded with caution. I emerged from under the River Road Bridge as a green-backed heron flew from the bank on my right. I was quickly approaching an island so I followed the heron to the right. It turned out to be the better of the two routes and now I was on my way with a green heron as my guide. The green heron did stay with me the entire trip, doing its awkward takeoff every time I got too close. It would do its chicken-like flight and disappear around a bend until I caught up and scared it again. The canoe was moving pretty fast and it took effort to stay in the deep channels and avoid the rocks. I could see the scars of heavy erosion from the June storm as I skirted along with River Road to my left. Yards of freshly fallen dirt and stone lined the unnaturally high banks. Large healthy trees not only lost their footing but were taken forcibly down stream. It is rare to see a tree across the creek with green leaves but not a bit of soil on

its roots. I came to a small strainer as the creek turned to the right, and I had to get out and squeeze the boat under a log.

The noise of River Road faded as I headed down stream along Seven Locks Road. I startled some deer and caused a doe and her fawn to make a dash across the creek in front of me. The rain was over now and the sun was making an attempt to penetrate the thick canopy shading the creek. Everything was wet, glistening green except for the creek, which was muddy brown. I passed the stone quarry on my right and did the first drop, a two-foot ledge under the Seven Locks Bridge. I think this ledge is the remains of an old ford that was used to cross the creek before there was a bridge. The river dropped again until I reached some wide riffles that looked like another old ford. I reached the Beltway and portaged river right over the remains of the artificial creek bed, (concrete slabs that toppled when the banks were eroded behind them). This spot wasn't pretty. The canopy was gone, replaced by concrete and steel, and the banks were fifteen feet above me with fresh scars of erosion. There were trash and invasive vines everywhere. I reentered the tunnel of overhanging trees and soon Cabin John was joined by Booze Creek coming in on river left (maybe named during prohibition). Booze Creek drains NIH and everything east of Burdette Road.

After Booze Creek, I entered a gorge where the creek is especially beautiful with rock outcroppings jutting right down into the water. The pace picked up here and the last third of the trip was nonstop action. I tried to catch glimpses of all the beauty around me but my attention was focused mostly on the rocks in front of me. The semi-low water conditions made the run very technical and it was all I could do to find the right route through the barrage of rocks and ledges. My canoe took on some water, mostly by being sideswiped coming off the ledges, but managed to stay upright. Things slowed down and I passed under the Cabin John Parkway. A great blue heron flew up from what looked like another ancient ford and suddenly much of my anxiety melted away. I was now in a full sweat and my shoes and pants were soaked with muddy water. The sun, now low in the sky, cast a strange light onto the scene as I drifted below the Union Arch Bridge high above me. I did my last portage around a log jam under the bridge.

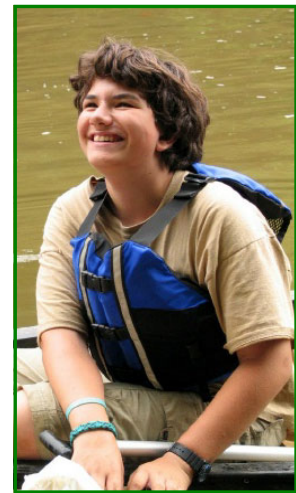
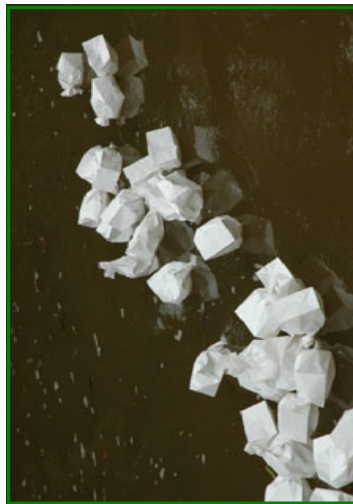
As I did the last few yards before the Canal, I passed a yellow-crowned night heron perched over the creek. I felt very far removed from the commuters passing over me on Clara Barton Parkway as I approached the tunnel under the Canal. I was apprehensive but there seemed to be plenty of headroom and no strainers. When I finally got the angle to look through the tunnel I saw a clear path to the other side. What was I worried about?

I coasted through and made a point of looking back up to the towpath to appreciate this reversed perspective. I headed for home. The sky was an assortment of soft pastel colors when I reached the open waters of the Potomac. The green heron seemed to turn back and head into the interior and I pushed my tired body down river. This last section from the mouth of Cabin John down to Sycamore Island seemed to take even longer than the entire trip down the creek, but finally I made it to the ferry and home. Quickly changed my clothes, had a snack, and biked back to my van. Most of the way back was along the towpath or on bike paths; but there is a section along Seven Locks where I was sure I'd be biking on a narrow road in the dark. I cursed myself for not having lights on my bike. No problem. There is a wide sidewalk along Seven Locks Road all the way to River. I was back at the van in half an hour, tired but feeling very satisfied. It felt like some sort of rite of passage had been achieved. A threshold crossed.

Photos by David Winer and Norman Metzger



The 2006 Sycamore Regatta



Saturday Relief Caretakers October — November

October			
7	10-2 2-dark	Robert Braunohler	202-291-3717
14	10-2 2-dark	Garret & Gigi Rasmus- sen	202-337-3396
21	10-2 2-dark		
28	10-2 2-dark	Eric Simpson	703-821-7556 or 571- 232-5762
November			
4	10-2 2-dark		
11	10-2 2-dark		
18	10-2 2-dark	Dick Schleicher Winston & Nancy Wiley	301-229-2385 301-299-7586
25	10-2 2-dark		

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

Large Parties

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/systems.htm>
To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, John Noble
e-mail: johnnoble@comcast.net, phone: 301-448-8562



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

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Upcoming Sycamore Events

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

November Meeting—Wednesday, November 8, 8:00 p.m. Location tbd.

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

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



The Three Graces aka Regatta Organizers: Vicki Judson, Anne Waidmann, and Sherry Pettie, tall to taller.

Photo by Norman Metzger