

Fall Workfest

Sunday November 12, 9 to 2.

Bring tools, energy, enthusiasm and food.

Show Your Care and Dedication to a Very Special Place

The Sycamore Islander

November 2006

Volume 85 No. 11

President's Letter

I am happy to report that we had a quorum for the October meeting, which included several members who were attending for the first time, and that we inducted four new members into the Club. Also on the positive side, the Park Service has repaired the washout by the canal-side steps to the ferry.

Unfortunately, I cannot report any progress on the plans for the renovation of the caretaker's quarters and the clubhouse. The Building Committee and the architect have not yet come up with a cost-effective method of satisfying the requirements of the fire code. At this point, we will not have a cost estimate and proposed financing plan to present to the membership for a vote at the December meeting. However, the Club does need to plan for the possibility of going forward with the construction in the first part of 2007 and having sufficient funds on hand for a down payment. At the November meeting, I would like to discuss whether the dues for 2007 should include some kind of a building fund assessment, perhaps on a contingent refundable basis in the event the project does not go forward as planned.

The Fall Workfest is scheduled for Sunday, November 12th. You should be getting a reminder through the phone tree.

The Club is looking for members who are interested in serving as officers or supervisors for 2007. This is a cooperative, volunteer organization. It is never too late to become more active in the Club's operations.

The November through February meetings are held in the homes of members rather than on the Island. The November meeting will be held on November 8th at 8:00 PM at the home of Lauren Brandt and Jean-Louis Sarbib, 3322 Stuyvesant Place NW, Washington, DC. Stuyvesant Place is off Western Avenue about 7/10 of a mile into the District from Chevy Chase Circle.

—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 December issue is Wednesday, November 29

Minutes: October 11, 2006

The October meeting was held on the Island, and called to order at 8:10 p.m. by President Jeff Komarow, who led the group in an expression of jubilation when the 10th member arrived and we finally had a quorum. When your recording secretary took on this job in exchange for membership privileges, I was concerned about the burden on a busy schedule of writing minutes every month. In fact, 5 out of the 10 months of this year have had no quorum. The responsibility has turned out to be a light one; but what does this mean for the Club?

Present: Jody Benjamin, Robert Benjamin, Ann Marie Cunningham, Jim Drew, Bruce Gaber, Phoebe Hamill, Larry Heilman, Jeff Komarow, John Matthews, Norm Metzger, Louise Meyer, Sherry Pettie, Johnna Robinson, John Stapko, Peggy Thomson, Tryon Wells.

Minutes: A motion carried to adopt the May minutes with no changes. (The June, July, and September meetings had no quorum, and the August meeting was cancelled in anticipation of no quorum.)

Membership Report: Jeff read from an email from the Membership Secretary Tammy Belden giving names and biographic details of those proposed to fill the three new membership openings. The proposed new members are (myself) Sherry Pettie, Kate Herrod and Richard Alper, and Paul Stanton and Kathleen Hooke.

A Motion carried unanimously to approve these new members.

Treasurer's Report: Jeff read from an email from Treasurer Alan Gelb. Alan says the Club will be on-budget for the year. He does not anticipate being under-budget as in past years, because of planned maintenance. [Next page for more.]

Captain's Report: Tryon Wells reported on two matters: discussions with a contractor to fix the leak over the kitchen, which will entail replacement of several horizontal beams and a new rubber roof. Tryon also reported that he has sent to the Treasurer a request for purchase of several large rulers for mounting as flood gauges – one on the tree to supplement the existing ruler, and one closer to the ferry landing. [Much more on pgs seven and eight].

Building Committee Report: Tryon reported that the architect had sent a report on her finding in the code books on county fire regulations for separating living quarters from public space. The County has specified a two-hour fire rating for adjoining walls between the Caretaker's quarters and the Clubhouse. Jeff reported that Ann Marie Cunningham and the architect have been meeting with mostly enthusiastic or at least tolerant Montgomery County permitting staff, with the exception of matters pertaining to the fire code and fire retardant materials. Ann Marie added that solving the issue of complying with fire codes is the only remaining holdup to getting a building permit.

Jeff also described an issue under discussion, which is whether or not to seek designation as a historic structure. The fact that the Clubhouse is not on the County's list of potentially historic sites impedes the process. But the benefit would be that a historic designation might enable rebuilding in the event of a catastrophic flood or fire.

Canoe Report: Jim Drew reported that a canoe rack will be vacant and available.

Fall Workfest on Sunday 12 November: Tryon said that he's looking forward to an easier time taking out the new canoe float with its 5-piece design. Jim Drew said that he and Gerry Barton would set up another phone tree, which was highly successful in getting Sycamoreans to the Spring Workfest. [See Joe's work list on page six.]

The Club in Print: Jeff reported that a *Washington Post* writer for the "Party Animal" section of the *Sunday Post* wanted to do an article on the Workfest. The ensuing discussion showed too many members opposed to the idea to warrant any motion being made.

Jeff also talked about an article that has already been published in *élan*, a small Northern Virginia magazine, which reported on recently discovered historic pictures and did not focus on the present-day Club. The photos, on large glass slides, have been donated to the Fairfax Library and Jeff would like the Club Archivist to obtain copies. The photos are of the 1900 period, which is 30 years earlier than any photos we have.

Year-End Meeting Location: Jeff asked for a volunteer with a large home to host the traditionally large December meeting, and Larry Heilman graciously stepped forward.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

--Sherry Pettie, Recording Secretary

Sycamore Island Financial Report

As of September 30, 2006

Our budget for 2006 was \$70,686. This did not include two contingencies, one for expenses on the construction project and the other for possible professional fees and other expenses associated with our non-profit IRS filing. These expenses were hard to predict, and, therefore, as explained at last December's meeting, would be considered separately.

At the end of September—three quarters through the year--we had spent \$48,551, or 69% of our budget. This included, however, expenses for the construction project of \$1,920, and filing-related professional fees of \$1,300. Our “normal” expenses were therefore \$45,331, which is well within our “target” spending range for the first three quarters of the year. Once again, we have been helped by careful cost control on capital spending and repairs and supplies. Miscellaneous spending has been low, and entertainment, the *Islander* and medical insurance have stayed under anticipated spending levels. Property taxes increased, but we had budgeted for that. Utilities this year will exceed budget, which will need to be adjusted to take into account long-needed upgrading of telecommunications.

The other really, really, good piece of news is that, with the successful resolution of our filing for non-profit status, we should not expect to incur further fees for professional services.

Our spending level is therefore in reasonable shape as we move into the last quarter of the year. Prudence requires that we sustain a reserve of about one year's income to cushion us against floods or other disasters. Relative to this target, our reserve stands at \$50,000 in CDs and an additional cushion of about \$15,000 in likely carryover —depending on spending in the last quarter. Costs in general continue to increase with inflation, and we need to take this into account as we move ahead. But, from the financial standpoint, the Island is still above the waterline!

-- Alan Gelb, Treasurer

From the Potomac Conservancy, courtesy of Trip Reid....

The Potomac Gorge is at risk due to pressures from surrounding development, insensitive recreational use, overgrazing by deer, and increasing demand for water. The Potomac Conservancy, Nature Conservancy, and the National Park Service have joined forces to protect this national treasure. An exhibit at the U.S. Botanic Garden (www.usbg.gov) focuses on the natural beauty of the Potomac Gorge and what is being done to save it, and its vital resources. It includes live samplings of the gorge's plant species, and describes conservation efforts underway to preserve the diverse ecology of the Gorge. The exhibit runs through November 19.

From the Archives, Holly Syrrakos, Archivist

At the Beginning of Sycamore Island

115 Years Ago, March 1891

Many members of Sycamore Island may not be acquainted with the early years. A relatively small group founded the Club in 1885. However, the record of property ownership appears to have come later.

I believe ownership of the original parcel was recorded on April 2, 1887, and a patent granted in August 1888. The following excerpts are recorded on March 12, 1891 at the Land Office of Maryland. These come from documents in the Club's archives.

“Know ye that whereas Mathew Ruppert of Montgomery County had surveyed and laid out for him a tract or parcel of land called “Barry’s Island” (Lot Number One) lying in the County aforesaid. (being an island opposite the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, between Locks two and three) and containing three and one half acres of land, by virtue of one half acre, part of a common warrant—for one acre obtained by him from the Land Office of Maryland...

“The State of Maryland doth therefore, hereby Grant unto him the said Mathew Ruppert, the said tract of parcel of land called “Berry’s Island”, lying in Montgomery County aforesaid. Beginning at a bounded Sycamore tree, and running thence South nineteen degrees fourteen perches, South twenty three degrees East eighteen perches to a three pronged Willow Tree...”

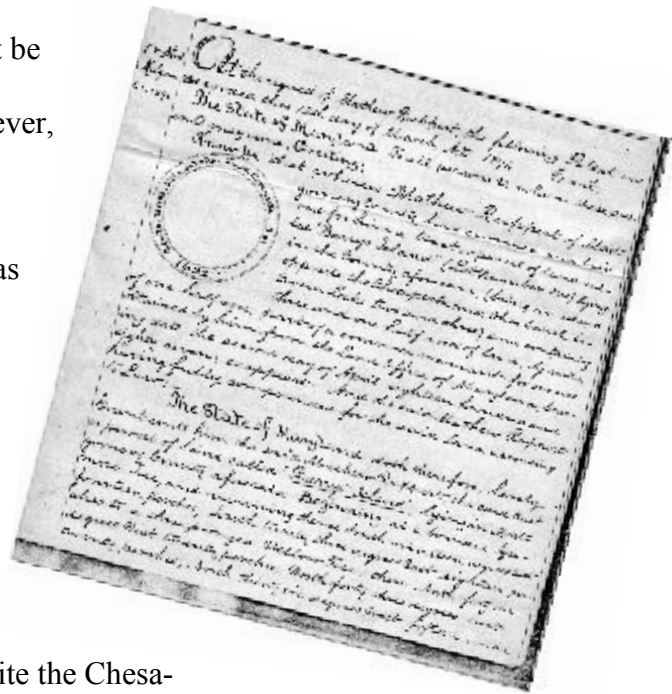
The document continues outlining the parcel and ends:

“To have and to hold the same unto him the said Mathew Ruppert, his heirs and assigns forever. Given under the Great Seal of Maryland, this thirteenth day of August eighteen hundred and eighty-eight.”

[Signed]

J. Thomas Scharf
Commissioner of the Land Office

Elihu E. Jackson
Governor



*Yes! There's the
Snipe!*

Photo by David Winer



Ruppert

*—Created by
Johnna Robinson*

In Touch With Joe....

The Workfest is almost here! Make your plans to be a part of the fun on Sunday November 12. Last spring's Workfest was a huge success and I'm hoping to repeat that success this fall. The turnout last spring was so good in fact that we ran out of things for people to do. Nothing is worse than having a willing body without a job. So, here's a preview of the day so that all you volunteers can show up prepared.

- (1) George and Shelly Malusky will be grilling. They will need help setting up, cleaning up and serving the food. The Workfest is a potluck so please bring a favorite dish.

- (2) As far as the docks are concerned, Tryon will be leading a crew to dismantle his new canoe dock, which will then be pulled out of the river. The swim float needs to come in as well but I'm hoping we can save ourselves some trouble and leave the heavy anchor out in the river. I found a giant buoy that we can attach the anchor until next spring. The swim dock will be coming in; but I think Tryon has decided to leave the Captain's Float in the river all winter.

- (3) Of course, there will be plenty of leaves to rake. Bring your rakes! There are also a lot of invasive vines that need to be controlled. These invasives are one of the biggest threats to the Island, so if you want to work on pulling vines, bring your gloves, lopping shears, and pruning shears.

- (4) The clubhouse, kitchen, and bathrooms should be cleaned; at a minimum, the spider webs should be vacuumed up. We can wash the windows and it would be good to have a volunteer to climb a ladder and clean windows from the outside. I think we have all the cleaning supplies we need.

- (5) Tryon says we should do something about the messy parking lot on MacArthur Blvd. Bring a flat shovel if you want to help with that.

- (6) I found more bricks and there is a brick walkway by the outdoor shower waiting for someone to build.

- (7) Another project idea is to put metal roofing under the deck to make a dry storage area off the screen porch. I have all the materials for this job.

- (8) Scraping, painting, scraping. The entire exterior of the clubhouse is peeling and needs attention. If you can help with this job, please bring your scrapers, masks, and goggles.

- (9) There is also a lot of preparation needed to get ready for the Workfest. If you can help gather needed supplies before the 12th, please let me know.

You can call me on the Island at 301-229-4921 or e-mail me at joebage@verizon.net

How High?

By Tryon Wells

The Club recently purchased several 4-foot long sections of a fiberglass river gauge to mount at selected places on Sycamore Island. It is an old-fashioned gauge, unlike its automated modern version, and is essentially a giant ruler, fastened to a vertical shaft, that one can eyeball from a distance to determine the water level of the river. It was thought that by placing sections of the gauge/ruler on a clubhouse wall and on a nearby tree, club members would have a better sense of river levels on the Island, whether for normal ranges or for flood levels.

A small volunteer work detail, comprised of Joe Hage, David Winer, and myself, met on the Island on Thursday, October 26, to mount the gauge sections. Gerry Barton, who was visiting the Island, joined us. The first item of business was to determine a benchmark elevation. We were aided in this by using the already existing, tall river gauge close to Sycamore Island, visible from the towpath under the canal bridge running up one of its supports. Of course, this gauge, starting at towpath level at about 14 feet, is only useful when the river is seriously flooding (14 feet or higher). It's also mounted facing away from the Island and under the bridge span, and is rarely seen by most members.

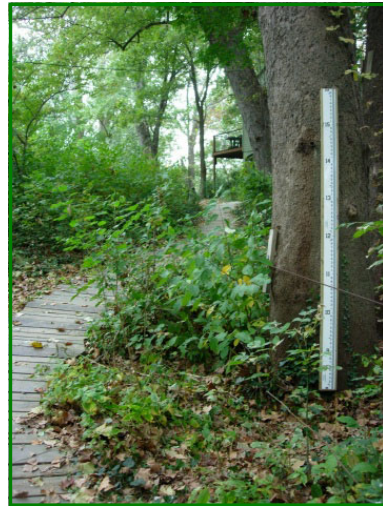
However little known this gauge is, it served as the basis for establishing our new gauges. We set up our transit-level and "shot" the towpath gauge. We then swiveled the instrument and shot exactly the same height on the clubhouse wall and put up the first section of our new gauge there. Then we set up our transit-level on the Island, and transferred elevations to the tree that has sported an old short section of river gauge for years. The tree required a new mounting board (we had brought down a treated 2x6 for this purpose), which installed without trouble. The previously mounted old gauge section fell off in our hands, its nails and screws long since rusted away.

This left us with only the last little 4-foot to 8-foot section of river gauge to mount, and predictably, this last section proved beyond our planned resources. We also ran into a bigger problem when Joe told us that he had hammered in a nail to mark the river height at Sycamore Island when the gauge at Little Falls reads 4 feet. After a quick calculation, we determined that the elevations we had just mounted on the clubhouse and the tree were about 2 feet higher than Joe's nail said they should be. Consternation!

After much deliberation, it was determined that, even though Sycamore Island and the Brookmont Dam at Little Falls are adjacent neighbors along the Potomac, the actual contours of the river basin are likely to be slightly different at both locations, thereby throwing off an exact foot-for-foot correspondence in each gauge's height measurement. But since the Little Falls gauge height is published daily on the Internet and in the newspaper, it is a very convenient scale for the Club to use. It was eventually decided that the Sycamore Island's gauge sections should be re-mounted to correspond to the Little Falls "standard."

We hope to establish a new base elevation by taking an average of observations daily over the next several weeks for a 3-foot nail, a 4-foot nail, and a 5-foot nail. Even if our gauge and the one at Little Falls might diverge slightly at higher readings, the important height values between 3 feet and 7 feet (the range that governs most daily activity on the Island) would share a close correspondence. The project remains a work in progress.

This High!



Photos by those who were there



Saturday Relief Caretakers November — December

November		
4	10-2	James Hess & Betsy Cody
	2-dark	Kirk Renaud
11	10-2	
	2-dark	
18	10-2	Dick Schleicher
	2-dark	Winston & Nancy Wiley
25	10-2	
	2-dark	
December		
2	11-dark	
9	11-dark	
16	11-dark	
23	11-dark	
30	11-dark	

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

Large Parties

Wed., 10-1-06, 9:45 to 2:00 (Rain Date, 10-8), Sally Strain, ESL Field Trip,
 Grades 7-9, Deal JHS, 35 Guests,

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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to:

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/pixilated/islander.htm>

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Upcoming Sycamore Events

November Meeting—Wednesday, November 8, 8:00 p.m. at the home of Lauren Brandt and Jean-Louis Sarbib, 3322 Stuyvesant Place NW, Washington, DC. Stuyvesant Place is off Western Avenue about 7/10 of a mile into the District from Chevy Chase Circle.

December Meeting—Wednesday, December 13, 8:00 p.m. at the home of Larry and Anne Heilman. (Directions in December issue)

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.



Yes, the geese were here.

Photo by David Winer