



Photo by Norman Metzger

# *The Sycamore Islander*

*July 2007*

*Volume 86 No. 7*

## **President's Letter**

This month is one of those times when I especially appreciate the *Islander* and the hard work of our Editor, Norm Metzger, and his predecessors. I was out of town (again) for the Summer Solstice Party and want to read about it. As I was leaving town, the weather forecasters were predicting spectacular weather. What could be better than being at a barbeque and party on the Island and sleeping outdoors in a perfect, low humidity night? Sharing the experience through the *Islander* is the next best thing to being there. Similarly, over the Memorial Day holiday, the niece of Alan and Caroline Gelb was married on the Island. This is the first wedding to be held on the Island in many years; so, I am looking forward to the story and the photographs [Pages five and six]. Without the *Islander* Club members would be unable to share the memories.

The July meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 11<sup>th</sup>, at 8:00 P.M. The Club held a barbeque dinner before the June meeting as part of our efforts to make meetings social events as well as business meetings. We had a good turnout and everyone who came said that they enjoyed the picnic. Therefore, we will again have a barbeque dinner before the July meeting. We'll begin around 6:30 P.M. The Club will provide hamburgers, veggie burgers, chips, coleslaw, lemonade, etc. Feel free to come down before 6:30 P.M. to help out. I look forward to seeing you at the July meeting and at the barbeque before the meeting. Enjoy your summer.

—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 August issue is Wednesday, July 25**

## Minutes: June 13, 2007

The June meeting was called to order at 8:15 p.m. in the Sycamore Island clubhouse by President Jeff Komarow. The meeting was preceded by a barbeque dinner and a slide presentation by John Lentz of his 620-mile canoe trip from the headwaters of the Black River in the Canadian Northwest Territories to the Arctic Ocean.

**Present:** Jim Drew, Bill Eichbaum, Tove Elfstrom, Alan Gelb, Larry Heilman, Jeff Komarow, Star Mitchell, Marianne Ross, Philip Ross, Carol Schleicher, Dick Schleicher, John F. Stapko, John G. Stapko, Tryon Wells, Jane Winer

**Minutes:** The minutes of the May meeting were approved without changes. Jeff Komarow volunteered to take the minutes of the June meeting in the absence of the Recording Secretary, Sherry Pettie. (Sherry injured her back. We wish her a speedy recovery).

**Treasurer's Report:** Alan Gelb reported that the Club's spending to date is within budget. He noted that utilities have been running higher than budgeted, which likely is due to the large rate increase that Pepco had put into effect.

**Reports:** Regarding the building project, Tryon Wells reported that he received a telephone call from our architect who stated that she needed to get in touch with Ann Marie to finalize some items for the bid package. Tryon did not know whether the bid package has been finalized. Star Mitchell reported on the Downriver Canoe Race, in which a number of Club members participated as entrants and volunteers. The event was a great success. Alan Gelb also gave a brief report on the wedding of his niece, which was held on the Island over the Memorial Day weekend. The July *Islander* will have an article on this singular event. There were no other reports by officers or committees.

**Spotlight on Members:** Jeff noted that the Club was especially happy to see John Stapko (Deputy Captain) at the meeting and wished him well in his battle with cancer. Jeff also noted that David Winer had injured himself in a bicycle accident on the Capital Crescent Trail, needed surgery to repair broken bones, and was convalescing in a rehabilitation facility. The Club sent its best wishes to Dave for a speedy recovery along with the hope that he will stick to riding his Harley in the future, which appears to be safer. Jeff also noted the passing of Phil Jones, a long-time member and the father of our former caretaker Peter Jones. Jeff mentioned that the *Washington Post* ran a wonderful obituary in its May 10, 2007 edition, which was excerpted in the June *Islander*. Phil Jones' was a life well lived.

No old business. New Business:

**Attendance at Meetings:** Jeff led a general discussion on ways of increasing attendance at Club meetings in light of the difficulty that the Club has had in mustering a quorum for meetings over the last year. There was agreement that the barbeque dinner before the June meeting was a good idea and that "if we feed them, they will come." We will have a barbeque before the July meeting.

**Relief Caretaking:** Jeff expressed concern that members were not volunteering for relief caretaking. He also has received complaints about relief caretakers not showing up for their shifts. The question was raised as to whether the fact that the monthly relief caretaker list published in the *Islander* frequently has many unfilled spots means that we are actually having trouble finding relief caretakers. Tryon noted that he sends out an email every three months to members who have not volunteered for relief caretaking in the last two years. Jeff said that he would talk to Maxine Hattery, the Supervisor of Relief Caretaking, to get more information. One suggestion was to have more than one person schedule relief caretakers. Another suggestion that Jeff had received from Gerry Barton was to impose a relief caretaking fee, which would be waived for members who served as relief caretakers. This suggestion was for discussion only. No proposal was made and no vote was taken.

**Large Party Approved:** The Club approved a large party.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:20 p.m.

----- Jeff Komarow, Acting Recording Secretary

## From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist

### 76 Years Ago At Sycamore Island From the July 1931 *Sycamore Islander*

The July *Islander* featured a range of subjects. The Club was repaying loans from members who had made possible a new clubroom. The *Islander* delivered a long pitch to increase membership by offering guest cards. New members were announced along with general club gossip.

And, there was a small debate about whether to have a Labor Day regatta. The *Islander* noted, "After three years we find that the number of members who are sufficiently interested in racing to practice for regattas dwindles...The trouble seems to be that our active members have a great deal more fun in paddling the rapids and camping up-river than they do in paddling in regattas and the new people who come to Sycamore become interested in the rapids much more quickly than they become interested in regattas. It's often said at Sycamore that if the down-river racers had any rapids to paddle they'd never bother about racing."

Tennis was back on the agenda for the summer. The Club "rehabilitated" the tennis court and the *Islander* said, "Cole had the court put into shape and a number of members were playing on it last Sunday. So there's another reason for coming to Sycamore. Even if you can't play you can sit on the side-lines and enjoy the arguments and notice how the contestants can't play either."

There was a sort of "trip report" titled "Two More Go Overboard," about two members tipping as they went through Stubblefield Falls but managing to keep their hair and their lunch dry.

Another report of a camping trip follows:

"On June 28<sup>th</sup>, a bunch of stags went up to Bear Island and camped and battled mosquitoes. The big laugh of the trip seems to have been at about 2 AM when Dick got up to slap at a herd of mosquitoes camped on the mosquito net over the tent entrance and, in slapping, knocked down the net, letting in so many mosquitoes that they just walked off with the tent, horribly trampling the inmates in the rush."

The strangest entry of the month was a rather long article titled "What You Will Wear at Sycamore Island". It is hard to imagine the basis for this article. It begins: "Here of late there has been some discussion as to what apparel should be worn at Sycamore Island and some have thought of purchasing tuxedos". The article continues with the decision that the appropriate wear is, "a morning or afternoon coat with the usual long tail but with the tail made stiff or rigid so that it will not slosh around in the water in the stern of your canoe and with this coat-tail you can brace yourself in the stern of the canoe. The trick is that the coat-tail is made of steel tinted to match the remainder of the coat and being steel it will not be damaged by the water and is absolutely rustless." The author adds a silk hat and gloves to the costume and ends by saying, "Now that the correct wear for gentlemen has been settled upon, it looks as though the ladies will wear beach pajamas."

I can't even conjure an image.

## Memorial Service for Phil Jones

The Jones family thanks the many Islanders who expressed their sympathy on Phil Jones' passing.

A memorial service will be held at The River Road Unitarian Church  
6301 River Road, Bethesda

Saturday, August 11, at 10 AM.

Please join us in remembering Phil.

### 2007 Island Calendar

Event	Date/Time	Contact	Rain Date
Fishing Derby	Saturday, August 18	George and Shelley Malusky	
Sycamore Regatta	Monday, Sept. 3 1:30 p.m. till dusk.	Sherry Pettie, Vicki Judson, Anne Waidmann	
Fall Workfest	Sunday, Nov. 4, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.	Joe Hage, Tryon Wells	Sunday, Nov. 11

### The Swim Float Stays Put (Really)

The reason the swim float hasn't been put out so far this year was the lack of a suitable anchor. The club lost its 40-years-plus-old anchor a few years ago in some high water and has been trying to get along on some concrete-bucket anchors ever since, with limited success. While the concrete-bucket anchors are heavy enough in general conditions, in higher and faster water they bump along the bottom, only slowing down the progress of the float downstream, not keeping it in place. The new anchor comes with some plumbing pipes sticking out of it that will hopefully snag on large rocks in the riverbed and keep the float stationary in the current.

We plan to try to launch the swim float, complete with new anchor this afternoon (i.e. June 8<sup>th</sup>).



— Tryon Wells, Captain



## How Sycamore Island Forever Captured a Piece of our Heart By Raj and Sandra Purohit

Certain decisions simply feel right. One of those occurred late last year when we became engaged. Another was when we decided to begin our life together as husband and wife on Sycamore Island.

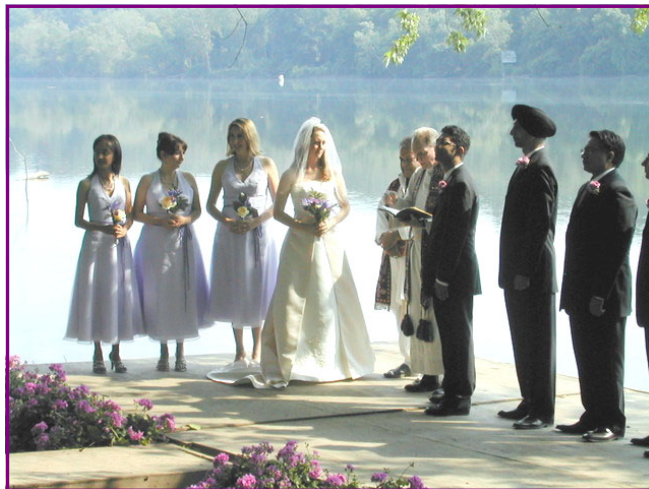
Sycamore was the first, second and third choice of venue for our wedding ceremony. Consequently, we were incredibly happy when the members agreed to allow us to hold it there on May 26<sup>th</sup> 2007.



We hoped to hold the ceremony amidst the carpet of bluebells that springs forth annually across the island. This plan fell victim to the whims of Mother Nature or our own miscalculation, as the bluebells had passed. But we were relieved to find the island bathed in glorious sunshine on the day of the wedding.

We held the ceremony on the Captain's dock and our guests, to a person, told us that it was one of the most beautiful venues imaginable for such an event. The cross-cultural ceremony was led by Rev. Joe Eldridge, from the Kay Spirit-

tual Life Center, and Pandit Vishnu, also from American University. It included the Hindu Mangalsutra ceremony, an Irish blessing, and an African proverb. The Mangalsutra is a necklace comprised of black beads and gold and is a symbolic token of dignity and love given to the bride by her groom. This ceremony, accompanied by ancient Sanskrit verse, is the most sacred Hindu wedding ritual. We took a host of pictures across the island to capture its beauty and the beauty of our special day.



While we have always loved spending time on Sycamore Island, after the wedding it will always have a place in our heart. Thanks again to the Club, for making our big day one to remember.

## An Island Wedding: A View from the Trenches

By Alan Gelb

As the big day dawned, we scoured the sky for signs of rain. Rain was one of our fears, as we imagined the large crowd of guests, elegantly turned out in suits, saris, dresses and high-heeled shoes, making its way back up the path in the midst of a summer thunderstorm. So much had been done. First, the endless debates on how to stage the ceremony. By the swim area? At the far end of the island? At midnight, with the bride ferried over by canoe from the Virginia side, escorted by paddlers with gilded bodies gleaming in torchlight to the accompaniment of drums? In the end sanity prevailed, and the Captain's float won out. A hundred chairs had been brought down and cleaned, as well as the many other essential supplies, and the complex logistics arranged, including special transport for the few guests unable to make the scramble down and up the bank of the Potomac. The squad



of four ferry-pullers was on standby. Two pm was D-hour and, with skies brightening, the Decision was made to go forward.



Other than rain, the other lingering concern was the large black rat snake,

which has seemingly taken a liking to Islanders and their guests. It had caused chaos at a previous graduation supper (by coincidence, for the bride), slithering into the midst of the party and scattering terrified guests in all directions. The image of it materializing in the middle of the ceremony was not a pretty one. The snake did put in an appearance, but fortunately a little earlier, climbing up the leg of one of the wedding party who was filming as we were setting out the chairs. At least one of the California visitors will not forget our Island for a very long time! We were not prepared for the drama of the ferry being found untied from the shore by the pullers, but it was recovered by their leader, Carla Tilchin, who plunged valiantly into the river, so saving the day for all.



In the end—it all worked out perfectly. A truly beautiful wedding, carried out against the misty backdrop of the Potomac. Would we do it again? Absolutely! But—perhaps not too soon.

Photos by Alan Gelb



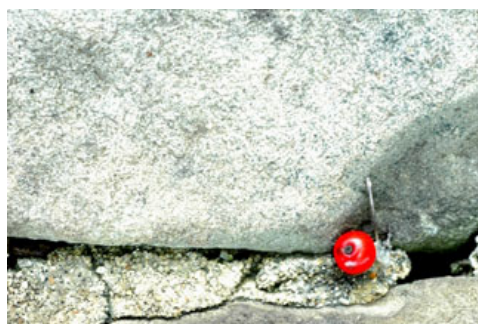
## The Best Hamburgers and Even a Quorum

It really was a dark and stormy night for the meeting; but that didn't stop us from having a good time—even before we got down to business. For the cookout, I had brought a couple of hamburgers still icy from the freezer, in hopes of finding someone to share them with. Inspired by a recent article in the Food Section of the *Washington Post* that featured “Hamburger Makeover”, David had made hamburger buns from scratch, and had chopped up the meat in the Cuisinart. These were truly going to be the best-ever! But you know what? They tasted still better at the meeting Wednesday night—even though David couldn't come.

For me, it had something to do with the rain and the challenge of the balancing act with the umbrella, the red hot grill, the patties and buns; certainly it had to do with those of us who had gathered for the meeting--even if we wondered why we were out on such a night—and discovering in good time that it was a treat to be hanging out on the screen porch. It made me think of being up in the tree house with my kid pals the time the rains came. Out came the stash of Almond Joys and bright orange peanut butter crackers for us to nibble on. This evening, too, on the Island, we watched the rain flail down, munched our barbecues, and talked to one another. When it was time for the Real Meeting to begin, we ran up the stairs stopping to wash sticky hands under the sluice spilling from the outdoor corner of the porch.

You can read the Minutes for the June meeting in this issue of the newsletter; but I bet they won't reflect the fact that a charge of energy filled the Big Room when the folks who missed the cookout finally arrived. Nor will they record the good conversation conducted earlier on the porch, the personal news that was traded. New names, new attendees will be recorded, yes, and we hope new members will come back, again and again. As for me, there was the satisfaction of finding just the right person to share hamburgers with. Oh yes, discovering that if salt and pepper are lacking, just top off your hamburger with crushed potato chips, put the lid back on, and, by George, you've got it, the Best Hamburger Makeover you'll ever want to share.

Jane Winer



Photos by Norman Metzger

## In Touch With Joe....

What can I say? It's been a super Sycamore summer season. The swimming is great, the fishing is exceptional, and the Island is full of picnicking people having fun.

We had a wonderful time at the Summer Solstice Sleepover. Thank you, Whitney, for putting that together. The weather could not have been better for singing by the fire and sleeping outside. George took over the grilling duties and we feasted like kings. Many of the families left at dark, but we did have four families that stayed. We awoke the next morning to another perfectly calm day with a river that looked like glass. I set up the pancake griddle and the coffee maker outside and made everyone breakfast in my new outdoor kitchen. We sat talking all morning until lunchtime, and then we ate baked potatoes that we cooked in the campfire.



I found a snake in my kitchen when I came home late one night; but I hesitate to tell any more snake stories. My last snake tale had the effect of scaring some people from coming down to the Island. Having snakes in the house is just a symptom of the explosion of life that's going on here during this time of year. We



Solstice Photos by Joe Hage

have snakes and mice and beavers and trees and warblers and beetles and eagles and bass and frogs and turtles and spiders and dragonflies and voles and ground hogs and catfish and hawks and owls...and a



deer on Ruppert's Island.

On a sad note, this past month marked the end of an era. One of our oldest and most committed members has decided to end his membership with the Club. John Matthews, club captain for twenty years, came down with his wife, son-in-law, and grandchild and very unceremoniously took his canoe off its rack and carried it up the hill. John had been a member since 1974 and had one of, if not the, oldest canoe on the Island. I think he said it was built in 1945. Unfortunately for John, the climb up the hill had become too hard to manage. I trust that he will become an honorary member and be allowed to use the Island if he feels able. Don't be a stranger, John!



## Saturday Relief Caretakers July — August

<b>July</b>		
7	9-3	Richard & Janis Pappalardo
	3-dark	Mary Ann Stein
14	9-3	Patricia Hartge
	3-dark	
21	9-3	
	3-dark	
28	9-3	
	3-dark	
<b>August</b>		
4	9-3	Andre Umhau
	3-dark	
11	9-3	
	3-dark	
18	9-3	
	3-dark	
25	9-3	
	3-dark	

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

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

### Large Parties

July 8, 2-8: Marianne Ross with 20 friends

Aug. 11, 1-6: Trish Hartge will host 22 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](mailto:johnnoble@comcast.net), phone: 301-448-8562**



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to:  
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/hochzeit/islander.htm>

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### Sycamore Events

July Meeting — Wednesday, July 11, 8 p.m. At the Island. BBQ beginning at **6:30 PM** -- hamburgers, veggie burgers, cole slaw, chips and lemonade. Donations of side dishes and desserts are welcome but not necessary.

August Meeting — Wednesday, August 8, 8 p.m.

August 18 — Fishing Derby

September 3, 1:30 p.m. Regatta

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

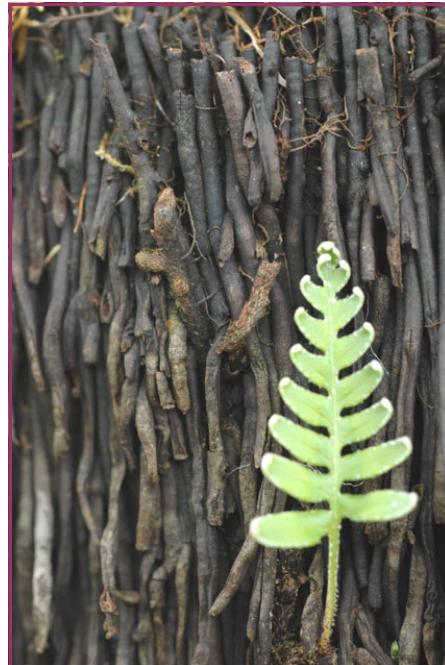


Photo by Norman Metzger