

## September Meeting Rescheduled

to

Wednesday, September 19th, 8:00 pm, at the Island

# *The Sycamore Islander*

*September 2007*

*Volume 86 No 9*

### President's Letter

First, as the banner headline above points out, the September '07 meeting will be on the **third Wednesday, September 19<sup>th</sup> (still at 8 pm and still at the Island)**. The second Wednesday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, falls on the same evening as the beginning of Rosh Hoshanah, the Jewish New Year; and many, including myself, would not have been able to attend. This change also give us a bit more time to shake off the August doldrums and focus on the issues facing the Club this fall.

### Swimming in the Potomac River

Not surprisingly, we did not have a quorum for the August meeting. I cannot remember the last time we held an official August meeting. It is probably time to eliminate the August meeting through a change in the by-laws. The six or seven people who did attend discussed whether the Club should take some action regarding swimming in the Potomac River in light of the questions raised about water quality in the July 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Washington Post*. The consensus, with which I agree, is that members swim at their own risk. The possibility of excessive levels of harmful bacteria should be added to the list of potential risks on the sign by the swimming area. The Club should take no other action.

### Update on the Renovation Project

During August, Ann Marie Cunningham, Tryon Wells and I met with three building contractors. We expect to have bids in response to the Club's bid package in time to have a recommendation at the September meeting about which of the contractors we should negotiate with. It is also time to revisit the issue of how to finance the project. As a starting point, we are republishing, on page four of this *Islander*, the financing proposal recommended by the Building Renovation Finance Committee in April 2006. Obviously, the proposal will require some changes to reflect the passage of time and the in-

*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 October issue is Wednesday, September 26.**

crease in dues for 2007. But the focus of the discussion should be whether the financing proposal is still viable.

### **Special Voting Procedures Proposal**

The August *Islander* contained my draft proposal to establish special voting procedures for a decision on the renovation project and other major decisions where institutionally the Club should enhance the opportunity of members to vote. Based on the feedback I received, the *Islander* is republishing the proposal on page three, and I am offering it for a vote at the September meeting.

### **Barbeque Dinner before the Meeting on September 19<sup>th</sup>**

As noted above, the September meeting is now scheduled for September 19<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 P.M., rather than September 12<sup>th</sup>. After taking an August vacation, the popular pre-meeting barbeque dinner is back for the September meeting. Burgers in many forms (ham-, veggie- and turkey), potato salad, coleslaw, chips, lemonade and cookies will be provided by the Club. Side dishes and desserts will be gratefully accepted. Dinner will be ready (I hope) around 6:30 PM. Come hungry. September and October are great months to visit the Island. If you've never been to the Island on a clear fall day, you're missing something special.

### **Fall Canoeing Class Saturday, September 15**

Islander Frank Daspit will again teach his very popular canoeing class this fall. The class will be at Sycamore Island on *Saturday, September 15, 2007 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon*. Frank is planning to cover some new topics in this fall course. All members and wait listers from beginners to more advanced paddlers can attend. Teenagers welcome. Plenty of club canoes will be available. No need to RSVP; just come to the Island. For more information, contact canoe supervisor Jim Drew at 202/462-3836.

— Jim Drew

### **Kelsey and Kaylen**

My two lovely and courageous daughters Kelsey and Kaylen have decided to take a break from Island life. After five winters on the Island the girls want to try living with their mother for a while. They will be spending this school year in the Tampa area and will be visiting on holidays and in the summer. This is a big change for them after living with their dad for the last twelve years but it feels like the time is right for them to make a change. It's going to feel different down here on the Island without them.

— Joe Hage

## Proposal to Add Special Voting Procedures to the Standing Rules

The Club may soon have to decide whether to go forward with the renovation of the Caretaker's quarters and the Clubhouse and how to finance and pay for the cost of the project. As President, I have repeatedly expressed my belief that the decision whether to go forward is important enough that taking a vote of hands at a regular Wednesday night meeting is not enough. Members should have a greater opportunity to vote, but they should be sufficiently motivated that they are willing to come to the Island to participate in pre-voting discussions and the actual vote. The August *Islander* published my proposal (re-published below) for discussion. Based on the feedback I received, I am offering it for a vote at the September meeting.

The special voting procedures contemplate having one or more days when a member could come to the Island and cast a vote in addition to the opportunity to vote at the regular monthly meeting. For example, the proposal would allow the President to designate the day of the Fall Work fest as a day on which votes could be cast with respect to the building project in order to maximize participation. Votes would be cast on paper ballots. The result would not be announced until the second day of voting was finished.

— Jeff Komarow

### Agenda Item for September Meeting

#### **DRAFT OF NEW STANDING RULE 20. (Existing Rule 20 would be renumbered as Rule 21)**

##### **20. Special Voting Procedures**

These special voting procedures shall be used where a proposed action of the Club involves (a) a commitment of \$20,000 or more for capital projects on the Island, (b) entering into a loan agreement, whether with a commercial lending institution or with members or other individuals; (c) the imposition of a building fund assessment or other special assessment over and above the annual dues, or (4) an increase in dues other than an increase approved at the December meeting.

Voting on the proposed action shall take place at the regular meeting **and** on one or more additional dates and times prior to the next regular meeting, which dates and time shall be established by the President with a view to providing members with a convenient opportunity to vote. If possible, the Island shall be the place at which additional voting will be held. The dates, times and places of additional voting opportunities shall be published in the *Islander*. Voting shall be conducted by paper ballot with appropriate procedures to ensure that members do not vote more than once. The ballots shall remain sealed and shall not be counted until the voting has been completed.

**BUILDING RENOVATION FINANCE COMMITTEE**  
**RECOMMENDED FINANCING PROPOSAL**  
**FROM**  
**APRIL 2006 ISLANDER**  
**(i.e. SCHEDULES REFLECT THE EARLIER PUBLICATION DATE)**

*The Building Renovation Finance Committee has held a series of meetings over the past two months, and, in light of the written comments and the discussion at the March meeting, has developed a tentative project financing proposal that will be presented for comment at the April meeting. Thereafter, the financing plan will be finalized and presented for approval by the Club as part of the motion to undertake the construction project as set forth in the architect's plans submitted to the County for permitting and to authorize a "not to exceed" amount of funds for the construction. It is hoped that the final package can be presented at the May or June meetings.*

*Since project costs are not yet firm, the proposal necessarily has some aspects that are estimated and others that must offer flexibility in their use. As with all sturdy stools, this one rests on four legs, as follows:*

*I. Drawdown of Surplus: The Club currently has a cash reserve of some \$62,000, of which \$30,000 would be committed to the project and available for near-term disbursement. The reserve, however, must be restored. It is proposed to accomplish this with a temporary annual dues increase of \$50 for regular members and \$25 for seniors beginning in 2007. At these amounts, the surplus should be restored in about 2 ½ years, at which time this dues increase would be dropped.*

*II. Prepaid Access Certificates (PACs): These are designed to obtain voluntary contributions from our extensive, 140-family waiting list to lift some financing responsibility from current members. Fifteen PACs would be offered to all waiting list individuals/families around mid-2006 at an up-front payment of \$4,000 each, thus raising \$60,000 if all were taken down. Purchase of a PAC would entitle the family or individual to all membership privileges (Island use, voting, etc.) until December 31, 2014, approximately 8 ½ years if purchased on June 30, 2006, without payment of any additional dues or assessments, including item III below. In effect, this would create a new, temporary class of Club member, the PAC member.*

*The PAC member's name would not be removed from the waiting list so that if the PAC expired and the individual or family were still on the waiting list, they would revert to that status. Alternatively, and hopefully more likely, during the 8 ½ years, the PAC member would reach the top of the waiting list and would be accepted into the Club as a regular member. In this event, the former PAC member would not pay dues for the remainder of the 8 ½ years (through December 31, 2014) and would not pay the initiation fee. The creation of PAC memberships would result in a maximum near-term membership expansion of 15, but no long-term permanent increase. Those on the waiting list choosing not to buy a PAC would not have their positions affected.*

PACs would be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. After purchase, they could be sold, but only to another party on the waiting list. Such a sale would be between buyer and seller without approval or financial support by the Club, although the Club would have to be advised for record-keeping purposes.

*III. Assessment: Existing regular and senior members would be assessed one time for the equivalent of a year's dues. If payment were received before December 31, 2006, the amounts payable would be \$300 and \$150 for regular and senior members, respectively; however, amounts received after that date would be at the rate for 2007 dues, which will probably increase, and must be paid no later than the 2007 dues payment deadline. Assuming 160 regular and 55 senior members, as well as payment in 2006, this would raise \$48,000 from regular members and \$8,250 from seniors or a total of \$56,250. The assessment would not be refundable. Beginning 2007, the initiation fee would be increased to an amount equal to the annual dues then in effect.*

*IV. Bank Loan: Three local commercial banks have expressed preliminary interest in assisting with financing of the project. They are (along with primary member contact): Bank of America (Steve Wolk), Chevy Chase Bank (John Lentz), and Potomac Bank (Johnna Robinson). Applications will be made to each bank for a line of credit in the area of \$170,000 in order to be able to compare offers. It is not anticipated this amount would be drawn down, and is probably on the high side since project costs are undetermined.*

*Each bank would be asked to provide multi-disbursement conditions for initial drawdowns that could be later converted into a fixed rate credit at an extended repayment term. If \$50,000 of bank financing were ultimately utilized and had a ten-year repayment term at 7.5% interest, amortization would raise regular members' annual dues by roughly \$40 and those of seniors by \$20. If a bank line was in place by mid-year, it could smooth out delays in receipt of funds from the PACs and assessment.*

*Once detailed bank offers are received, they would be reviewed in the Islander and presented to the Club by the Finance Committee for a vote on which one to accept. It is anticipated that such a vote could take place in a mid-2006 meeting.*

**Summary and Recommendation:** *The above financing plan would generate the following amounts:*

<i>Drawdown of Surplus</i>	<i>\$ 30,000 Firm</i>
<i>Prepaid Access Certificates</i>	<i>60,000 Subject to sale</i>
<i>Assessment</i>	<i>56,250 Firm if paid in 2006</i>
<i>Bank Loan</i>	<i>170,000 Subject to bank response</i>

*The Finance Committee believes that the plan will raise sufficient funds for the project, is varied in scope, and spreads the responsibility for repayment widely among the various categories of our membership.*

*--John Lentz, Building Renovation Finance Committee*

## From Holly Syrrakos, Archivist

### 76 Years Ago (and more) At Sycamore Island From the July 1931 *Sycamore Islander*

In 1931, the *Islander* editor Rodger Gessford delivered his historical view, “Sycamore Island—Ten Years.” Excerpted here are more of his stories of the time between 1919 and 1929.

“In the summer of 1922 there was considerable agitation to have the Club permit camping on the upper end of Sycamore Island. Most of the young bloods had gotten married by then and wished to settle down quietly for the week-ends instead of having to paddle up to Upper Sycamore to tent. The whole upper end of Sycamore, from the tennis court up, was a wilderness and I well remember how the Coles and McLeods cleared away small tent sites in the underbrush after the Club gave permission. We had quite a task in clearing a path to their tents and everyone felt that the Coles and McLeods were taking an awful chance way out there in the jungle. But camping prospered and next summer the Stodders, Coles and us Gessfords erected tents just as close to the upper end of the tennis court as we could squeeze them. Other tenters followed... The spring high waters kept us busy moving our platforms each year but tenting was in its hey day then and high water never discouraged us. Up until this time only Cole and Boyd had automobiles and when we couldn't line up with them we all brought out supplies to the Island via street car. When the Sycamore Store opened about this time living at Sycamore was much easier and when we arranged things so that we would not have to bring ice out from the city we were living on top of the world. Old days always seem best but any tenter of those times will admit that those were happy days—when we lived at the Island all summer.

“Sometime along in here the urge to build docks and bridges became popular... the first of these great works, Hundley's wharf, was built alongside the old canoehouse landing to enable members to do diving tricks. Unfortunately, Hundley's Wharf was built directly in front of an underwater rock and the first diver nicked his skull and had to be dragged to Georgetown Hospital. Hundley's Wharf was never popular for diving. Incidentally, on the same day as this inaugural catastrophe at the wharf, we played base-ball with Buckets of Blood, a camp on the canal, and Tom Edwards had his collar-bone broken and was rushed in to Georgetown Hospital at 18 miles an hour in his old Model T touring.

“Getting into 1923, we had a tennis tournament, tennis having been *the* pastime at Sycamore for several years. No sport has ever been as popular at Sycamore as was tennis in those days. Doc Custis was champion of the Island but there were always plenty out after his title. Tennis and baseball for the summers and the Hallowe'en Party and woodfests for the winters were our only diversions but, would you believe it, we had a standing list of applicants trying to get into the Club!”



# 2007 Fishing Derby

Photos by Tryon Wells



...but this photo is by Laurence Richa



## In Touch With Joe....

Normally, this would be the month that I would tell you all about my summer vacation and the adventures I had in some far-away place. This summer, however, I didn't go anywhere but stayed close to home and enjoyed the perfect conditions here on the Island. The weather this summer has been so amazing that sometimes I'd wake up and feel like I was in some New England vacation spot. Never, in my memory, has it ever been 62 degrees in D.C. in July.

I did take one little local trip that might be worth reading about. This story falls under the category of my continued exploration of the towpath and Potomac River, another "hike up/paddle down" story.

This time I started my trip in Hancock Md. Now I've driven by Hancock many times heading west out Interstate 70 and from the highway it doesn't look very impressive. Mostly what you see are railroad tracks and truck stops and overpasses. But, once I got down into the historic part of town, I found a very friendly and interesting town.

I drove down the main street through town and continued north until I was at the top of Tonoloway Ridge. Here I turned left and followed the ridgeline through Woodmont Natural Area straight down to the river. On the way I passed the old Tonoloway Rod and Gun Club (1870), whose guests included several presidents. Soon, I found the western terminus of the Western Maryland Rail-Trail. This is a converted RR track and runs parallel to the canal and the river from Fort Frederick to this spot. Here, at the abandoned town of Woodmont, is where I'd stash my canoe. I carried my canoe through the dry canal bed, across the towpath and into some thick brush nearer to the river. I knew it was the right spot when a red-shouldered hawk made itself known and landed on a branch just above me. I saw a mile marker up ahead. I was now 136 miles from Georgetown and twelve miles from Hancock. It was also 10:30; I had better hurry up and get hiking.

I rushed back to Hancock and parked my van in the boat ramp parking lot. Apparently, they don't mind if you leave your car there over night. If you don't mind risking it. It was so nice to finally leave the car behind and start hiking. The towpath at mile 125 is very similar to the towpath at mile 6, fewer people and more horses, but similar. The obvious difference is that there is no water in the canal. The trees and plants are slightly different as well -- a lot more hardwoods and ferns. The most striking difference is the topography and it was really cool walking along the towpath with Cacapon Mountain shooting up from the river to my left. I passed "The Devils Eyebrow", which is an anticline or a fold in the rock that is visible from the towpath. It is this same folding that created these mountains; and as I walked along I contemplated the forces that allowed this river to continue to flow east despite all these ridges trying to block its course. I also passed an old cement plant. At one time, after they discovered the limestone layered into these rocks, tons of cement were shipped from these hills.

I passed the Cacapon River as it entered the Potomac on my left. It was here at this Cacapon Junction Campsite that I was supposed to be able to fill my water jug. Unfortunately, the pump was broken. I didn't have to panic; I had my water filter, but even with the filter I didn't like the idea of drinking the warm water from the river. Since it had been so dry, all the smaller springs were dried up. I pressed on, not knowing if I could make it all the way to the next pump before dark.

The trail was pretty quiet and except for a few cyclists I was able to explore all the abandoned lock houses and canal works in solitude. I passed locks number 53, 54, 55, 56 and dam number 5. This earthen dam no longer holds the river and has a huge breach on the West Virginia side.

I reached the spot where I hid my canoe, but decided to keep walking. Sidling Hill Creek was just a couple of miles ahead, and I thought that would be the best place to get the water I needed. On the

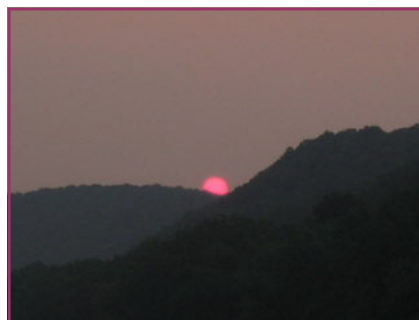
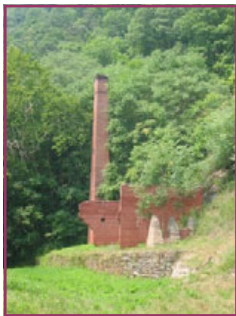


way to the creek, I counted thirteen wild turkeys in a group as they crossed the towpath in front of me.

The shadows were getting pretty long as I sat under the Sidling Hill aqueduct pumping my drinking water. I decided I had better camp there for the night. I looked around for a good spot for the tent and ended up out on the rocky bars that lined the drought-level river. I wanted to camp near the water. It was breezier outside of the trees but it was way too rocky on the bar for a bed. But then, triumphantly, I found a perfect little grassy patch and I set up my temporary home. I was too tired to fish for my dinner and I fixed my dehydrated meal and watched the sun set behind Sidling Hill before going to bed. It was a great spot to camp except that I was only yards from the West Virginia shore where an all-night stream of coal trains was passing by. (Coal is still king.) It was surreal to see the lights of the trains coming out of the complete darkness and rounding the curve around Sidling Hill.

I awoke the next morning to the sound of some local fishermen trying their luck in Sidling Hill Creek. I wasted little time in breaking camp and I headed down river to my boat. It made me smile when I heard the screeching of that same red-shouldered hawk as I dragged my canoe to the river. There is a steeper gradient on the river here and the canoe moved swiftly over the shallow water. It was a little tricky navigating through the remains of dam number five and I was wondering what it would be like in higher water. The town of Great Cacapon was coming up on my right and I decided to splurge and head into town for some bottled water. I parked the canoe at the mouth of Cacapon River and bushwacked my way over the railroad tracks and up to WV Rt. 9. It was a ten-minute walk to the country store where I bought some water. I also couldn't resist buying a bag of ice, a six-pack of beer, and a steak sub.

I spent the next six hours floating and fishing on a perfectly hot summer day. There were plenty of fish to keep me from getting bored as I drifted past all the makeshift campsites and summer homes that lined the WV shore. Some of the shoreline was trashed out with old school buses. I diverted my eyes to the towering hillsides and their ancient rock outcroppings. Soon I was back near Hancock and paddling under the Rt. 522 Bridge that was being painted. I was marveling at the extensive scaffolding when a worker stuck his head out from behind the giant tarps high above the river. We waved to each other and I was thinking how glad I was to be the one in the canoe.



Clockwise from top left:

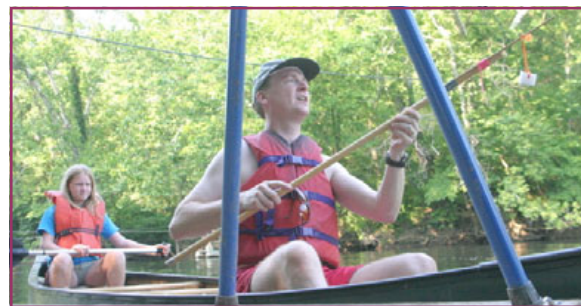
- Cement plant
- Anticline
- Route 522 Bridge
- Sidling Hill Sunset
- Lockhouse 55

## 2007 Sycamore Regatta

Photos by Cindy Bertaut



Our terrific and tireless organizer, Vicky Judson



**Saturday Relief Caretakers September — October**

<b>September</b>		
1	9-3	
	3-dark	
8	9-3	
	3-dark	John and Susanna Membrino, 301-229-1154
15	9-3	Jack Sanders, 703-799-6624
	3-dark	
22	9-3	
	3-dark	
<b>October</b>		
6	10-2	
	2-dark	
13	10-2	
	2-dark	
20	10-2	
	2-dark	
27	10-2	
	2-dark	

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

**Large Parties**

None Scheduled

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 view this month's Sycamore Islander *in color* on the  
Internet, go to:  
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/facetiae/islander.htm>

FIRST CLASS MAIL

### Sycamore Events

September 15 — Canoe Class (p. two)

September Meeting — Wednesday,  
September 19, 8 p.m. At the Island.

October Meeting — Wednesday, Octo-  
ber 10, 8 p.m. At the Island

November 4, Fall Workfest, 9 a.m. to  
2 p.m.

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

