



The Sycamore Islander

March 2008

Volume 87 No 3

President's Letter, March 2008

Even though it's still cold, spring is in the air and it can't come soon enough for me. An ice storm held down attendance at the February meeting. We did not get a quorum (again), but, once again, it was not a problem because there was no pressing business requiring the attention of the membership. Jennifer Glaudemans, co-recording secretary, took minutes anyway, and they are included in this month's Islander.

We are making progress on the construction project. I understand that we have a heating contractor that we are satisfied with and expect to have HVAC drawings shortly. As I explained at the February meeting, the county wants us to submit all of our drawings before they will process the building permit. The HVAC drawings are the final ones we need. Stay tuned.

Spring is coming and there are some great activities on tap, including the annual flower walk on Sunday, April 20th, and Frank Daspit's canoe class on Saturday, May 10th. A couple of other reminders:

New Member Orientation If you are on the waiting list and haven't attended a new member orientation, your chance is coming up on Sunday, April 13th. You cannot become a regular member without attending a new member orientation.

Waiting List Membership The opportunity to become a waiting list member expires on March 31st. Contact the Club if you need additional information.

Spring Workfest The Spring workfest is scheduled for Sunday, April 6th. We have lots to do to get the Island ready for the season.

The March meeting will be held at the home of Peter Winkler and Judy Kraft, on March 12th at 8:00 P.M. Their address is 5214 Carlton Street, Bethesda, MD 20816, in the Mohican Hills neighborhood. Check Google or Mapquest for directions.

See you at the March meeting (Wednesday, March 12th).

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, Amanda Cannell, 5901 Cranston Rd, Bethesda, Md. 20816. 301-229-8658. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to acannell@norwoodschool.org.

The deadline for the April issue is Wednesday, March 26th.

Sycamore Island Meeting Minutes:

February 13, 2008

Present: Brad Coolidge, Jennifer Glaudemans, Joe Hage, Jeffrey Komarow, John and Judy Lentz, and Alison Levine

The meeting was called to order at 8:15 P.M. at the home of John and Judy Lentz, but a quorum was not present.

Despite the absence of a quorum, Jeff Komarow gave an update on the status of the building renovation. He reported that Montgomery County required all plans be submitted before it would grant any permits. He said that the plumbing and electrical plans were ready, but he was still waiting for the HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) plan. He was informed that once the plans were submitted, the County would not be able to put the application on a fast track, but would nevertheless try to expedite the application. Jeff also reported that he is still trying to finalize the contract and hopes that construction can begin by the end of March. Finally, he suggested that he would like to post construction progress reports with photos on the Island's website.

Treasurer's Report: Jeff noted that Allen Gelb's report was published in the last *Islander* and added that the Club was financially solvent in fiscal year 2007. He reported that members appeared to be paying the 2008 dues in a timely manner, but said that a few inactive members have resigned.

Caretaker's Report: Joe Hage said that the latest news is in the current *Islander*.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 P.M.

Jennifer Glaudemans , co-recording secretary



Joe serenades the sunset
Photo by Renee Dunham

From Holly Syrrakos, Island Archivist

76 Years Ago

From the April 1932 Sycamore Islander

Even though it may not feel quite like it yet, Spring is on its way, as it has been for many years. The *Islander* of April 1932 reminds us of that fact.

“A Few Kind Words About Spring and Sunday Mornings”

“One of the bounden duties of the Sycamore Islander is undoubtedly to persuade the members in good standing to spend more time at the Island and our particular text for this spring is to urge you to spend more mornings—Sunday mornings—on and about Sycamore.

“We’ve often noticed how practically all of the members who come to Sycamore on Sundays seem to feel that afternoon is the time to come, but if more of you would come out before noon when there’s just a faint haze on the river and a lazy, pleasant sun, you’d never again wait for the stark, bright afternoon sun. Sounds poetical, but it’s true. Just picture a Sunday morning when the river is bright green and the sun’s merely pleasantly warm and the faint haze is almost like liquid sunshine—and you at home, waiting for the afternoon. Of course, a great many of you go to church on a Sunday morning but couldn’t you occasionally go to church just as well in the evening when there is no sun at all?

“Try it some morning this spring or summer. Come up in your old clothes and go out on the river for a paddle. Don’t be like that song, ‘Mad Dogs and Englishmen Go Out in the Noonday Sun!’—try the morning sun at Sycamore.

“But of course if you simply can’t make the morning sun, the afternoon sun is almost as good.”

The approach to Sycamore has always been challenging. Evidently, the Club has worked on that path down the hill for many years—with varying degrees of success.

“A year or so ago the Club made arrangements to have a path of cinders laid from the car track to the head of our steps down the hill but the party who was to lay the path was unable to go through with it. Perhaps the Club could make some arrangement to have such a path laid in the near future and, if so it would certainly be a boon to all and sundry. The present stretch of dirt and rocks above the steps grows worse with each rain and the loose stones are rather ticklish walking at times. And, after a heavy rain there’s the matter of mud to consider.

“Perhaps we might go even a little further and lay a plank or duck-board walk along the edge of the towpath from the foot of our steps from the bridge to our steps down to the landing after a rain, the towpath is a pretty muddy proposition and since many of the members wear their usual street attire to the Island, they’re due for a shine after tackling the towpath.

“Neither of these ideas would cost any considerable amount and it hardly seems worthwhile to stumble on loose rocks and slosh in mud-puddles if it can be avoided.”

That’s one man’s opinion anyway about the coming of Spring.

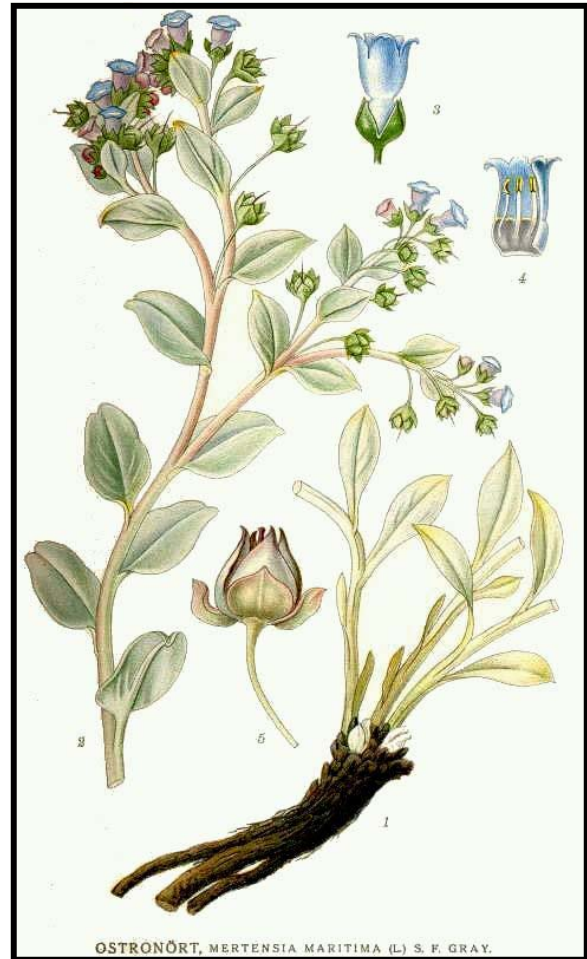
Wild Flower Walk –Old Angler’s Inn

April 20th, 10-2

With R. G. Steinman and John Parrish

The Annual Sycamore Island Spring Wild-flower walk will be on Sunday, April 20th. We will be parking in the lots opposite the Angler's Inn (on MacArthur Blvd) and gathering at the bridge over the canal below the parking areas at 10:00 AM. We are going to be visiting the WideWater/Bear Island section of the C&O Canal and walking portions of the Billy Goat Trail. Expect to see Virginia Bluebells, Trillium, Trout Lilies, Spring Beauties, Violets, Toothworts, Wild Blue Phlox, Golden Ragwort, and much, much more. Save the date. See you then.

**Bring a bag lunch.
Rain or shine**



Mertensia maritima

**Island Remembrances:
*Honorary Members, Blue Birds, and Mushrooms***

Gifts for John and Barbara Matthews, new honorary members:

At the December 2007 monthly meeting a motion was approved to give Honorary Membership to long time members John and Barbara Matthews. John was Captain for many years and was responsible for many improvements to the Island such as the raised caretaker's quarters, the deck, the improved ferry, the Captain's Dock, and the new canoe shelters.

Joe Hage and Gerry Barton presented at the meeting two gifts for John. Joe made a model of the ferry and Gerry brought an 18 inch diameter by 4 inch thick round of a Sycamore tree from the Island. The idea is for John to have a piece of Sycamore Island in his house. Members signed the round at the meeting. A few days later Joe and Gerry took the remembrances to John and Barbara. See the photos for the surprised Matthews with their gifts.



John, Gerry and Joe



Barbara and John Matthews



Bluebirds on Sycamore Island:

For many years we have had a Purple Martin house on the Island. It was located in the open field just west of the canoe shed, but it failed to attract Purple Martins. Two years ago Gerry Barton and Joe Hage moved the house to a location near the river, just at the swim float area. It still attracted no Purple Martins and recently the house fell from its pole. So we needed a new bird house.

For quite some time Barton was thinking of building a Blue Bird house for the Island. After seeing a Blue Bird at the canal bridge in January the decision was made. A house was constructed and erected just downstream from the Captain's Dock on the edge of the open field. Hopefully we will attract a Blue Bird pair that will raise a family. If they do nest, take some time to watch them hunt and feed the little ones.



Photos by Gerry Barton

Wild Mushrooms on the Island:

One of my hobbies is hunting for wild mushrooms. I am not sure what I enjoy most, walking in the woods or actually finding mushrooms. Over the years I have found few mushrooms on the Island. About 8 years ago there were some very large Dryad's Saddles, Polyporus squamosus, on large downed tree trunks on the south tip of the Island.

On a warm sunny day last December I took a canoe around the Island. On a tree trunk just downstream from the swim float I found some beautiful Dryad's Saddles. They are difficult to see from the Island side of the tree, but were quite easy to see from the river. Dryads were wood nymphs who used the mushrooms as saddles for their rides. These mushrooms last a long time on the tree so find time for a winter walk on the Island and take a look. They are edible, but very tough and leather-like to chew, but they make a nice strong broth that can be used to flavor soups and stews.

Gerry Barton

In Touch with Joe....Notes from his Island Journal

Monday -- February 4, 2008

This is the second day that the river has been above 4.5 feet. It's strange to see so much water in the basin after so many months of below-average water flow.

I was watching the eagles yesterday. I think it was the female that I saw in the nest and it appeared that she was sitting on eggs or maybe even in the process of laying them. The other bird, which I'm guessing was the male, was 100 yards down river sitting motionless on a sycamore limb. This second bird was definitely smaller than the other bird and very much lighter in color, it was light brown rather than the almost black of the bird in the nest. The light color made me think it was immature but the head and the tail were white like an adult.

I came home today and found that my kitchen drain was clogged. It's times like these that I'm reminded about the fact that I'm in a self contained septic system and I need to be more restrictive about what I put into my garbage disposal. I disconnected the trap in the drain under the sink and went to get the snake. I managed to get about four feet of snake into the drain but I hit a right angle, where the pipe heads to the main drain at the up-river side of the house, and I couldn't go any further. I can't use drano in the septic system and the hot water hasn't worked either. Now I'm debating whether to call a plumber with a mechanical snake or to just cut a hole in the floor, find the pipe, and snake it from there myself.

Wednesday -- February 6, 2008

The river has remained high since it shot up last Saturday. They predict the river to go up above five feet on Friday and reach over six feet by Friday night. That means the ferry will probably be closed all weekend.

I had the plumber here today and I'm glad I called him. There is nothing like a professionally operated power snake for unclogging drains. We fed 28 feet of snake into the drain but finally we found the clog. Chris Williams is a great plumber if you ever need one. It's great to have a good plumber for those jobs that I can't handle. Lots of good eagle watching!

Monday -- February 11, 2008

The river got close to five feet on Saturday, but now it is going back down, very slowly.

Paul Hagen was the relief caretaker on Saturday. He's another of those who are looking forward to becoming one of the new waitlist-members. Apparently he's a good birder as well because he sent me this list of birds that he saw. I also want to thank him for doing a great job of cleaning the club kitchen.

American Crow, Bald Eagle(nesting), Black Duck, Brown Creeper, Canada Goose, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Common Merganser, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Horned Grebe, House Finch, Belted Kingfisher, Mallard, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Pileated Woodpecker, Red Bellied Woodpecker, Pied-billed Grebe, Red Tailed Hawk, Ring-Billed Gull, Song Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse, Turkey Vulture, White-Throated Sparrow, White-Breasted Nuthatch and Blue Jay. Paul thinks we should have a spring bird walk in addition to our annual flower walk. We'll have to work on that one. In other birding news, there is a report of Peregrine Falcons up at the beltway bridge.

I was prepared for this recent cold snap and all my pipes are working fine. I don't heat my daughter's bedroom anymore since they don't sleep there. That means I have to run from the warmth of the kitchen, through the cold zone, to get to the bathroom on the other side where it's warm again

Tuesday -- February 12, 2008

I forgot to mention that Gerry Barton has ambitiously installed a bluebird house on the island. I saw a few bluebirds up river recently, but I'm not optimistic that they'll nest on the island. I hope I'm wrong. By the way Gerry, shouldn't that bird box have a door? I haven't seen the eagles together for a while, just the one sitting on the egg/eggs.

Wednesday -- February 13, 2008

Icy conditions this morning, I should have worn my crampons for the hike up the hill. It was a little scary and I had to be very careful getting on and off the ferry, slipping into the river did not look like fun. Once I was on the ice-encrusted ferry I found it hard to pull it across without sliding right into the river. I had to brace my feet against the railing to get the leverage I needed to get to the mainland. The steps to the top of the bridge were tricky too, and I was surprised to find that even the towpath was covered in ice.

Sunday -- February 17, 2008

It's been fun being able to use the river gauge we have on the dock. We haven't been able to use it much this year since it only registers levels above 4 feet.

There was an ice storm last week and it made its mark, now the lights on the trail no longer work. I'll have to work on that tomorrow. Speaking of the ice storm, Island members John and Suzanne Membrino had a huge, triple-trunk oak tree fall on their house last Tuesday night. It also crushed two cars that were in the driveway. As far as I know, no one was hurt, but keep them in your thoughts during their hardship.

Yesterday a friend and I paddled across the river and hiked the three and a half miles up to the beltway bridge. We were hoping to catch a glimpse of the peregrine falcons but no luck. We did see a ton of ring-billed gulls, perfectly spaced on the river's surface like chess pieces on a chessboard.

Thanks to John and Judy Lentz for hosting the meeting and for inviting Brad Coolidge and myself for dinner before hand. Only three other people arrived for the meeting, but I had a great time listening to stories told by John Lentz and Brad. I saw a fish today. A large catfish lethargically swam from under the captain's float as I was cleaning up.

Monday -- February 25, 2008

It's hard to believe that it's almost the end of February, but then again the signs of spring are everywhere. The silver maples were the first to bloom and now the daffodils are close to blooming as well. The "island lawn" is decorated with isolated patches of green and I just noticed the first of the bluebells pushing through the soft ground. The wood ducks are here, and the eagles are already halfway done incubating their eggs. I certainly didn't need to look at the calendar when this evening I saw a flock of cormorants flying up river to roost, spring is right around the corner.

I finally got around to installing our new lamp-post light at the ferry landing. The old light was corroded and would go out if you shook the post too hard. The new light is totally plastic, weird but it looks OK and it "never needs painting". On the down side I couldn't get the lights on the trail to work. I was hoping it would be an easy fix, maybe a loose wire in the junction box. After climbing the ladder and checking the first two boxes in the chain I realized that the problem was in the wiring that connected the two boxes. The sun was setting behind the trees, but I was able to identify what I think is the problem. The protective coating around the wire had worn off where it had been rubbing against a tree. I guess we can expect these kinds of minor inconveniences as long as we continue to use living trees to hold our power lines. Tomorrow I'll replace the wire, wish me luck.

Thursday -- February 21, 2008

As you can see the river level hasn't changed very much during February. I'm getting used to 4 + feet, its nice to be able to ride my bike right onto the ferry that is now level with the dock.

I hate waking up before the sun is up and so it makes me happy now that the sun is rising earlier. I love to walk out my door in the morning and feel the sun shining directly on me. This doesn't happen most mornings, its only during this special time of year that the sun's rays are at the right angle to hit me in the face right at eight o'clock when I step out my front door. Cool.

When I walked out my door this morning I heard, besides the incessant Carolina wrens, the loud cawing of crows. The sound of crows has become a rare sound since the crows were hit so hard by the West Nile virus and it caught my attention, even at that early hour. It took a couple of seconds for it to click, but it dawned on me that maybe the crows were being so vocal for a reason, maybe there was a hawk or an owl on the Island. Crows are known to make a big fuss when they find a raptor perched in or near their territory. I quickly decided that I wasn't in a hurry to get to my job at NIH so instead of heading to the ferry I ran around the corner of the clubhouse to see what all the commotion was about. It didn't take me long to spot the big, white-chested Red Tailed Hawk perched on a low limb above the fire pit. I thought of running inside to grab my binoculars, but I was afraid I would lose track of the bird. As an alternative I tried to creep closer for a better look. I ducked behind the outdoor shower and stealth fully made my way toward the fire pit. The hawk was a mature male, judging by the size (a little small), most likely one I've seen before. I stood motionless for a few seconds watching the hawk, the air was cold and the island was awash in a wonderful golden light. It would have been a peaceful moment except for the fact that there were eight crows in the trees cawing their lungs out. Suddenly the hawk took flight, I thought it might fly away from me but instead it dropped from its perch and with two effortless beats of its wings this magnificent bird glided within fifteen feet of me. It flew low allowing me to see its dark brown back and wings and brilliant orange tail! The coolest thing was that as soon as this hawk flew past me, the crows became completely silent. I picked up my lunch bag and my coffee mug and headed off to work with a smile on my face.



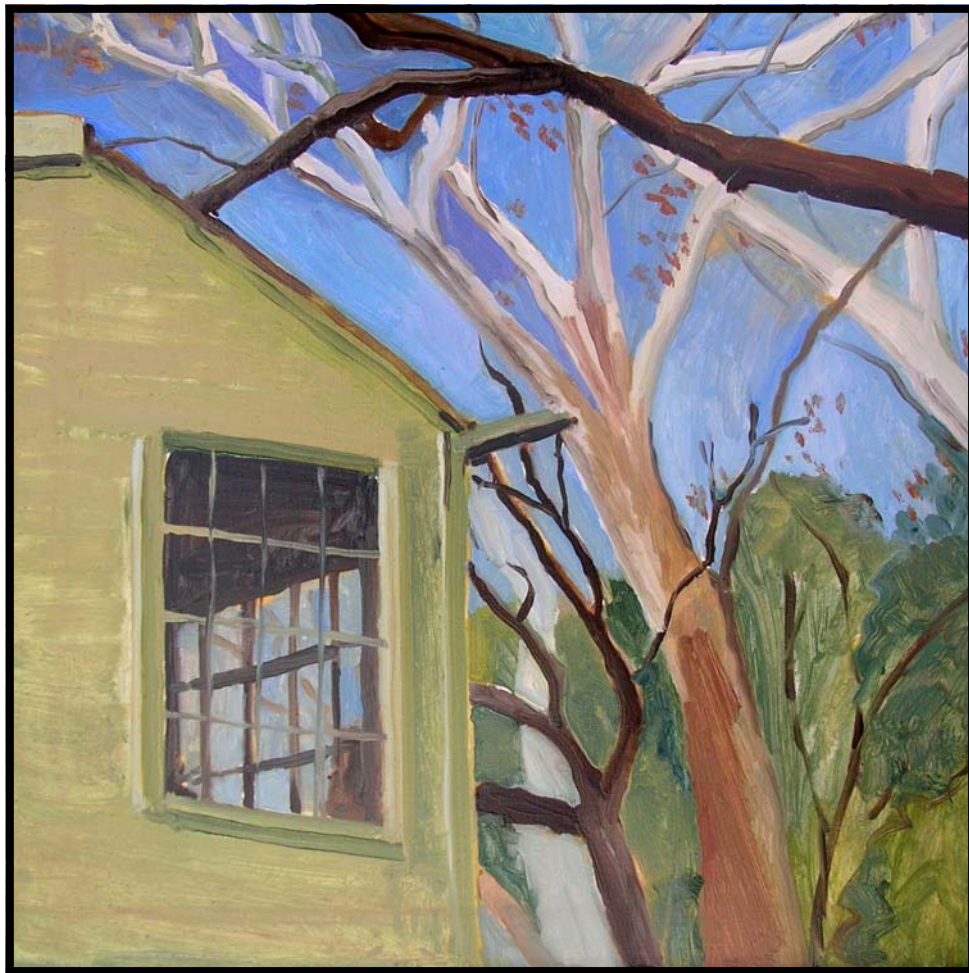
**Red Tailed
Hawk**

I want to take this opportunity to shame (name deleted). Let this be a warning, if you're not sure of the protocol, don't pull yourself over to the Island, and never ever leave the caretaker stranded on the mainland. I hate getting home and not getting home.

We had a lot of fun at the annual Canoe Cruisers Association winter party on the island. My musician friends were nice enough to come down and provided the music and we spent the afternoon waltzing to the sound of mandolins and guitars.

The music has really taken off and the Sycamore Island Band can be heard here almost every week. One of these nights I'll have to invite the club down for a caretakers music party. I'll keep you posted.

Joe Hage



Painting by Amanda Cannell

Saturday Relief Caretakers March-May
Please sign up as soon as possible

Date	Hours	Caretaker	Phone Number
March			
1	10-2	David Lyles	703-536-8692
	2-dark	Barbara Fisher	703-966-4373 cell
8	10-2		
	2-dark		
15	10-2		
	2-dark		
22	10-2		
	2-dark		
29	10-2	Lucky and Bill Marmon	phone 301-654-7893 cell 301-503-6105
April			
May			
3	9-3	Kate Herrod	

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

Large Parties

Gavin Block will host a cub scout camp out, April 26-27 from 3pm to 11am with 35 guests, one parent per child.

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



The Sycamore Islander

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Internet, go to:

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

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Sycamore Events

March Meeting : Wednesday,
March 12th at 8:00 PM at the home
of Peter Winkler and Judy Kraft,
5214 Carlton St. Bethesda, 20816

Spring Workfest: Sunday, April 6th

April Meeting : Wednesday,
April 9th at 8:00 PM. Site TBD

Wildflower Walk: April 20th, 10-2
Meet at old Angler's Inn.



Photo by Amanda Cannell