



# *The Sycamore Islander*

*April 2008*

*Volume 87 No 4*

## **President's Letter, April 2008**

The Club usually moves the monthly meeting back to the Island in April, but this year the meeting will be on-shore at my house. We will be honoring long-time member Johnna Robinson who is moving to Texas. Johnna was Treasurer for five years (1995-1999) and has taken on several special projects involving the Club's finance. Moreover, for a number of years, Johnna was our Island's editorial cartoonist and the creator of Ruppert the wily beaver. The Club is planning on a Ruppert Retrospective in the May *Islander*. The Club owes Johnna a debt of gratitude for her service, support and good judgment. So come out and offer Johnna our best wishes.

**Construction Update:** The Club has received HVAC drawings from the contractor. Anne Marie Cunningham and Tryon Wells shortly will be meeting with the Permitting Department to file the permit application.

**Date Change for New Member Orientation:** The date for the New Member Orientation has been changed to **May 18**. You cannot become a member without attending a new member orientation. Waiting List Members who have not attended a New Member Orientation are particularly encouraged to attend an orientation in 2008. If necessary, the Club will try to hold another orientation in the fall. You cannot become a Regular Member unless you have attended the orientation.

**Upcoming Events:** We have two great events coming up – the annual flower walk on Sunday, April 20, and Frank Daspit's canoe class on Saturday, May 10.

**April Meeting Date and Location:** The April meeting will be held at the home of Jeff and Sandi Komarow on Wednesday, **April 9<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 P.M.** The address is **9511 Linden Avenue**, Bethesda 20814. Linden Avenue is between Old Georgetown Road and Wisconsin Avenue, just south of I-495, near the Bethesda-Chevy Chase YMCA. The telephone number is 301.897.5996 in case you need detailed directions.

See you at the April 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, Amanda Cannell, 5901 Cranston Rd, Bethesda, Md. 20816. 301-229-8658. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to [acannell@norwoodschoool.org](mailto:acannell@norwoodschoool.org).

**The deadline for the May issue is Wednesday, April 30th.**

## Sycamore Island Meeting Minutes:

The March meeting was held at the home of Peter Winkler and Barbara Kraft. There were not enough members present to constitute a quorum. President Jeff Komarow convened the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

**Present:** Gerry Barton, Jim Drew, Alan Gelb, Jennifer Glaudemans, Jeff Komarow, David and Jane Winer, and Peter Winkler.

**President's Report:** Although there was no official business to conduct, Jeff gave a brief update of the construction project. He noted that the HVAC bid was almost finalized and would be rolled into the overall contract. He also reported that to date, there were 154 regular memberships, and six vacancies, although he suspected that there might be a net increase of 40 by this summer.

**Canoe Storage:** Jim Drew reported that 62 members have canoes stored on the island, and noted that six of those members have resigned. There was a brief discussion of a proposal from member Paul Stanton to take an inventory of the canoes and examine possibilities for those that are no longer used. It was decided to let the Canoe Supervisor, Jim Drew, handle the proposal.

**Treasurer's Report:** Alan Gelb reported that he expected the first bills for the construction project would arrive around the end of April.

**Other Business:** Jane Winer reported that long-time member, Johnna Robinson, will be moving to Austin, Texas soon. Jane suggested recognizing her long service to the island at a future meeting, perhaps with an honorary membership.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:0 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

**-Jennifer Glaudemans, Co-Recording Secretary**



Photo by David Winer

## Please Take note of the following events:

### **River Cleanup -- Saturday, April 5**

For those who can't get enough of the great outdoors next weekend, Renee Dunham would sure like some company, the day before the workfest, to clean up debris and refuse on the island that has been deposited over the winter on the Island and nearby shores. This event also starts at 9 in the morning, and like the workfest, is an "approved event" for those trying to secure party-giving eligibility this year. She's also bribing you with light refreshments around lunchtime.

### **Spring Workfest -- Sunday, April 6**

As you probably already know, the Spring Workfest is next Sunday (April 6). It will start about 9 in the morning and finish off with a big feast by early/mid afternoon. This will be a wonderful time for new members to meet old members on this special year, which has already seen 40-plus new members enter the club. The usual chores beckon as we prepare the Island for "the season," which we then get to enjoy!

### **Orientation -- Sunday, May 18th**

This year's Orientation may be the last one held for some years. In recent years, the club has required that all club applicants attend an Orientation prior to becoming new members. This is to familiarize new members with the ferry, club canoes, club rules and other details specific and unique to the Island. While it may not be reasonable to hold up membership privileges to this year's crop of new members to require Orientation attendance this year, it is nevertheless highly encouraged. If you are a new member this year, and you still haven't attended an Orientation, please try to make it, for your own sake as much as for the club's.

## Events on and around the Island

### Canoe Class– May 10th

Islander Frank Daspit will again teach his very popular canoeing class this year. The class will be held at Sycamore Island on Saturday, May 10, 2008 from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. All members and wait listers from beginners to more advanced paddlers can attend. Teenagers welcome. There are plenty of club canoes available. No need to RSVP or bring anything; just come to the Island. For more information, contact canoe supervisor Jim Drew at 202/462-3836.

### 53<sup>TH</sup> RUNNING OF CCA POTOMAC DOWNRIVER RACE SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2008

By V. Star Mitchell, Co-Race Chair

What race do you know of that has lasted consecutively for 53 years? The 53<sup>rd</sup> running of the CCA Potomac Downriver Race hosted by Sycamore Island will be Saturday, May 17<sup>th</sup>. **COME AND BE A PART OF MORE THAN A HALF-CENTURY OF LIVING HISTORY AND PADDLE THE RACE! JOIN THE FUN!**

The pre-registration fee is only \$15 if received by May 10th! Obtain a registration form from [www.canoecruisers.org](http://www.canoecruisers.org), [www.sycamoreisland.org](http://www.sycamoreisland.org). Follow the instructions for mailing. At registration the fee is \$25. Tandem teams pay as individuals UNLESS they are a parent and child. A parent and child (under age 18) go for \$15 a boat pre-registered and \$25 a boat at the sign-in. Liability forms **must** be signed on race day.

The race begins at Rocky Island on the Potomac River just above Wet Bottom Rapid and goes for 7.5 miles to Sycamore Island. At the end of the race, a free T-shirt and a free lunch will be given to all workers and racers, and there will be a ceremony with awards and prizes for the winners. (If you DO NOT attend the ceremony, **do not** expect to receive the above! No awards will be mailed!)

Sign-in begins at 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Great Falls Inn (Maryland) followed by a mandatory meeting for all racers. If the river is over 5 feet, the race will start at Old Anglers Inn. This is a race for **anyone** from the pros to parent/child tandem teams, but this is **NOT A NOVICE** race. All participants should have experience in and be comfortable with up to **Class III rapids**. Any kind of a boat can enter provided it is **properly outfitted** with adequate floatation (air bags) and the paddlers (and all occupants of the boat) are **wearing** a helmet and a PFD (life jacket).

If you plan to paddle the race, **PLEASE PRE-REGISTER** to help with our head-count for how many T-shirts and lunches we need to order.

**VOLUNTEER** helpers are needed for **safety boats** and for helping at the registration at Great Falls and at the finish at Sycamore Island. Volunteers will receive the gratitude of the racers, a sense of participating in an important annual river event, a race T-shirt, and lunch. Anyone interested in helping out with this year's race should call Star Mitchell @301-530-3252 or e-mail [starmitchell@verizon.net](mailto:starmitchell@verizon.net).

## A Topic of Particular Interest to Sycamore Islanders.....

### Erratic River

Something unusual happened at the Island during the first week of March. Initially, we had intense rain from an extensive storm system. The river level quickly responded by rising about a foot in the next four hours. At the club--no problem--the level was still well below the five-foot limit for ferry operations. The downpour may have seemed heavy, but we got off easy compared to the Potomac watershed as a whole.

The Washington area must have been only on the fringe of the system because by early next morning, without hint from the local weather, the river started rising rapidly. At eight o'clock the level reached our ferry cut-off, five feet, and by noon had gotten to the eight feet range! It stayed there for a day before tapering off. See the graph for a detailed history of this minor flood.

Caretaker Joe took this all in stride, and was prepared as usual. He wrote in his log:

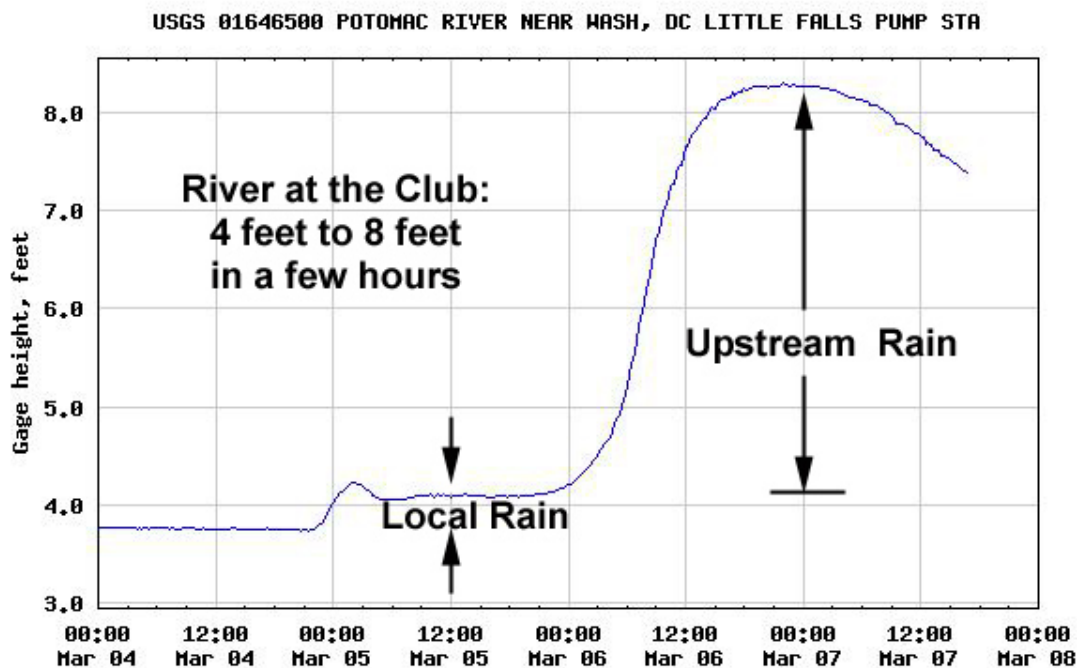
*No ferry tomorrow, the river is going to be rising all day. The gauge up at Paw Paw is already over 23 feet, that means we're going to see over eight feet here at Little Falls. There was an inch of rain on the Island last night but some places further west reported over three inches! That's a lot of water headed our way.*

This floodlet turned out to be inconsequential, but there is a lesson here for Islanders. We are subject to rapid rises in river level even after long periods of low water. We need to keep an eye on the upstream watershed. For official *predictions* the National Weather Service provides a website:

<http://newweb.erh.noaa.gov/ahps2/index.php?wfo=lwx>

in which one may click on a map for predictions of river level at the Little Falls and other gauges in the watershed.

**-David Winer**





## From Holly Syrrakos, Island Archivist

76 Years Ago

### From the April 1932 Sycamore Islander

Our *Islanders* come with such regularity—now digital delivery is an option—that it is easy to forget the typewriters and carbon paper that were once used to produce the publication. In fact, the *Islander* has appeared monthly with few interruptions since it began. In the April issue in 1932 there appears a brief notice: “*If you haven’t received an Islander for the past two months it wasn’t simply because you were lucky. This is the first one published since January.*” No explanation given.

Activity on the Island didn’t cease. The Club was aggressively moving into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. First, a notice of a new radio.

*“The last Club meeting voted to buy a combination radio and victrola and it is now on duty in the club-room and has been highly approved by everyone who has seen and heard it. Before any of you get rough with it, permit us to say that all of the various controls work quite readily if you operate them in the right direction and you don’t have to kick it, or hit it with a hammer or stand on top of it to make it operate.”*

Then—a telephone.

*“Now we come to our new telephone—a straight line to Washington and environs with a coin box in which you’ll have to drop a nickel before you get the operator. The charge for a call into town is five cents. The new Sycamore phone number is Bradley 632.*

*“Whenever you hear this new phone ring, the call is for Sycamore, so please answer it. That is to say, it operates just like your phone in town and when it rings the call is for us and we don’t have to stand around and figure out whether the operator is ringing one long and three shorts or three cheers and a tiger. We also have a large bell installed on the kitchen porch so that the caretaker can hear the phone”*

And, finally, a note about the new caretaker, “*one Frank Sweeney.*”

*“Sweeney does not claim to be a great oarsman but he’ll undoubtedly learn quite soon and he seems to have other favorable points. He has been instructed quite fully as to his duties and understands that he is to help members in any way possible. However, he is under the immediate supervision of the Captain of the Island, Everett Rodman, and if you feel that there are things which Sweeney should do, please get in touch with Rodman. There’s no use in each of us dashing about and telling Sweeney what he should do and that has been a source of dissatisfaction with previous successors” (of the previous caretaker.)*

*“When we say that we’d prefer that you don’t tell him what he is to do, we mean that there’s no need of your telling him when to cut the grass or when to rake the leaves. Tell Rodman about that.*

*“Incidentally, it is not one of the caretaker’s duties to wash the club dishes or to clean up the kitchen after you have used it. You’re to do that yourself.”*

And that, my friends, is a pretty good rule for living.

Joe Hage participated in a white water canoe race on the Red Moshannon River in Pennsylvania



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

### **Monday—March 3, 2008**

The lights on the trail are working again. Gerry Barton and I took advantage of the nice weather today and managed to find and fix the problem. The most labor-intensive part of the whole project was getting all the necessary tools and ladders to the other side of the river, especially in that wind. Once that was accomplished it didn't take long to retape the faulty wire and restring it through the trees. I tried not to look down as I reattached the wires high on the pole and I was glad to have Gerry there holding the ladder. We turned on the circuit to test the lights and, to my surprise, all the lights were working. I was happy that it was an easy fix and we didn't have to replace the wire after all. I said goodbye to Gerry and hauled the ladders and tools back to the Island.

### **Tuesday -- March 4, 2008**

I know this prediction will change but right now they are calling for 7 feet at Little Falls on Thursday afternoon. That's more rain in the basin than we've had for a long time. Remember, always be extra careful when paddling in a strong wind.

### **Wednesday -- March 5, 2008**

No ferry tomorrow, the river is going to be rising all day. The gauge up at Paw Paw is already over 23 feet, that means we're going to see over eight feet here at Little Falls. There was an inch of rain on the Island last night but some places further west reported over three inches! That's a lot of water headed our way. Today I'll make sure everything is ready for the flood including adding a line to the ferry rope so that it will be easier to raise above the high water. If I were a true paddler, I'd skip work tomorrow and go up to Green Ridge State Park and run Sidling Hill Creek while its still high.

### **Friday -- March 7, 2008**

The ferry is closed for tomorrow and it looks like it won't be operating again for a while. The river is expected to rise to 9 feet on Monday. I did go and paddle Sidling Hill Creek yesterday and I wasn't a disappointment.

### **Sunday -- March 9, 2008**

The river level isn't going up after all. It reached 8.4 on Thursday and now it is slowly receding. I should have the ferry running again by Tuesday. I need to reattach the rope for the bell and lower the pull rope back down. I did a slight improvement to John Matthews and Doc's system of raising and lowering the pull rope. I added an additional vertical line so that the rope doesn't sag so much at the banks. There were three Ring-Necked ducks (they should be called ring-billed ducks) feeding by the Captain's float yesterday. I don't think I've ever seen Ring Necks here before.

### **Friday -- March 14, 2008**

I think it was Tuesday morning that I walked out to the ferry to find some empty clamshells piled up on the edge of the dock. I instantly thought of the otters I thought I saw earlier this year but then something caught my eye that made me throw the whole otter theory out the window. The river had just receded and the dock was covered in soupy, silty mud. In the mud, next to the freshly eaten clams were some very small paw prints. These prints were much too small to be the prints of an adult otter. After consulting all my books on local mammals I've concluded that it must have been American minks that left the prints on my dock that Monday night. These animals are difficult to keep track of, they don't come onto land to leave tracks and they venture out only when it's late at night. Apparently it's not that unusual to find mink in a suitable habitat like we have here. I'm still thrilled that they're here.



### **Sunday -- March 16, 2008**

There's a deadly predator in our midst. On Friday morning it was a Mourning Dove that paid the ultimate price and today it was a male Wood Duck. On Friday I saw neither the perpetrator nor the victim but as I looked out my bathroom window I watched as a shower of down came floating from a perch high out of my view. I went out later and made the ID from the tail feathers I found on the ground. This morning's sighting was a little more dramatic and exciting. I hadn't noticed the bird standing near the ferry until I startled it when I jumped onto the ferry. It was on the ground, near the bank, right under the bell rope! I was shocked to see this big Coopers Hawk just five yards from me, sitting in the middle of a huge pile of freshly plucked, snow-white feathers. It flapped its angular wings but seemed reluctant to leave its kill. It hopped backwards and I got a good look at its long shins and powerful talons. I pulled the ferry toward the other side hoping I wouldn't scare it away from its breakfast, but it flew up to a nearby branch and then I never saw it again. I went to inspect the kill, thinking I would find another dove. I was very surprised to find the half eaten carcass of a Wood Duck drake. How could a Coopers Hawk take down a bird twice its weight? It gives you an idea of just how powerful these hawks are. I took a picture of the duck, its breast completely eaten while its brilliant head remained untouched. The feathers on the ground looked like a pillow had exploded in front of me, I picked out a couple of the more colorful feathers and added them to my collection. Speaking of dead ducks. The eagles put on a good show yesterday. We watched as the two adults stood on the edge of the nest and tore into the hapless bird they had caught. The significantly smaller male was busy plucking feathers while the female fed tiny pieces to the chicks.

### **Sunday -- March 16, 2008, supplemental**

The Coopers Hawk came back. I had been inside for a couple of hours when I looked out to see it feeding again on the carcass of the duck. I opened the window and pointed my scope to get a good look at the yellow-eyed accipiter. I managed to get a few photos through the scope but they're very blurry. I had better luck with the video setting on my camera and I took some decent footage of the hawk as it pulled the last of the beast meat from the duck. The theory is that they don't eat the inner organs because they want to minimize their exposure to parasites. Too bad I can't put video clips in the newsletter; this one even has a sound track. (I happened to have had the radio on in the background.)

### **Monday -- March 17, 2008**

I looked for the Wood Duck carcass this morning, but, not surprisingly, it was gone. All I found were some feathers and what looked like the large intestine piled neatly on a leaf. It's amazing how these animals instinctively know not to eat certain parts of a kill. I'm guessing that the midnight diner was a raccoon. I just observed seven Wood Ducks perched in the sycamore tree near the captain's float. It was strange to see them up in the trees instead of in the water; I think they were doing some kind of courtship ritual. I watched one male as he tried to get the attention of a female perched nearby. He bobbed his head and made a funny whistling noise, but to no avail, the hen flew off with another drake. I watched the eagles feed again. The male flew in with something big just before 7:30. I've been watching this pair for over a month and I can tell that the older, more experienced, female is taking the lead when it comes to the parenting. The male seems to be keeping up his end of the bargain with daily kills but I think it was the female that did most, if not all, of the incubating and she is now doing all of the chick feeding. It really helps that the male is so much smaller and lighter in color than the female. It makes it easier to know what's going on.

**Wednesday -- March 19, 2008**

Yesterday as I was rushing off to my early morning CPR training I noticed that there were three Tundra Swans posing on the river. I was so glad to see their perfect white shapes reflecting off the water, this winter has been so mild that I thought I might not see any migrating swans. Last year I was lucky enough to see two large and noisy flocks on the river.

It was so cool to go outside after the rain had stopped and listen to all the birds singing. Robins, Chickadees, Cardinals, Starlings, Titmice, Pileated Woodpeckers, Red-Bellied Woodpeckers and Carolina Wrens. No warblers yet.

No Eagle watching today. The rain kept me indoors most of the afternoon and then a blanket of warm air moved in and suddenly there was a thick fog on the river, visibility, five meters. The air was 65 and the river temperature was 40, perfect for canoeing in the mist. There is something about a mist-covered lake or river that is irresistible to paddlers and I took a quick spin around the Island in the fog. In the fog the familiar becomes alien and the rocks and the geese seem to appear out of nowhere.

**Thursday -- March 20, 2008**

Very windy today. If you rang the bell right now I might not brave the wind to pick you up. So far, only three pairs of Canada Geese are nesting on the Island. It might be too early to say for sure, but I think some geese couples have decided to nest on Ruppert's Island rather than live with the caretaker on Sycamore Island. I just saw the first of the Virginia Bluebell blossoms of 2008. Some plants are eight inches out of the ground already. Happy first day of spring. I think we should have some kind of special bluebell/springtime celebration on the Island!

**Friday -- March 21, 2008**

Sorry folks, the ferry is closed today. At least we didn't get six inches of rain like they did in Indiana.

**Monday-- March 24, 2008**

Ground hog alert! I was walking up to my front door right at sunset when a frightened young ground hog came barreling from around the corner and dove into the holes below the house. I'm not sure who was more startled, me or the ground hog, but I almost dropped my spotting scope when it scampered frantically past me. I was watching the Eagles tonight. It looked like the male failed to bring in an evening kill like he normally does. He brought in something but it didn't seem to satisfy the female and she flew out of the nest. That was the first time that I'd ever seen the male in the nest without the female. I guessed that she went off to try her luck at hunting. This year I'm going to find out what Goose eggs taste like.

**Monday—March 31, 2008**

What does a caretaker of a canoe club do on his day off? This past Saturday I participated in a white-water canoe race. Club member Paul Stanton and I drove up to central Pennsylvania to join in on the fun of the 41<sup>st</sup> race on the Red Mo (Moshannon). It's 7.5 miles of non-stop class 2 action. There's nothing better than jumping on a river with 200 other racers and to top it off Paul brought home first place in his class!

**-Joe Hage**



Coopers Hawk  
Photo by Joe Hage



Wood Duck  
Photo by Joe Hage

## Saturday Relief Caretakers April-May

**Please sign up as soon as possible**

Date	Hours	Caretaker	Phone Number
<b>April</b>			
5	10-3	Peter Winkler & Barbara Kraft	301-320-2285
	3-dark	Kathleen & Stephen Carroll	202-723-2233
12	10-3		
	3-dark	Stephen Wolk & Fran Rothstein	301-588-5976
19	10-3	Mike & Anne Savage	703-620-5746
	3-dark	Carol Cavanaugh & Lee Gravette	202-333-6830
26	10-3	Douglas & Deborah Richards	703-578-0822
	3-dark	Robert & Jody Benjamin	301-652-0834
<b>May</b>			
3	9-3	Kate Herrod & Richard Alper	<b>301-229-6363</b>
	3-dark	Witt & Ann Farquhar	301-326-4042
10	9-3		
	3-dark	James & Laura Snow	703-751-4853
17	9-3		
	3-dark		
24	9-3		
	3-dark	Richard & Erica Lodish	301-656-2148
31	9-3		
	3-dark		

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

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



No Large Parties are signed up for this month

A large party application form may be printed from the Club's web page at <http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systeps.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

*A final reminder:*

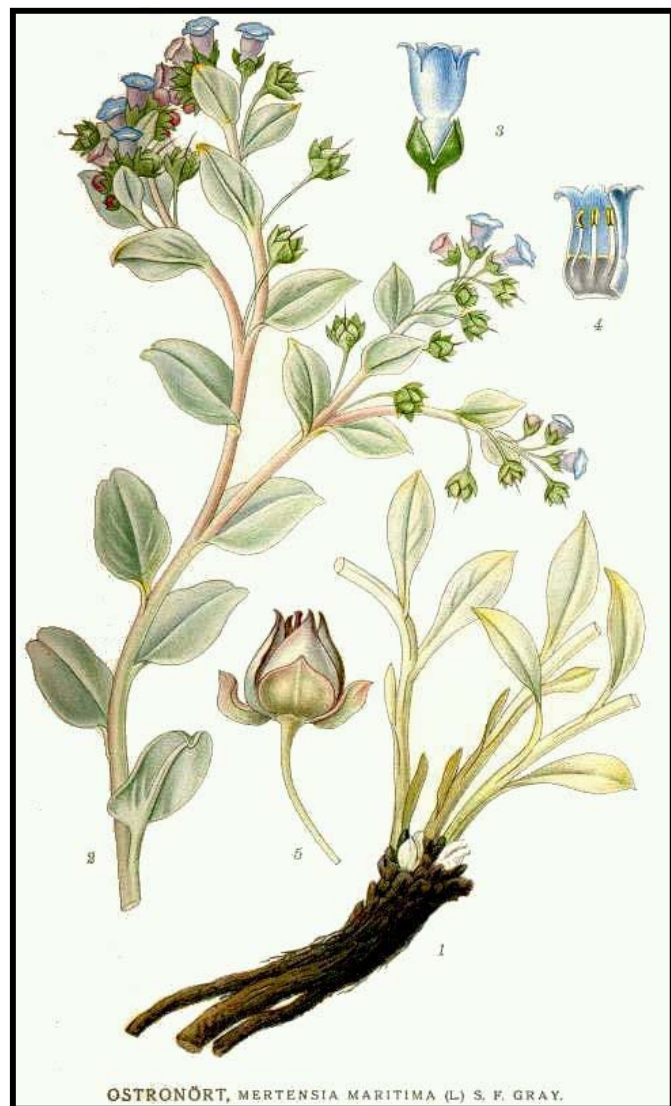
**Wild Flower Walk –Old Angler's Inn**

**April 20th, 10-2**

**With R.G. Steinman and John Parrish**

The Annual Sycamore Island Spring Wildflower 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



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

FIRST CLASS MAIL

### **Sycamore Events**

April Meeting : Wednesday,  
April 9th at 8:00 PM at the home of  
Jeff and Sandi Komarow,  
9511 Linden Ave. Bethesda, 20814

Spring Workfest: Sunday, April 6th  
9am-2pm

May Meeting : Wednesday,  
May 14th at 8:00 PM. Site TBD

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



Photo by David Winer