



The Sycamore Islander

October 2008

Volume 87 No 10

President's Letter, October 2008

Because my day job has required extra attention the last couple of weeks, this will be an abbreviated letter.

October meeting changed to October 15: A final reminder that this month's meeting is being moved back one week to October 15th in order to avoid a conflict with the Yom Kippur holiday. Professor Bob Beauchamp, Director of Environmental Management and Energy Research Programs at University of Maryland, University College will be giving a talk on global climate change. Bob's presentation will start around 7:00 PM. The days are getting shorter, so bring a flashlight for the climb up to the parking lots.

Proposed Rule Change: This month's *Islander* contains a proposed amendment to the standing rules concerning the use of club canoes. It will be considered and voted on at the October meeting.

Fall Workfest Scheduled for Sunday, November 23rd: We will start around 9:00 AM and go until 4:00PM or so. The workfest includes a barbecue lunch with the Club providing chicken, burgers and franks. Plan on bringing a side dish or dessert.

Construction Update: I believe we have given the county the electrical plan they want. We may actually see construction start before the end of the year. My New Year's resolution will be never to undertake a construction project again or become involved in one.

No Quorum at the September Meeting : If there are no meeting minutes in the October Island, the reason is that we were one or two members short of a quorum. The next regular meeting will be held on October 15, 2008 at 8:00 P.M. on the Island.

-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 ahcannell@gmail.com

The deadline for the November issue is Wednesday, October 29th.

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

Saturday-- September 6, 2008

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 83

I decided to close the ferry for today. No sense in risking injury pulling the ferry on a blustery day, especially since no one will be coming down anyway.

We really need to address our roofing problems. Yesterday I discovered that not only is the roof above the club kitchen in terrible shape and dripping water on the floor but the lower roof above my kitchen is also leaking like a sieve. We had to do some rushing around to control the damage yesterday morning as the water came pouring down the wall onto my bookshelves. After taking a close look at that lower roof it is not surprising that it leaks. It looks like it has been patched many times over the years. It worries me a bit to think about all the mold that might be growing behind that wall and between the roof and my ceiling.

Sunday-- September 7, 2008

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 73

The ferry is open today.

The river is a funny brown color but it's below five feet so I guess I have to run the ferry. The worst part is that I now have to go back and let the ferry rope down and restring the bell rope across the river. One early-riser made it to the landing this morning before the bell was back up and had to resort to calling me from his cell phone to get picked up. Worked pretty well actually.

I've been secretly hoping that the river will rise above five feet just so I can get a break from this unprecedented onslaught of seasonal visitors. I'm afraid I'm on the verge of being what I don't want to be, a grumpy caretaker. I'm sure I'll get over it. Maybe it's a good thing that this summer season is ending and soon the Island won't be so busy. It's not a good sign when I'd rather deal with a little high water than run the ferry on a busy Sunday.

Tuesday-- September 23, 2008

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.7 Water Temperature: 75

I fixed my oven yesterday. For some reason the heating element on the bottom of the oven became fractured and would not heat up properly. I wasn't sure why the coil would break like that but I figured it was some kind of short circuit or power surge since it's an electric stove. I ordered a new heating element and when I went to install it yesterday I realized what had happened. Apparently a mouse had found its way behind the oven and when it scurried over the electrical connections it short-circuited the power. I removed what was left of the "conductor" mouse and finished replacing the heating element. I then I cooked a pizza, yum!

There seems to be another repair job on the horizon. When the water is running in the kitchen upstairs I can hear water dripping above my bathroom ceiling. Since everything is

made of plywood the water isn't coming through the ceiling but it is going somewhere and that can't be good. The problem is that I'll have to cut out the plywood to get to the leak, big job.

We talked about getting the roofs repaired properly at the last meeting but so far I haven't heard of any plans to address the problem. Hope it doesn't rain!

I heard that a large portion of the towpath has been washed out! The heavy rains that we had two weeks ago were too much for the canal berm above Anglers Inn and 120 feet of the towpath has been obliterated.

Also on the towpath, they did some clean-up work where Cabin John Creek flows under the canal. Two years ago that was the sight of heavy creek flooding and many large trees were thrown up on the path between the creek and the canal. The same creek flooding occurred two weeks ago when we had over five inches of rain adding to the huge piles of fallen trees and debris. Thankfully all that trash is now gone.

As we get more news about construction delays I find myself hoping that the renovations never happen. The more I think about the plans the more I don't like them.

Monday-- September 29, 2008

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.7 Water Temperature: 72

The river is on it's way up but will level off before it gets to four feet so not to worry. I'm a little surprised that the river is going up because around here we didn't get that much rain, only a quarter of an inch fell at National (I like that they still call it National Airport on the NOAA web site) on Saturday, while three and a half inches fell at BWI.

I biked up to Anglers Inn on Friday to have a look at the section of towpath that has been washed out. It was sad to see the fencing across the towpath and to see the canal completely drained and dry. I crawled through the barriers and scrambled down to the riverbank to look at the damage from below. The landslide felled many huge trees and left others sitting precariously at the cliff's edge with their roots exposed. The twenty foot wall of quarried stone that was holding up the towpath has crumpled and now lays buried by the rivers edge. This break happened just up river from the major break we had at Anglers after the flood of 1996, and portions of that reconstruction project are now exposed. I watched as a small stream of water continued to cut through the layers of imported gravel and clay and realized that it will probably be a long time before the towpath is repaired again. I guess water always wins.

But I wonder if this break could have been avoided. The canal has been drained all summer and flows have been restricted because of a sinkhole in the canal near Carderock. Were the makeshift dams at Carderock the reason the water backed up to the weak spot above anglers Inn? Could a lock have been opened to prevent all that rainwater from filling up the canal? Maybe not, maybe we're just relearning what the Canal companies of the past had to learn; the repeated flooding of the Potomac makes it almost impossible to keep this canal watered.

Don't forget, the October meeting will be on October 15 at 8:00. Also that night we have a special presentation by club member Bob Beauchamp. He will be presenting a slide show about global climate change. Should be interesting, don't miss it! And to further entice you to come to the Island that evening I've decided to grill up some burgers and dogs for everyone. Show up at 6:00 with something to eat or come at 7:00 for the show.

Tuesday-- September 30, 2008

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 72

Here is a special notice to everyone concerned about the recent canal breach.

The C&O Canal National Historical Park and the C&O Canal Trust will host a free community forum on Saturday, October 4, at 9:30 a.m. to address issues related to the serious breach in the canal near Angler's Inn. The forum will take place on the canal just downstream of the breach. Sturdy shoes are encouraged for those who wish to see the breach up close.

Kevin Brandt, Superintendent, C&O Canal NHP, and Matthew Logan, President, C&O Canal Trust, will be on hand to provide the public with information how repairs will be undertaken as well as ways the public can help in the repair effort.

The damage to the historic canal occurred September 6th during the heavy rains associated with Tropical Storm Hanna. Cracks in the towpath first appeared on September 5th and grew rapidly into a full-scale breach when the downpour arrived the next day. It is now estimated to measure 125 feet across at towpath level and is continuing to grow. The affected section of towpath, between the Angler's Inn parking area and Great Falls, is currently closed.

Speaking of erosion, we have some erosion issues here on the Island that need to be addressed. When it rains the path down the center of the Island becomes a fast moving stream. There is no vegetation on the path, so the water is carrying off large amounts of soil as it carves a ravine through the Island. I think we need to devise some kind of terraced system to slow the water and prevent our Island from being washed away.

It's also time to think about the upcoming **Fall Workfest**. This year's focus will be on ridding the Island of invasive plants, so I'm hoping some knowledgeable plant people come forward to help lead us. We could use more leaders in general, the problem we've had at the Workfest's recently (since we started the phone tree) is that we have too many Indians and not enough chiefs.

-Joe Hage

Girls scouts with Molly Carr and Mac Thornton
Photo by Jane Winer



From Holly Syrrakos, Island Archivist

76 Years Ago

From the September 1932 Sycamore Islander

“Summer is of course officially ended, though some very warm days and some mighty pleasant ones are still ahead of all of us at Sycamore.” Thus began a recap of the summer of 1932. The Islander of that time contained many bits of housekeeping, such as, *“The dry spell of this summer has again affected our well and you are earnestly requested not to waste water.”* A longish article about stray food items in the “icebox” followed the notice. Yet another article warned members not to tell the caretaker how to do his job, or to ask the caretaker to store their personal property in his “room.”

The Island was preparing for its annual regatta, welcoming all comers and touting its own teams.

Members also took up a new sport as reported in “We Become Ping Pong Conscious.”

“At the behest of Thomas Rives Edwards our Director of Athletics, who assumed that high-sounding post many years ago, the August Club meeting voted the purchase of a ping pong table which has taken the Island by storm.”

“The Islander holds that the bringing of ping pong to Sycamore was purely a strategic move on the part of our Director of Athletics. Some years ago Tom introduced croquet to the Island and watched its popularity wane. Then he tried horse-shoe pitching and that had its hey-day. Then bottle-pool tournaments, and these passed out. It’s rumored that Tom feared that unless something was done he would go on the toboggan and would lose his high prerogatives. However, not to be outdone, and in desperation, one rainy day at the Island he carved some ping pong paddles out of old scraps of wood and, with his conniving brother, Morts Edwards, played ping pong with a tennis ball on the pool table. This sport became so popular that Tom is once more well established as our perpetual Director of Athletics and we have a ping pong table.”

On a more whimsical note, the editor writes about a canoe paddle with “Doris Lee Henley and two other of the Island’s junior misses.” The young women led a tour of points around that Island that they renamed in a pirating spirit.

“Midway Island, the little island between Sycamore and Upper Sycamore which has been a lodestone for adventurous spirits, now draws Doris and is a rendezvous for her pirate band. They call it Pirate’s Island. From Pirate’s Island they carry prisoners to Castaway’s Rock, the rock just off the tenting colony and from which we used to start regatta races. Gonnick Dock is Hangman’s Dock to our buccaneers. The Islander named the little harbor into which the Gonnick—or Hangman’s—Dock projects as Morninglory Harbor, because of the fact that its shores are now covered with poison ivy. Our system breaks down completely before Doris, Lee, who calls it Pirate Cove.”

Summer has officially ended once again but the imagination and creativity of Islanders never rests.

Obituaries:

Blair T. Bower and Nancy Ann Bower, both longtime Sycamore Islanders.

The following article appeared in the Washington Post.

Blair T. Bower Environmental Consultant

Blair T. Bower, 82, a consultant on water resources to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the World Wildlife Federation, died Aug. 27 at his home in Arlington County after a stroke.

Mr. Bower worked as a private consultant to a variety of government agencies and nonprofit organizations until the 1990s. Previously, he was employed by Resources for the Future, a Washington think tank.

He was born in McKeesport, Pa., and graduated from the University of Washington in Seattle with a degree in sociology.

He served with the Navy in the United States during World War II, then received a second bachelor's degree, in civil engineering, in 1953 from the University of California at Berkeley.

He also received a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University in 1957.

He was a visiting professor at universities around the world and for numerous state and federal agencies.

One of his books, "Managing Water Quality: Economics, Technologies, Institutions" (1968) written with Allen V. Kneese, has become a standard text in the field. Mr. Bower published 10 other books on water, air and environmental quality.

He was a fellow and life member of the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Soil and Water Conservation Society, and a life member of the American Geophysical Union and the Water Environment Federation.

Locally, he was a past member of the Environmental Improvement Commission of Arlington, the Maryland Water Sciences Advisory Board and an ad hoc planning group for the National Research Council. For the last, he reviewed an Army Corps of Engineers study of the water needs of the Washington area.

His wife, Nancy Ann Bower, died Sept. 6.

He leaves no immediate survivors.

Saturday Relief Caretakers- October 2008

Please sign up as soon as possible

Date	Hours	Caretaker	Number
October			
4	10-2	Dave and Patty Whitnah	301-717-6400
	2-dark	Corine Roosevelt Michael Colon	202-966-8140
11	10-2	Elizabeth Taylor David Debruin	301-654-7973
	2-dark	Amy Hancock Christopher Weals	301-320-7075
18	10-2	Chris White Tamara Zemlo	301-320-7764
	2-dark	Chris Savage Lisa Hemmer	301-320-6733
25	10-2	Sara Deshler Bruce Delaplaine	301-263-0816
	2-dark	Patricia and Bruce	301-229-1359

****** Caretaker Volunteers ******
To volunteer, contact Alison Burns at
riburns@att.net
202-362-6654

Sycamore Bulletin Board:

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO RULE 6(c)

AMEND RULE 6(c) of the STANDING RULES with the underlined changes: “Club canoes or boats cannot be used by club guests unless accompanied by a member if the river level is 5 feet or higher, or if the water temperature is below 55 degrees Fahrenheit.”

At the July 2008 meeting, Tryon Wells reported that the Standing Rules continue to provide that club canoes cannot be used when the river level is five feet or higher or if the water temperature is below 55 degrees Fahrenheit. A vote had been taken several years ago to rescind this rule, but the vote was not effective because the proposal had not been published in the *Islander*. A lively discussion followed concerning what restrictions, if any, the Club should have on the use of Club canoes. Several possible resolutions were drafted for publication in the *Islander*. The consensus resolution being submitted for a vote prohibits guests from taking out canoes themselves when the water is cold or the water level on the Potomac River is high.

Hosts For November-April Meetings needed:

The October meeting will be the last one on the Island until March or April 2009. We need members who are willing to host one of the off-island meetings. Please contact Jeff Komarow at 202-492-2003 or jkomarow@gmail.com if you are willing to host a meeting.

October 15th Meeting, 8:00 on the island

Featuring a slide show by Bob Beauchamp about Global Climate Change

Fall Workfest, Sunday, November 23rd , 9-4

This year's focus will be on ridding the Island of invasive plants, so we are hoping some knowledgeable plant people will come forward to help lead us.

Large Parties:

-There have been no large parties reported for October

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, phone: 301-448-8562



The Sycamore Islander
6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818
ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
BETHESDA, MD 20817
PERMIT NO. 1172

FIRST CLASS MAIL

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>
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

October Meeting : Wednesday,
October 15th at 8:00 PM on Sycamore Island.

November Meeting : Wednesday,
November 12th, location TBA

Fall Workfest: Sunday Nov. 23rd
9AM-4PM



Great to see so many canoes out on the river-
Photo by Joe Hage