



The Sycamore Islander

August 2009

Volume 88 No 8

President's Letter:

I jumped the gun a bit when I wrote last month that the construction project had passed the final inspection. However, after some back and forth with the county during July, the project has passed final inspection, and the club now has an occupancy permit (finally)!! A number of dedicated members showed up on one or more Sunday mornings in July to take on the work that the Club planned to do itself – painting, constructing some shelving for storage, laying a brick floor on the ground level by the new bathrooms, etc. We have made progress, but there is still more to be done. We may need to schedule a few more Sunday morning work sessions (followed by a barbecue lunch, of course) in August and September to complete the work.

Also, the Club needs to make a decision on replacement lockers. The consensus at the July meeting was that the Club should survey the membership to find out how many members want lockers, whether those members would be willing to pay a fee (either a one-time fee or an annual fee), and what size lockers members would want. Hopefully, we can get the survey ready soon and distribute it on the Island, by email and by including it in the Islander.

August Meeting Barbecue: August 12 at 6:30 PM (Weather Permitting): I cannot remember an August meeting at which the Club has had a quorum. Some years, the President planned for the meeting as scheduled and did not come close to getting a quorum. In other years, the President cancelled the meeting. This year, let's try something different. On the theory that if you feed them, they will come, the Club will have an August barbecue with hamburgers, veggie burgers, cole slaw, potato salad, chips, and lemonade. Feel free to bring a side dish or a dessert to fill in. If we get a quorum, we'll have a short meeting after dinner. If we don't have a quorum, at least those members who show up will be well fed. If the weather is bad (i.e. persistent thunderstorms), then the event will be cancelled. Check the website or call the Island if the weather is doubtful.

I hope that everyone is having a good summer. See you on August 12th at 6:30 PM for the barbecue (and maybe a meeting to follow).

-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-Boone, as email attachments to ahcannell@gmail.com

The deadline for the September issue is Wednesday, August 26th.

Sycamore Island—Meeting of July 8, 2009

Minutes--

Meeting on the Island, on the lawn, was called to order at 8:10 p.m. by President Jeff Komarow. Several members had come early for picnic/grill dinner.

Attending the meeting were: Nancy and Norman Metzger, Jane and David Winer, Phoebe Hamill, Peter Winkler, Trip Reid, Sherry Fizdale, Ned Goddan, Jim Drew, Paul Hagen, Larry Heilman, Gerry Barton, Marianne Ross, Mary Ann Stein, Tyron Wells, Stan Wiggins and Bill Marmon. A quorum was present. The minutes of the May meeting were unanimously approved.

Jeff Komarow and Captain Tryon Wells reported that preliminary inspection approvals for the new Clubhouse construction had been received with final approval expected within the week. Whew! And check out that handicap access to the Men's locker room. Considerable work, which was not part of the commercial contract, still needs to be done to bring the clubhouse into finished condition.

To that end Caretaker Joe Hage will conduct work parties on the next three Sundays in July. Work needed to be done includes painting the kitchen, laying brick on the ground floor, trash removal and much more. Please call Joe and let him know if you can participate.

Tryon reported on options for reinstalling lockers and cubbies in the Clubhouse. One option included 60 lockers (20 full length and 40 in varying shorter sizes) that would cost \$4,500. After discussion it was decided to survey the membership on desire for lockers and to inquire if a payment option was feasible. It was also agreed to pursue putting hooks and open cubbies in the men's and women's locker rooms.

Tryon then led a discussion on furniture placement in the second floor, particularly the positioning of the pool table. While Tryon, as Captain, has discretion in these matters it was agreed that the best place for pool table was in the smaller new room in the Clubhouse, in order to preserve the option for a large gathering in the larger room.



Jane Winer relaxing after working hard painting the club floor.

Tryon also reported that he was going to try to construct a new float, to replace the float that was swept away earlier this spring by high water. Larry Heilman made the recommendation that the float NOT be replaced because of possible dangers to young swimmers in unpredictable rapid water. After considerable discussion and a show of hands, the sentiment overwhelmingly supported the replacement of the float, although several members agreed with Larry that if we have a float it should be relatively close to shore and upstream.

Larry Heilman also submitted Guidelines for Swimming at Sycamore Island, which are printed elsewhere in the Islander and will be posted at the Club.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:07 p.m. and several members toured the newly completed Club-house renovation.

Respectfully submitted
Bill Marmon
Co-Recording Secretary



Searching for the Swim Floats

Several years ago, I participated in a small adventure with John Matthews and the Winers in the retrieval of a fine club picnic table that had floated downstream during one of our routine floods. John had taken the time to explore some of the large debris wash area downstream of the Little Falls dam and had found the table. Armed as we were with socket wrenches and screwdrivers, we made short work of dismantling it and carrying the pieces of it back to our cars. At the island we reassembled it and it is still in use today.

I've been trying to find the time to re-build the swim float, which requires some specialized hardware (the float drums and step ladder), which will take some time to be ordered and delivered. "What if I could find either of the last two swim floats downriver," I thought optimistically. "I could unscrew the flotation, return it to the Island and save the club both time and money."

So it was with a light gait and brimming with purpose that I struck off from the towpath into what I estimated would be the upstream end of the great debris field. I was soon engulfed in high grasses, large boulders and uprooted tree trunks strewn in every pattern. It was treacherous bushwhacking and the going was slow. Unlike a well-developed trail, every step you have to look down to see where you are stepping, and only when you've achieved a stable footing, can you bring your head up to look around. I gave it about two hours in the hot sun before I headed back to the canal and home, sadly, without the satisfaction of finding either of the last two swim floats.

The "X" marks the approximate spot where I found the battered remnants of the swim float ladder purchased last summer (summer of 2008 that is). The line in the picture is what I believe was my path through the debris wash.

-- Tryon Wells



Swim Float Redux

Almost every year, the club's swim float seems to face a trial by flood, usually not long after its April launching. In both 2004 and 2006, springtime high water tried to wash it away, and would have, had it not been for Joe's sharp eye and timely heroics (see Caretaker's Log -- April 28 and 29, 2004 and July 6 and 9, 2006) But in the spring of last year (2008), the river finally claimed the swim float. So, last summer, I built another swim float and we enjoyed it the rest of the season. But we only enjoyed it for that single season, as it wasn't long after its re-launching in this year's spring of 2009, that this new swim float was likewise swept away. This loss of the new swim float was especially galling since this time, the float was attached to TWO 100-pound concrete anchors AND a "security cable" attached to a huge shoreline tree, specifically to prevent any trip downstream. How could that swim float have disappeared?

I attempted to answer that question by first looking for its remnants downstream a couple of weeks before (see "Searching for the Swim Floats" sidebar), but came away empty-handed. So, as the summer was slipping away quickly, July 25 was the date chosen to re-build the swim float yet again. David Winer, David Holdridge, Richard Bertaut, and Alan Gelb all responded to the call and put in a good afternoon's worth of work assembling the newest float. Then it came time to launch it. But how do we anchor it? Are last spring's concrete anchors still under water? Last spring's cable was still lashed to the huge tree, but did it go to anything? It was time to find out.

David Holdridge and I first ventured out in a canoe following the cable from the shoreline tree. We satisfied ourselves that at least one anchor was still down there. But the canoe was too unstable to try to pull it up, so instead, we put our new swim float in the water, and again followed the line until it was vertical and descending into the murky depths. After some hauling, we managed to pull a concrete anchor up onto the deck. Anchor number one was revealed! But another steel cable line went off into the water. After a bit more following and more pulling up, anchor number two was also hoisted on deck. Both anchors revealed! But still another steel cable line went off into the water.

Actually, this made sense. The way the float had been anchored last spring, was to two concrete anchors in series, and then tethered from the second anchor to the huge shoreline tree. My best guess was that somewhere in the chain, some cabling or bolt tightening had been poorly done, and that was why we lost the second swim float in as many years. Now I would find out if my suspicions would be confirmed.

We pulled on the line again. There was something down there, but the line wasn't particularly heavy. After about 15 feet we pulled up ... a broken 2"x 6" plank with the steel flange connector still attached firmly to the steel cable (see photo). Wow! The cabling was not the failure at all. The float's front 2"x 6" timber had snapped in half under the pressure of the floodwater. Amazing. Mystery solved.

Armed as we now are with this new knowledge, our newest swim float will receive some specific reinforcement before next spring (perhaps at the fall workfest) that will enable it to stay in place in the springtime floods of future years.



It is a measure of the popularity of the swim float, that before we had even finished building it, several children from different parties (there must have been four or five that Saturday) had come wandering by wondering if we were planning to launch it. I will conclude by quoting David Winer's report to Joe Hage on the success of the endeavor:

"The raft is in the water and a great hit with the swimmers. We had five guys putting it together and it went quite quickly. About thirty seconds after the last screw went in a little girl on the swing said, 'When are you going to put it in the water?' It didn't have the ladder on at that point, but shortly thereafter it did and the same little girl was standing on the raft as we paddled by (after connecting the cables). She said 'Thank you.'"

--Tryon Wells

Sycamore Island Swimming Float Diagram and Specifications (Underside)

Frame and Decking

- (7) 2" x 6" x 8' treated lumber
- (1) 2" x 6" x 10' treated lumber
- (2) 5/8" treated plywood
- (1) Box of 3 1/2" deck screws
(frame construction)
- (1) Box of 1 1/2" deck screws
(plywood decking)
- (1) "Single T Female" steel plate w/flange
for attaching wire cable to float
(Merco Marine - H-SF)
- (1) "Inside Corner" steel plate
w/reinforcement bar
for upstream corner of float
(Merco Marine - H-IC)
- (8) 3" x 3/8" galvanized bolts with
nuts and washers (for steel plates)

Ladder

- (1) Howell 3-step dock ladder (Overtons)
- (4) 2" x 3/8" stainless steel
lag screws w/washers

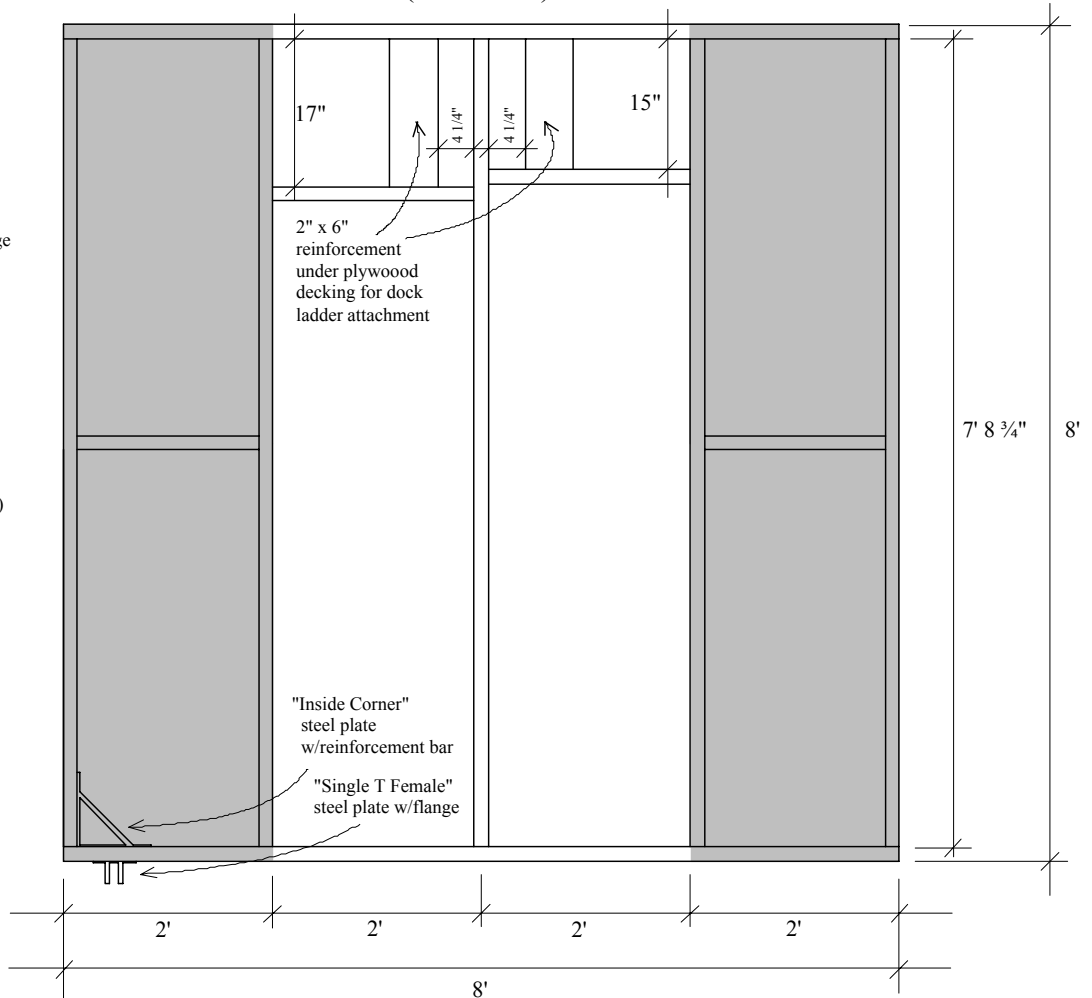
Flotation

- (4) 2' x 4' x 12" Float Drums
(Merco Marine - F2412)
- (28) 4" x 3/8" galvanized
hex lag screws w/washers

anchors (2)

- (2) Eyebolt w/nut and washer
- (2) 5-gallon bucket
- (2) 80-pound bag of Sakrete
- (10) cable clamps
- 200 feet of 1/4" wire rope cable

= Float Drums



Saturday Relief Caretakers- August 2009

Please sign up as soon as possible

****** Caretaker Volunteers ******

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

<u>August</u> <u>2009</u>		
SATURDAY	MORNING 9 A.M – 3 P.M	AFTERNOON 3 P.M. – DARK
August 1st	Lafe Solomom and Cam Crocker 301.229.3116 lafesolo@aol.com	Bonnie Roberts and Jeff Holdridge 301.464.5046 bonnie@holdridge.org
August 8 th	Joe and Louisa McBride 301.564.0235 louisamcbride@yahoo.com ;	James and Laura Snow 703.751.4853 james.snow@usda.gov ;
August 15th	Michael and Beth Grant 202.234.7547 spikeave-	Roman Kulbashny and Nancy Shute 301.263.0609 romank@shuku.com
August 22nd	John Membrino 301.229.1154 ssmembrino@aol.com	Betty Chia Karro 202.265.2476 Kargas @earthlink.net
August 29th	Lauren Brandt 202.363.4289 lbjls@rcn.com ;	Steve Newman and Mary Tisdale 703.528.4352 snewman3623@comcast.net

Guidelines for Swimming at Sycamore Island

Swimming in the Potomac River off Sycamore Island on a hot summer day can be a marvelous adventure. However, one must always keep in mind that the river can be dangerous especially if not treated with respect. For a number of years the river has been declared clean and safe for swimming. However, there have been articles in the Washington Post that suggest that after heavy rains, because of the run-off upstream, the river may be unfit for swimming.

The following are guidelines, not rules, for your consideration:

You swim at your own risk.

It is strongly recommended that you swim in pairs.

Parents are responsible for their children.

Swimmers should only swim off the swim float if they are able to swim to and from the swim float without stopping.

It can be tempting to allow a non-swimmer person or child to play in the water if they are using a flotation device, but it is inadvisable and potentially very dangerous. DO NOT assume a flotation device is a substitute for the ability to swim.

If you see a swimmer in distress, first throw the person the life safety ring, which is attached to the dock or in the canoe on shore behind the dock. If you must use the canoe to help a distressed swimmer, again first give the swimmer a life safety ring, which you will find in the canoe. As a last resort, you should attempt a swimming rescue.

Enjoy the river!

In Touch with Joe:

There is a thick mist rising from the river as I write this and the rocks in the middle of the river look as though they are floating in a cloud. It is an eerie scene as I look up-river at the silhouettes of the twisted trees emerging from the fog, and a goose swimming in the foreground as if it was filled with helium. This kind of fog is very unusual for this time of year. It isn't very often that the river is twelve degrees warmer than the air in August.

It's funny, just when I think I've written about every possible thing that can happen down here something new always comes along. You'd think that, after seven years of living on the Island, I would know that by now. The other day I watched as two white-tailed deer bucks sparred at the foot of Ruppert's Island. There they were with their new, velvet-covered antlers trying to force each other into the river. Never seen that before. I guess there are always interesting things happening down here, it's just a matter of having the time to notice them.

Lately things have been busy. Now that the contractors are gone I've been working at moving back into my new place and making it homey. I'm really happy with my new digs and it's been fun moving back in and fixing up the place. I have it looking pretty good now so I'm ready to give free tours. Just let me know whenever you want to check it out.

My quarters are a little further along in the construction process than the clubhouse is though. Sadly, there are still many hours of painting to be done in the club areas, despite the fact that we had three mini workdays here this past July. We didn't get anywhere close to finishing the painting but I'm pleased with the progress we've made. Thank you so much to the devoted club members that have come down and donated their muscle, much appreciated. We just have to keep plugging away and I'm sure things will eventually get back to normal around here.



We did get the new swim float out last Saturday. I say we but I had nothing to do with it. The driving force behind launching the swim float was Tryon, our Captain. It was amazing to see, several club members heeded Tryon's call for volunteers, and by the afternoon the float was in the water. No small task considering that all the materials had to be carried down from the parking lot and assembled on site.

July was a great month down here with many days of near perfect weather and excellent river conditions. The weekends have been busy, especially The Fourth, but the weekdays are usually pretty quiet, even Fridays. The fishing is slowly improving but it is nowhere near as good as it was last year. I guess we got spoiled last year with all that warm water and those low river conditions.

-Joe Hage





Please Join Us For the

Sycamore Island Regatta and Barbecue Dinner

Monday, September 7, 2009
2:00 PM till dark

September just wouldn't be the same without the umpteenth annual Sycamore Island Regatta! Mark your calendars for this Labor Day celebration open to all Sycamore Islanders and families – including folks on the waiting list. Everyone is welcome, especially kids, teens, their families and the young at heart. There will be cheering and prizes! Even if you opt not to join in the games, come join us for dinner, and enjoy summer on the river for one more weekend.

Events include:

- The famous canoe dash around Sycamore Island
- Lance-a-lot jousting tournament
- Balloon stomp
- Egg toss
- Swamped canoe race
- Canoe tug of war
- and more.....

Games followed by a pot-luck starting at 5-ish. Club will barbecue main course and you folks bring side dishes, desserts or drinks to share. Come any time and join us for all or part of the fun. To volunteer (especially for grill meister) contact glogau@verizon.net.



Sycamore Bulletin Board:

Relief Caretakers wanted:

Thanks goes out to the many people who volunteered for relief caretaking. We are currently looking for relief caretakers for weekends in September and October.

Call Alison Burns to volunteer- 202-362-6654

Large Parties:

Sept 12, 4 to dark, V. Star Mitchell, CCH Friends and any island member who wishes to come, 35 guests (even numbered date subject to monthly meeting approval)

Sept 13, 12-6pm, Bonnie Roberts & George Holdridge, birthday party, 35 guests.

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

To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, John Noble
e-mail johnanoble@mac.com phone: 301-448-8562

This is a new email address for John



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

August Meeting: August 12th, 8 PM
on the island.

September Meeting: September 9th,
8PM on the island.

