



# The Sycamore Islander

OCTOBER 2010 | VOLUME 89 NUMBER 10

## President's Letter

Even after last spring's completed renovation, a number of clubhouse projects continue to require our efforts. Have you noticed the painting going on in the downstairs areas? And our energetic caretaker has been scraping the exterior of old paint prior to putting a new coat on the wood siding. The new lockers are being installed, a job we seem to have underestimated in its complexity and the effort required. Getting them delivered and brought into the clubhouse was no small task; now we must firmly and neatly attach them to walls. So far, we are managing all this without resorting to outside contracting.

Two of our favorite events took place in September with the best imaginable weather, but with lower than usual attendance. Both the Regatta and Fishing Derby were well planned, organized, and "produced" by Cindy Bertaut and George Malusky, respectfully. Thanks to them and their assistants, those who did show enjoyed the action very much. I envisage more timely and attractive publicity of Island activities to let members know in advance specific details about events planned for them and their guests.

A third event, the Old Timers Day, experienced a good turnout for the pot-luck lunch and conversation around the picnic table. The day was organized by Charlotte Brewer and Larry Heilman. Roger Herst conducted an informal seminar about writing stories and memoirs, citing specifics from his latest novel.

There is a special treat in store for us this month. Long before this civilization, the extraordinary fishing

resources in our area of the river attracted concentrations of native peoples. And they left evidence of their presence. Doug Dupin, who maintains a museum of artifacts from prehistoric times along the local Potomac palisades, will discuss his interests with emphasis on objects discovered on Sycamore Island. We have scheduled this presentation to coincide with our monthly meeting, to start half an hour earlier than normal. Please join us to learn about this topic and to discuss the ramifications of finding relics and artifacts on Sycamore and Ruppert's Islands.

**Our next meeting is at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, October 13, in the clubhouse.** Note that this is thirty minutes earlier than usual to provide time for the special presentation by Doug Dupin. Suggestion: come even earlier and bring a brown-bag supper—the Island is particularly hospitable around sunset these days.

DAVID WINER  
President



Pot-luck lunch on OldTimers Day

DAVID WINER

## Minutes for the September 8 Gathering

### Attendees

David Winer, Jane Winer, John Membrino, Maria Stenzel, Tryon Wells, Jerry Barton, Cindy Bertaut, Joe Hage, and Ann Marie Cunningham

### The Meeting

Didn't actually happen due to lack of a quorum.

Monica Hesse of *The Washington Post* was guided around the Island by our president. She had lots of questions and thoroughly enjoyed the zip line. It is not likely that there will be an article in the paper as a result of her visit.

September 17, 2010

Greetings to friends and family of Peggy Thomson—we have some news for you. After 53 years at 23 Grafton Street, Peggy has moved to Northampton, MA.

Rockridge is an assisted living facility, and Peggy lives in the Gardens, a unit for people with memory loss—a group of 19, with cheerful and friendly care-givers, who organize meals, activities and walks, all day, every day. Peggy is still getting accustomed to the changes, but she seems comfortable. It is a very inclusive group. In some ways, it seems almost like going back to college. She has her own room, set up with family photos, Swiss posters, familiar furniture, games, and books. There are singing groups, discussions, and all sorts of organized events to participate in that she seems to be enjoying. Currently, though, she seems pretty convinced that she is just there for a brief visit. Change is not easy. Fortunately, Rockridge is just about a mile away from the David Thomson family household and David and Ann have been dropping by and spending time with her every day. And it is only about a 2-hour drive for Hili and Tom to visit, as well. It is nice to have family near by. She would love to hear from all of you, too. Currently, she is finding phone calls quite confusing, so a card or a letter, sent to the address below, would be better. If you want more information, give us a call—

Hili and Tom	603-224-4598
David and Ann	413-586-9147
Christopher and Susan	575-421-2334

We would love to hear from you, too. We hope all is well with you. Best wishes from the next generations of Thomsons.

Peggy's new address:  
Peggy Thomson  
Rockridge  
37 Coles Meadow Road, Northampton, MA 01060

Doug Dupin, archaeologist with the Palisades Museum of Prehistory, will come to the next meeting and do a presentation on his findings from his efforts digging on Ruppert's and Sycamore Islands. His visit was spurred by Joe Hage finding an arrowhead. Hopefully he will compare what he found with Betty Burchell and American University's dig on Ruppert's.

### Lockers

The lockers are here but have not been set up. They will be screwed to the wall in the hallway by the rest rooms. Daily use lockers will be placed in the rest rooms. It was a big effort to get them onto the Island. Thanks go to Tryon Wells, Joe Hage, Robert Gelb and Drew Walsh.

### Fireworks

Not literally. There was a circuit breaker that continually was turning itself off. Joe had an electrician look at it a few times. Then one day, the Gelbs were there and saw a shower of sparks by the rest rooms. A wire had been rubbed so that the protective coating had worn through. It's all fixed now.

### Canoe auction

Several canoes have been abandoned on the Island. Despite John Membrino's best efforts, he has not found the owners. Look to the *Islander* for the details of the auction.

### Swimming

This is the best time. The water's great.

Signs warning about the dam are either gone or nearly impossible to read due to fading and foliage. A kayaker recently intended to paddle over the dam. The Club should request the Park Service to fix the signs.

### Anniversary celebration

Cindy Bertaut has a 10"x15" picture that is mounted and lacquered that she will hang in the clubhouse.

### Regatta

Despite the low turnout, there was great fun and will be held again next year on Labor Day. There will be more publicity so there will be no excuse to have conflicting plans.

### Water filtration

The filters get clogged quickly, resulting in the problems at the anniversary celebration. Joe has a theory on how to make them more effective and last longer. He will check with the folks who installed the system.

### Pull saws

Jerry Barton reported there are three, newly polished, antique saws with copper plates.

### Fishing Derby

To be held on September 18.

ANNE MARIE CUNNINGHAM  
Recording Secretary

## Unclaimed Kayaks/Canoe for Sale



JOHN MEMBRINO

There are four kayaks and a canoe on the island looking for a home (see accompanying photo). If you are interested in purchasing one or more of them, you may submit a written bid to Canoe Supervisor John Membrino at [johnmembrino@verizon.net](mailto:johnmembrino@verizon.net). Make sure to note the color and markings of the boat you are bidding on. All proceeds will go to the island's treasury. Please note that if you purchase one of these boats you will have to remove it from the island pending future availability of unassigned racks in the canoe shed.

## Evidence from Prehistory found on Sycamore Island

In the Spring of this year, Joe Hage found an American Indian artifact near Sycamore Island's clubhouse. With the possibility that erosion was exposing Native American artifacts, Joe asked me to come have a look. I am an avocational archeologist and Director of the Palisades Museum of Prehistory, and I was able to recognize the projectile point as a Susquehanna Broadspear. Other manipulated rocks in the area suggested that a prehistoric soil horizon may have been exposed.

In May, Joe and I conducted a small archeological dig at the area of interest, and found a few more artifacts that shed

light on the island's early inhabitants. In referring to the work of Elizabeth McDowell, who completed her doctorate thesis on Ruppert Island's archeology, a similar pottery type was found on Sycamore Island. But beyond that, the two islands differ substantially in their geomorphology and quite possibly in their archeological value.

The Palisades Museum of Prehistory is a small museum I founded eight years ago after discovering many artifacts in my own yard and neighborhood. For Native Americans, the section of river between Little Falls and Great Falls provided phenomenally abundant fishing during the Spring migrations—explaining the ubiquity of Indian artifacts in the area.

I will be presenting my archeological report for the Sycamore Island dig at the monthly meeting in October. Please join me for the discussion and viewing of the artifacts.

DOUG DUPIN



Susquehanna Broadpoint surface find (Sycamore Island)

## Notes from the Island

**Thursday, September 3, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.55 Water Temperature: 82**

I scared up two deer yesterday afternoon. I was bush-whacking through the trail at the top of the Island when I heard a crash and saw the white tails of two large deer as they bounded toward the swim dock. I freed myself from the foliage and gave chase. I ran all the way to the other side of the Island and searched for half an hour but I never got another glimpse of them.

Good night of fishing on Tuesday. The water was clear and I caught half a dozen bass in two hours. While we were paddling up stream we saw hundreds of dragon flies. These were the big dragon flies and they looked like squadrons of fighter jets as they zoomed close past our heads. We actually saw some other humans while we were out, which is pretty rare. Four

guys were obviously getting set up for a night of fishing on Rupperts. They had a big fire going and they had lots of lines out for catfish. I suppose it isn't a problem to have them there, I just hope they don't leave a ton of trash, which they probably will. I tried to say hello but they did not seem to want to talk to us.

**Tuesday, September 7, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.50 Water Temperature: 78**

Wow, what a weekend. It was a perfect weekend to enjoy the Island and many of you members did just that. The weather was exquisite, and with the river so clear and warm, the fishing, boating and swimming were great too. It was awesome to see so many people using the Island, but with the weather like it was, it would be hard to find an excuse not to come down. The bell kept ringing and everyone pitched in to help carry the load. It also helped when members met their



The biggest sycamore leaf ever!

JOE HAGE



JOE HAGE

A cardinal flower

guests in the parking lot or ferry landing as opposed to on the Island.

The air is quiet this morning but the passing warblers have been treating us to their wonderful bird songs recently. I also saw a brown creeper and a peregrine falcon.

The Sycamore Regatta was kind of a flop. I'm afraid that people either didn't know about it or they just didn't understand what it was about. We eventually did manage to have a canoe race around the Island and that was fun. I cooked burgers for the families that were here, and Jane Winer brought some delicious mac'n'cheese, but it was all pretty low key. A big, special "thank you" to Cindy Bertaut for single-handedly organizing and preparing all the games, food and activities. Cindy, you rock!

**Wednesday, September 8, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.43 Water Temperature: 78**

The river is really low right now. The rocks are exposed and strained with mud making it look as if our dam has sprung a leak. This is the lowest the river has been since my first September here, eight years ago! Back then it got down to 2.18 and it became necessary to release water from the upriver dams to keep the river at its minimum flow. If this drought keeps up we may have to do the same this year.

I had another first yesterday, which is great because it gives me something new to talk about. I'd seen a deer swimming before, but this time I was out in the water with them. I came around the top of the Island where I spotted three deer, their heads bobbing in the river. It seems they were heading from Sycamore up to Rupperts, I gave chase in my canoe. I was starting to gain on them but then they reached the shallow water and they were able to bound out of reach. The adult female reached the shores of Ruppert's first and she stood waiting for her nearly-mature offspring to catch up. Then they all took off, soaking wet, into the underbrush.

**Thursday, September 9, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.35 Water Temperature: 77**

There was not much turnout for the meeting last night, maybe because of the Jewish holiday. Six of us had a nice dinner on the Captains float and then we had a good discussion in the clubhouse.

**Sunday, September 12, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.39 Water Temperature: 73**

Well, we got a little rain but not enough to pull us out of these extreme low-water conditions. The river got so low(2.2) that it became impossible to pull the ferry up to the dock on the Island. I was forced to put on my waders and commence a dredging operation. I dug into the river bottom for an hour and made things a little better, but if the river continues to fall I'll have to get out there again. Its easier to dredge the river bottom than it is to fight it with the ferry. Its better to fix than to fight.

The clubhouse has become a death trap for the carolina wrens. I found another carcass in there yesterday. I think they are getting in through a hole that was made by a squirrel last fall. I'll patch that hole today and maybe the carnage will be over.

Saturday Relief Caretakers <b>October 2010</b>		
	10 A.M. – 2 P.M.	2 P.M. – DARK
OCTOBER 2	Roger Herst and Judy Bader 301.320.6436 jrjprop@verizon.net	Garret and Jean Rasmussen 202.337.3396 grasmussen@orrick.com
OCTOBER 9	Adrienne Allison 301.951.8007 adrienneallison@aol.com	Tom and Katie Dyson 301.208.1071 TomDyson@verizon.net
OCTOBER 16	Douglas and Deborah Richards 703.578.0822 ddncr4@cox.net	Linda Greer and Michael Tilchin 301.229.0705 lgreer@nrdc.org
OCTOBER 23	Dick and Penny Doolittle 301.229.5632 rdool@rcn.com	Trip Reid 202.363.8554 trip@editdc.com
OCTOBER 30	Nancy and Winston Wiley 301.299.7586 wpwiley@mac.com	David Holdridge 301.657.8536 dholdridge@starpower.net

**Tuesday, September 14, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.53 Water Temperature: 73**

There was a dam release up at Randolph-Jennings Dam back on the 10th of this month. They were forced to do the release in order to keep the river at its minimum flow requirements. It takes nine days for the release to reach us, so by Sunday we may see its effects here on the Island. Maybe this means that I won't have to do any more dredging.

There was a recreational/whitewater release scheduled for the Savage River Dam but that was canceled, maybe they need to conserve that release in case we need the water later this month.

I saw a rose-breasted grosbeak, it wasn't the striking male but a cool sighting all the same. It must be migration time.

The jewel weed, which is all over the Island, is at its peak right now. The plants are over five feet tall and most are sporting more than two dozen yellow flowers each. Native bees are covered with white pollen as they busy themselves crawling in and out of all the flowers. Once I saw a flower fall from a plant with a bee still inside! Soon the fruit will be ripe and we can see how this plant got its other name, touch-me-not. There is also some of the orange, or spotted jewel weed, here too. They don't seem to grow nearly as tall.

**Thursday, September 23, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.56 Water Temperature: 74**

Happy equinox, the end of another fabulous summer on the Island. We will also have a full moon on the river tonight.

I guess our great egrets knew that the summer was ending. The sixteen of them that were roosting nearby are now gone. Last week they had moved from their normal roosting tree and were gathering across the river in Virginia. That must have been a precursor to their departure because now they are nowhere in sight.

The snakes are on the move again too. Maybe they are looking for suitable winters quarters because I caught one in the field by the hammock and another big blackie crawling into the screen porch.

I bought a motion detector camera so I can try to catch the deer on the Island at night, but so far no luck.

Big news, they have repaired the towpath near us where it was washed out over by the warning sign. This is good news for us since it allows us to drive on the towpath to the Island from lock five rather than having



DAVID WINER

Canoe contest

to drive all the way down from lock ten. For years this section has been washed out and was too narrow and scary to drive on.

I heard that there are plans to eventually clear all the trees and brush from the canal and I noticed that some of the locks upstream are being repaired as well. This is all great news. I hope they have our old metal bridge on their repair list too. If people are interested in helping the C&O Canal, I suggest that they get involved with The Canal Trust. This organization seems to have a good vision and are making things happen on the Canal.

**Wednesday, September 29, 2010**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.63 Water Temperature: 74**

There is a storm on the way up the coast. It's not a real strong storm but chances are that it will dump a lot of rain on us. Right now they are predicting the river to rise up to 5.2 feet by Saturday. That's a big jump from where we are now. Please check the river levels before you come down. Anything over five feet at the Little Falls gage means the ferry will be closed.

JOE HAGE

# The Sycamore Islander

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## FIRST CLASS MAIL



DAVID WINER

### Large Parties Scheduled



Saturday, October 16, Joe Hage,  
30 guests for engagement party

*The Sycamore Islander* is the monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Every attempt is made to publish the *Islander* before the second Wednesday of the month and in advance of the monthly meeting. Articles, photographic essays, drawings, announcements, letters to the editors—any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list—are welcome. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to: Carol Beehler, [cbeehler@comcast.net](mailto:cbeehler@comcast.net). The deadline for inclusion in the November issue is November 1.