



The Sycamore Islander

JANUARY 2011 | VOLUME 90 NUMBER 1

President's Letter

Happy New Year to all Islanders!!! I predict that 2011 will be a banner 126th year for Sycamore Island and all Islanders—and also that the fishing will be really great this year. The installation of lockers has now occurred and so the construction project is now officially and finally completed.

We should all thank outgoing president David Winer, and the other 2010 officers and supervisors for doing a superb job and for their very substantial contributions of time and commitment. We 2011 officers and supervisors will try and continue this high standard during the coming year.

Our next monthly meeting is at 8:00 p.m. on January 12, 2011 at the home of Cora Shaw and Bernard Veuthey, 5022 Cathedral Avenue, NW (in Palisades—off MacArthur Blvd., take Arizona up the hill two blocks and then left onto Cathedral for one-half block). Please plan to attend.

At our January meeting we need to select dates and lay out a schedule of events for the coming year. We have spring and fall work sessions every year which all members should try and attend. In addition, there are many club events that appeal to different members. During past years some of these have been the fishing derby, fall regatta, summer solstice sleepover, old-timers picnic, winter bird walk, summer bird paddle, wildflower walk, Potomac River clean up day, canoeing and kayaking classes, and many more. If you can serve as a coordinator or a co-coordinator of any of these

events, please contact me at 202.331.1639, or vice president Bill Marmon, or any club officer.

A new and very interesting event proposed for this year is a State of the Nation's River program. This is envisioned as an annual event. We all use and enjoy the Potomac and have a special interest in and responsibility for the health of our River. Club member Paul Hagen conceived and developed the idea for this program and has volunteered to serve as the coordinator.

See you on the Island.

JIM DREW
President



The installation of lockers is now complete.

DAVID WINER

Minutes for the December 8 Meeting and Christmas Party

A very festive Christmas Party meeting was convened at home of Silvija Strikis and Miguel Browne in McLean. The food table was groaning for mercy under the weight of all sorts of delicious bowls and platters. Fortunately David Winer did not mix his justly famous home-made eggnog until after the meeting, or the meeting may have never commenced.

But commence it did at 8:15 p.m. with a robust quorum including Sherry Pettie Fizdale, Maria Stenzel, Marianne Ross, Jim Drew, Lucky and Bill Marmon, Larry Heilman, David and Jane Winer, John Noble, Silvija Strikis, Drew Walsh, Tryon Wells, Gerry Barton, John Membrino, Star Mitchell, Alan and Caroline Gelb, Karen Possner, Stan Wiggins, Louise Mayer, John Stapko, and Jeff Komarow.

It was a special treat to have former caretaker "Doc" Taliaferro visiting from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where he lives with wife Phyllis on eight acres and a menagerie of animals. Current caretaker Joe Hage was also in attendance at the party.

Minutes of the November 10 meeting were approved by unanimous vote.

Reports

Captain Tyron Wells reported that 72 lockers have been successfully installed at the Club with 18 full height lockers and the rest 2 or 3 feet in height. Members may sign up for a locker, without charge, with Joe Hage. Lockers in the men's and ladies' room are for daily use and should not be locked overnight.

Membership

Membership Secretary Peter Winkler was not present but President Winer indicated that the Membership committee would be getting into full swing on making recommendations for how the waiting list would be opened once the existing waiting list and waiting list members brought the club membership to 160 regular members.

Treasurer

Alan Gelb gave his report on state of Club finances, which are good. (See Alan's detailed and separate report on the next page.) A motion to approve the Treasurer's report, along with a \$32 dollar a year rise in

club dues to \$358 for regular members for 2011, and a bonus for Caretaker Extraordinaire Joe Hage, was adopted by a very large majority vote. Also approved by the same motion was approval for a slight increase in dues for other categories of membership, waiting list fees, and large party fees. (Dues figure for 2011 does NOT include an additional and continuing \$75 per year for regular members to retire the construction loan for the recent club upgrade.)

New Business

A motion to elect the proposed slate of officers for 2011 was approved unanimously. Jim Drew was elected President of the Club and Bill Marmon was elected Vice President. Jim had been serving as Vice President and Bill had been Co-Recording secretary. Lucky Marmon was elected as Co-Recording Secretary. All other officers were re-elected to their existing posts and supervisors were reappointed.

OFFICERS AND SUPERVISORS FOR 2011

ELECTIVE OFFICERS

President Jim Drew

Vice-President Bill Marmon

Recording Secretary Lucky Marmon and Ann Marie Cunningham

Treasurer Alan and Caroline Gelb

Financial Secretary Lisa Kliefloth

Membership Secretary Peter Winkler

Editor Carol Behler

Archivist Larry Heilman

Captain Tryon Wells

Deputy Captain John Stapko and Drew Walsh

SUPERVISORS

Canoeing John Membrino

Swimming Larry Heilman

Camping and Parties John Noble

Carpentry and Painting Charles Pill

Entertainment George and Shelly Malusky

Clubhouse Karl Kosack

Finance Bill Eichbaum

Website Tryon Wells

Relief Caretaking Alison Burns

Jim Drew commended outgoing President David Winer for a job well done and gave special credit to David's ability to create a friendly and positive tone on the

Island. There was enthusiastic and unanimous agreement.

The business meeting was adjourned at 9:02.

The friendly and positive tone was continued for some time thereafter in the lovely surroundings of the Strikis/Browne home. David's eggnog (served in elegant silver cups) and a delicious assortment of good things to eat, including barbecued chicken legs, really good cheese, and many other treats, created a very festive post-meeting atmosphere.

Respectfully submitted,
BILL MARMON
Co-Recording Secretary

Sycamore Budget, 2010 and 2011 Treasurer's Report

The budget situation for 2010 was outlined at the December meeting. In real terms (that is, adjusting for inflation) the Club was not spending more than it had in 2007, the last year before the start of the construction project. However, as explained in the December *Islander*, the Club was facing a shortfall of about \$5,000 in income because the fall in interest rates had almost erased our interest income. In addition, we normally adjust our budget each year to allow for inflation, which had been 1% over 2010 as measured by the October–October CPI. This would imply an operating budget for 2011 of \$79,098. An increase in dues and charges is therefore recommended to place the Club on a sound financial footing. The preferred increase would raise dues and charges by about 10%, not including the construction charge which was mostly used to service the 10-year notes issued by the Club to fund the construction. The meeting voted to approve the budget and the increase in dues. Members also commended Joe Hage on an outstanding caretaking job in 2010.

ALAN GELB
Treasurer

Annual Winter Bird Outing

Please join us for the second annual Sycamore Island Winter Bird Outing scheduled for Saturday, February 26, 2011. This year's outing will begin at 8:30 a.m. with bagels and coffee at the Clubhouse. Our plan is to walk the Island and the towpath in the vicinity of the Island from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. looking for visiting winter waterfowl and other winter resident and migratory birds. Following the walk, we will compare notes on the day's sightings over coffee around the wood stove at the Clubhouse. Both beginners and experienced birders are encouraged to join us.

Last year a dozen participants walked the Island despite the heavy snow cover and were rewarded with good looks at numerous resident and migratory birds, including Wood Duck, Ring-neck Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser (see related photo), Common Merganser, Bald Eagles, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-Shouldered Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, and Pileated Woodpecker. Our resident Bald Eagles usually start to nest this time of year just down river from the Island in a Sycamore tree that is easily seen from the Island. If you would like to attend this year's event, please contact our trip leader Paul Hagen at phagen@bdlaw.com or 202.412.4685 by February 24th. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather.



Hooded Merganser

MARK LASNEK

Park Service Discusses Canal Situation with Club Officials

Caretaker Joe Hage couldn't stand it any longer. He wanted to do something about the deplorable conditions in the canal. Joe contacted the National Park Service and arranged a meeting for Islanders to learn about the status of restoration efforts. Apparently, Joe had another item for the agenda—to see if we as a club might participate in some way to aid the efforts. His initiative led to success on both counts.

On a chilly morning on the next-to-last day of the year, the meeting took place on the banks of the canal, next to the ferry landing. The obvious place to meet was the Clubhouse, but a still-frozen river prevented ferry operations. Joe arrived by his now standard half-canoë/half-ferry transportation mode. To everyone's delight he stepped ashore with a thermos of coffee, milk, sugar, and cups to bring a semblance of normal Sycamore Island hospitality to the gathering.

The Park Service representative was Geordie Newman, whose responsibilities include coordination of volunteer efforts for the C&O National Historical Park from Georgetown to Seneca. Newman was well aware of the litany of complaints about the degraded state of the canal, especially the trees lying across the water in stretches upstream and downstream from Sycamore Island. He patiently explained how the situation had developed—and most importantly—that the Park Service has hired contractors to remove the downed trees from the canal bed. He acknowledged that this section of the park is in the highest category of use and that it has high priority. Not surprisingly, he described how the pace of restoration depends on limited resources. This state of affairs led the Park Service to seek citizen participation through its Canal Steward Program that allows organizations to adopt areas of the park and be responsible for the routine maintenance..

It turns out that volunteers are welcome, but with reservations. Imagine the disorder if everyone who wanted to help simply made "improvements" according to personal attitudes instead of judiciously planned Park Service standards. So coordination is required. And for many activities volunteers must be "certified" to assure they have appropriate knowledge and skills.

The discussions ended with action items. We



DAVID WINER

Attending an al fresco meeting, 30 December 10. left to right: Captain Tryon Wells, Caretaker Joe Hage, Deputy Captain Drew Walsh, President (Elect) Jim Drew, C&O Canal National Historical Park Volunteer Geordie Newman. Then President David Winer was present but otherwise engaged in photographic duties.

Islanders asked Newman what we might do and where. He suggested that he would look into possible assignment of our club to adopt a section of the canal between Lock Six and Lock Seven. He will send information to Caretaker Joe with forms needed to establish prescribed relations with Islanders as volunteers. The Club will take this matter up in a near term monthly meeting.

Here is an excerpt from the Park Service's handsome website about its volunteer program for the C&O Canal. (<http://www.chohvip.org/>):

Throughout the country, thousands of individuals assist the National Park Service by volunteering their time and talents. These people who work side-by-side in partnership with NPS employees are called Volunteers in Parks, or VIPs. VIPs care about the parks—their past, present, and future—and care about the people who come to visit the parks.

Their home page headline states, "Give Back to the Park You Love." That nicely sums up our opportunity.

DAVID WINER

Notes from the Island

Thursday, December 2, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.3 Water Temperature: 44

The river is really rising fast now, I guess the surge is here.

Right here on the Island in the last 24 hours I've seen; two eagles perched together in a sycamore tree, a red-tailed hawk with a dead squirrel, three deer, two cute raccoons in a tree and two beaver. I hope to add otters and mink to my list some day but I'd have to stay up all night to catch a glimpse of one of them.

Friday, December 3, 2010

**Water Level at Little Falls: 6.68 Water Temperature: 44
HIGH WATER—FERRY CLOSED!**

Well the dock is under water right now and it looks like the ferry will be closed again tomorrow. It hasn't been like this in a long time and I have to remind myself on how to deal with the swollen river. I wished I had taken the trash up the hill before I had to put the ferry out of commission, today is trash day and I hate pulling those bags out of the canoe.

It was funny last night. I went out thinking that the river would not go up until today but when I got home the dock was two feet under water. I was not prepared and I had to disembark from the ferry into two feet of cold ass water. Luckily I was at home and I could get out of my wet clothes right away.

Monday, December 6, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.4 Water Temperature: 40

I closed the Club bathrooms and turned off all the water to the Clubhouse today. I hated to do it but with temperatures dipping into the low twenties tonight I was afraid to take a chance and have the pipes freeze overnight.

I was treated to an early morning red-shouldered hawk perched on a small tree just outside my window.

Sunday, December 19, 2010

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.2 Water Temperature: 0
THE FERRY IS CLOSED, RIVER IS FROZEN.**

I returned home from my mini-vacation to Florida on Friday afternoon, only to find that the river was frozen and covered in snow. You would think that since I was just returning from sunny Florida that the sight of an icy river in a winter wasteland would be disheartening and cause me to cower away. But in fact, the



JOE HAGE

An icy crossing.

opposite was true. The sun glistening off of the ice and the feel of the brisk air gave my heart a lift and I was glad to be back at my Island home.

I had one little problem though. The ferry was completely encrusted in the ice and I had no way of getting to my house. The ice was too thick (a solid inch) to even consider breaking the ferry free and it was definitely too thin to attempt walking across. I felt a little stupid for not anticipating this situation and should have locked a canoe up on the mainland before I left town. You'd think that by now I would know better, cold snaps and floods only happen when I go away. I needed a canoe and the closest one that I knew I could procure was at my brother's in Arlington so I climbed back up the hill and started the rush-hour drive over chain bridge to Virginia. The traffic wasn't as bad as I'd predicted, but it still took me a while to get over there and load his heavy boat on to my van by myself. It didn't help that the canoe and my van's roof were covered in snow and my hands were like ice by the time I had the thing secured to the rack.

When I finally got back to the ferry landing with the canoe, the light was pretty much gone and I began to wonder if a night crossing was a good idea. I decided to

do a test and see just how difficult it would be to pull the canoe over the snow-covered ice. I plopped the canoe down and gingerly stepped aboard, being careful to hold the ferry rope for balance. I heard some cracking noises as the canoe took all of my weight but the friction of the snow made it impossible to drag the boat over the river. Thankfully, I have a healthy sense of fear and I decided to back off and not do anything crazy. I decided to spend the night at a friends and tackle the problem in the morning.

When I returned on Saturday morning I found that an unusual, yet fortunate, thing had happened. It looked as if someone had come and swept the snow from under the ferry rope for now there was a perfect, snow-free path directly to the dock on the Island. What I think happened was that when I put the canoe on the ice the night before I caused the ice to crack. The crack, which miraculously spanned the entire width of the channel, allowed some water to seep onto the surface of the ice which melted the snow. The water refroze during the night, giving me a nice smooth surface for gliding my canoe.

The first thing I noticed when I reached the Island were the paw prints that were everywhere. It was obvious that at least one fox had had a heyday checking out every corner of the Island. I put down my bags down, walked to the captains float and there was a red fox running across the white frozen river toward Virginia. I saw another fox that day as well, but that one was dead on the side of the road on Clara Barton Parkway. It made me a little sad to think that that dead fox might have just come up the hill from the Island.

The river is solid ice all the way to Virginia with only small areas of open water, so there are no wintering ducks about. The only birds I've seen are the hardy, carolina wrens as they flit about, sifting through the old squirrel's nests looking for insects.

Monday, December 20, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.2 Water Temperature: 0
Well, it looks like the cold temperatures are not leaving us anytime soon so there is no way to know when the ferry will be running again. I guess if this keeps up you all will be able to walk over to the Island, and you won't need my help at all.

I was just about to talk about how nice it is to not have any mice in my house this year. Before the renovation, the mice had many ways to get into my kitchen



A red fox crosses the frozen river.

JOE HAGE

and were in the habit of causing a lot of mischief. My hope now was that the new walls would be a little more mouse proof. Unfortunately, my hopes were dashed this morning. I was lying in bed this morning at around five a.m. when I heard the distinctive sound of a mouse chewing the styrofoam insulation in the ceiling above my head. I tried to ignore it, but ultimately I had to get up and bang on the ceiling between my bedroom and the kitchen upstairs. I wasn't too optimistic that the mouse would heed my frantic gesture but I was pleased when I heard it's little feet run across the ceiling and down the outside wall. I'm afraid it will be difficult to live with a mouse scurrying around on my bedroom ceiling so I will set some traps and look for any openings that may have allowed them access.

Our new Club president, Jim Drew, has asked me to think of ways to solve our problem of not having a working bathroom down here during the winter months. In the past, Captain John Matthews had a special underground pipe that fed a single heated toilet in the men's room. While this solution could feasibly be duplicated, it would be extremely difficult and costly under the current state of the plumbing. One quick and easy way to solve the problem would be to take a hint from Victorian days and have a simple chamber pot. I could set up a platform with a toilet seat and a bucket, and the ladies could use that. It may seem primitive but it would save the cost of replumbing the Club bathroom, plus, since we would not have to keep it constantly heated like we would if it were running water, we would save money on the subsequent heating bills. We could, of course, supply a space heater to make it a little more comfortable. Just an idea.

Wednesday, December 22, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.2 Water Temperature: 0

The ferry is still locked in the ice but it looks like the river might be loosening its grip. Things are warming a bit so maybe by tomorrow I can get out the icebreaker. Right now I'm coming and going in the canoe, which is OK but now that the ice is broken around the ferry it's a little dicey. I skim over the ice and then the canoe plunges into the open water around the ferry with a jolt. I have to exercise extreme caution while stepping from the canoe to the now buoyant ferry. Falling in the river is not an option.

Thursday, December 23, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.2 Water Temperature: 0

I tried to get the ferry across the river today but I did not get very far. I was optimistic about my chances since the air was warming up and the strong winds would keep the channel from refreezing. I was optimistic, but there is something about the nature of ice that I didn't factor in, once its solid it likes to stay solid. I spent over an hour doing the back-breaking work of breaking the ice with my 4 × 4 ice breaker post. Things went well at first, since the ice near the mainland was only an inch thick, but as I reached the quarter-way mark the ice was a stout, three and a half inches thick and not very friendly. I quickly became sore, tired and soaked with sweat, plus I was being battered by winds of 30 MPH. I decided that maybe using the canoe wasn't so bad after all.

The wind was so powerful that I had to hold tight to the canoe lest it get swept out across the frozen river.

Yesterday I walked out to see the sunset and I was a little surprised to see, not one, not two, but three red foxes trotting across the ice.

Sunday, December 26, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 0

The river ice is beginning to break up. The river is completely free of ice upriver from us, and this sun-warmed water is creating open channels around the Island as well. It may be worth the effort to clear a path for the ferry today.

Where are the birds? I finally got around to filling my bird feeder but sadly I still haven't seen any bird activity. Usually, when I put seed out I'm surprised at how quickly the birds find it. This time, I haven't even seen the ever-present carolina wren at the feeder.

Tuesday, December 28, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 0

Ferocious wind yesterday. There were so many white-caps on the river that I just had to get a picture of this rare event. Of course the picture didn't do justice to the extreme scene that I was photographing. The wind was blowing the water far up over the captain's float and then the water would freeze, leaving an 8-inch layer of ice in the float. The river was open and the ice was completely gone on the Virginia side except for large chunks that were being cast against the shore. There were some mergansers out there and I couldn't help but marvel at their ability to cope with those severe conditions.

Wednesday, December 29, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.0 Water Temperature: 0

The ferry is still closed because half the channel is still solid ice (over two inches). Thankfully, it looks like the weather, and the river, are about to warm up. We'll see what happens.

I'm actually glad that I wasn't able, (or didn't try) to break the ice all the way across the channel. Right now I can only pull the ferry halfway across. I then put the canoe on the solid ice and slide onto the Island. The problem is, that the open water where I pull the ferry, gets frozen overnight. I have to add ten minutes to my commute in the morning, just to give myself time to break up all the ice between me and the mainland. So I'm glad I can slide on top of the ice for at least halfway. If I'd broken up the solid ice all the way to the Island, I'd have twice the amount of ice-breaking to do in the morning.

Thursday, December 30, 2010

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.0 Water Temperature: 0

Well I tried to break up the remaining ice today but no deal. I thought that the ice might be thinning, but after pounding it with my 4 × 4 post, I realized that it is still a hefty, three inches plus. I decided that it wasn't worth it and that I had better things to do with my time than to beat on concrete-like ice. Maybe the promised warm weather will make a difference.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

The Sycamore Islander

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Happy New Year



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 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. The deadline for inclusion in the February issue is February 3.

DAVID WINER

Masthead photo by Joe Hage