



The Sycamore Islander

FEBRUARY 2011 | VOLUME 90 NUMBER 2

President's Letter

The Winter Bird Walk is this month—Saturday morning, February 26. We will meet on the Island at 8:30 A.M. See the article in this issue. Last year's bird walk was great fun and well attended even with knee-deep snow on the Island. It should be easier getting about this year.

Our next club meeting is February 9 at the home of Star Mitchell. Meetings are always at 8:00 P.M. on the second Wednesday of each month. From December through March we meet off the Island. In addition to interesting and usually brief agendas, meetings at this time of year are a chance for Islanders to get together during the long winter. Everyone is invited.

Directions to Star Mitchell's home for the February 9 meeting: from Wisconsin Avenue go out Old Georgetown Road; go left at Suburban Hospital onto McKinley; go four blocks to Hempstead; go right one very long block to 8705 Hempstead Avenue.

The Club's Financial Secretary, Lisa Kliefoth, deserves our recognition and sincere appreciation for her work for the Island. Lisa is now in her eleventh year as Financial Secretary.

Lisa does many things as Financial Secretary, including receiving your dues checks and making the bank deposits. She maintains records of who has and who has yet to pay their dues. She sends out follow-up dues reminder notices when needed. Lisa enters into the

club's database the volunteer information from the forms each of you returns with your dues check. And, in addition to these and other responsibilities, she coordinates with and provides updated information to the Membership Secretary, Treasurer, and other Club officers throughout the year. Thank you, Lisa.

JIM DREW
President



BACKYARD BIRDSCAPES

Minutes for the January 12 Meeting

Attendees: David Winer, John Noble, Cora Shaw, Marc Bergeron, Joe Hage, Bernard Veuthey, Bill Eichbaum, Jim Drew, Jane Winer, Susanna Membrino, John Membrino, Star Mitchell, Emily Glazer, Maya Kosok, Louise Meyer, and Ann Marie Cunningham

Our new president Jim Drew called the meeting to order for the first time in his presidency at the lovely home of Cora Shaw and Bernard Veuthey.

The minutes as published in the *Islander* were approved.

Captain's Report (aka Caretaker's Report)

Joe Hage and David Winer met with the Park Service's volunteer coordinator at Great Falls to discuss the state of the bridge (rusty supports, needs paint) and the towpath, and a new stewardship program. Joe will report what is involved in adopting the towpath between mile 6 and 7 following his next conversation with the volunteer coordinator. The Club will then discuss the proposal and make a decision.

There is consideration to establishing a warm toilet in the clubhouse.

Great News: All the fallen trees in the canal have been removed, despite the hindrance of ice.

John Noble complimented the caretaker on the quality of his diaries and photos.

Party Supervisor's Report

John Noble recommended approval of plans by Emily Glazer and Karl Kosok for parts of their daughter's wedding celebration. Maya Kosok, who has been celebrating birthday parties on the Island since childhood, will be married on Sunday, September 4, Labor Day weekend. She would like to have some friends camp on the Island on Friday, September 2. On Saturday, September 3, they will have 60 guests on the Island. The guests are all very sensitive to concerns of environmental stewardship. They will operate the ferry for their guests on both occasions. The wedding will be on Sunday, but not on the Island. Their plans will not interfere with the regatta, if it is held on its usual date, the Monday of Labor Day weekend. The plans for camping and the large party were unanimously approved.

Membership Committee

David Winer talked of ideas that had been discussed concerning the admission of new members once the freeze on applications is lifted. A concept of how to admit new members must be established first, then the details of how to administer the process can be addressed. A report from the committee is expected in March.

Canoe Supervisor

The canoes are resting comfortably in their winter quarters. There are two canoes that are left for those interested in adopting.

Old Business

Joe will be away on the weekend of January 21–23. If a substitute caretaker cannot be found, club members will be responsible for operating the ferry.

New Business

Jim Drew led a discussion of events that have been held on the Island in the past to begin scheduling those that will be held again this year. Mark your calendars for the events that are currently planned:

- Winter bird walk. Paul Hagen will lead a bird walk on February 26.
- Potomac River cleanup. Renee Dunham will coordinate with the Ferguson Foundation for the Island's efforts on April 9
- Health of the River. Hedrick Belin of the Potomac Conservancy will describe the state of the river on April 13 at 7:30 prior to the meeting.
- Spring Workfest. May 1 (raindate, May 7)
- Fall workfest. November 13 (raindate, November 20)

Other events under consideration are:

- Fall regatta
- Spring flower walk
- Fishing derby
- Canoe instruction
- Downriver canoe race
- Summer solstice event
- Kids' science or outdoor activity
- Old Timers picnic
- Bird paddle
- Bicycle ride
- Dance

Watch the *Islander* for details.

Also, be sure read Star Mitchell's description of the C&O Bike Patrol in a past issue of the *Islander*.

A discussion was held about scanning old photos and making digital versions available. A get-together may be planned to identify the activities and people in the old photos.

The February meeting will be held at Star Mitchell's house at 8705 Hempstead Avenue, Bethesda.

The meeting was adjourned with gratitude to Cora and Bernard for their hospitality.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-Recording Secretary

Nell Hennessy

It is with deep sadness and a profound sense of loss that we report that Nell Hennessy, an active member of the Sycamore Island community for many years, passed away on Friday, February 4, 2011. Nell would come often to the Island with her husband, Frank Daspit, an experienced river runner who has trained many Islanders in the basics of canoeing. Nell's enthusiasm for Sycamore Island was immense. Just last May, Nell arranged for the T-shirts, cups, and bandanas that were such a great hit at the Sycamore Island 125th Anniversary celebration. Nell and Frank sometimes hosted Sycamore Island meetings at the restaurant she owned, The Irish Channel, and she was a dedicated substitute caretaker even in the coldest of months. Nell's presence on the Island and contributions to the Club will be sorely missed.

In addition to being a dedicated Islander, Nell was an accomplished attorney in the employee benefits area and was an avid promoter of public policy and legal education. The Catholic University Law School named an employee benefits scholar award after her. So, while Nell never sought any recognition for herself, friends who are so moved may want to make donations to:

The Nell Hennessy Employee Benefits Scholar Award
at the Catholic University of America
Office of Development and Alumni Relations
3600 John McCormack Road, NE, suite 339
Washington, DC 20064



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.

Saturday Relief Caretakers February 2011

	11 A.M. – DUSK
FEBRUARY 5	Penelope Mitchell 301.229.4606 pmitch21@aol.com
FEBRUARY 12	Bernard Veuthey 202.362.5859 bveuthey@gmail.com
FEBRUARY 19	Joan Barron and Paul Lang 301.657.2812 joan.barron@verizon.net
FEBRUARY 28	Mike and Anne Savage 703.434.2957 mike@mikesavage.net

Notes from the Island

Sunday, January 2, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 33

I have to tell you the exciting story of how we broke up the river ice and freed the ferry. Initially, I went out with the big metal digging bar and did some test holes to see just how thick the ice was. The ice was thinning in some places but I was not encouraged to find that it was still three and a half inches thick (About as thick as my index finger is long.) in other places. I continued in the canoe, across the ice toward the ferry which was still marooned in the center of the river. As I got closer to the edge of the ice sheet the entire sheet of ice began to sink slightly into the river. This sheet of ice ran the entire length of the island, cantilevered from the island out to the middle of the river. I was now creating ripples on the water and water was pumping up through holes in the ice as I jumped up and down in the canoe. I was also allowing water to pour in over the top of the

ice as I reached for the ferry. Then, my weight in the canoe cause the ice on the edge to crack and a large chunk was set free. This gave me an idea. If I was able to get the ferry on top of the ice the weight of the ferry would break the ice for me.

I climbed aboard the ferry and immediately got to work to implement my plan. I had to move all the heavy roofing shingles from the island side to the mainland side of the ferry. (I use them to balance the lopsided ferry) After I had moved one stack of heavy shingles I was able to use my own weight to get the ferry nose out of the water and with one big heave-ho I got the ferry on top of the ice.

While I was doing this I had attracted some attention and a small crowd was gathering on the Maryland shore. There were some people that I recognized and a couple that I didn't, but I went over to ask if they wanted to help. They all gladly agreed and suddenly I had six people to use as counter weights. I could not have asked for a better crew and soon we had a routine



JOE HAGE

down. First we stood on one side of the ferry and got the nose high up in the air. Then we would pull ourselves up onto the ice. Then we would all walk back to the Island side of the boat and wait for the ice to crash beneath us. We did this several times but each time the ice was thicker and harder to break. One time, near the end, I was alarmed at the steep angle of the ferry as we popped a mega wheelie onto the thickest part of the river ice. The ice broke but it was now right up against the river bottom. I was able to jump onto the dock at this point and together we broke up the remaining ice between the ferry and the Island. The channel was free! Then, we had to move all of the huge icebergs that were floating around. We were all thrill at our success and everyone seemed glad to have had the adventure. I invited all into the clubhouse for a refreshment and even gave a tour of the Club to the newbies. Fun, adventure, and new friends, that's what its all about right?

Tuesday, January 4, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 33

Ice on the river this morning. It was thin but it doesn't take much to keep the ferry from plowing ahead. Plus, I try not to use th ferry for a battering ram. Those aluminum hulls aren't made for ice breaking. The ice was thin, so instead of chopping at it I decided to use a different method. I decided to create large waves in the water to cause the ice to fragment. I pushed up and down on th ferry while standing on the dock, and sure enough the ice broke up into huge sheets. This made it easy to push the ice and open the channel again. The cool thing was that as the waves radiated across the ice it caused the ice to "sing." The ice rubbing against itself made a rather pleasant sound, similar to a chorus of crickets.

Wednesday, January 5, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 33

Easterday Well and Pump are here today. They are going to install the new pre-filter for our well system.



JOE HAGE

They also discovered that our water-quality sensor has gone bad again. This is the second time that the sensor has gone bad. Now they are going to have to make another visit to change out the bad sensor. I wished that I had known, could have saved them a trip.

Monday, January 10, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.6 Water Temperature: 32

There has been ice blocking the ferry every morning lately. Yesterday I cleared a path through the ice, but today I did not. Instead, I rigged a secondary rope just up river from the ferry rope and I was able to use that to pull myself across in the canoe. Now I can cross in the ferry if the ice melts or use a canoe if the river stays solid.

Big News! There was a truck and a crew on the tow-path today and they were pulling all the fallen trees from the canal!

I had my first confirmed sighting of a coyote last Saturday night. It crossed Macarthur as I came up the hill to my van. It was tawny brown, it had long, dog-like legs and its tail was perpendicular to the road. Fox always run with their tails down.

Thursday, January 13, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.6 Water Temperature: 32

I just talked to the C&O Canal volunteer coordinator, Geordie Newman. He said that the metal bridge over the canal is schedule to be worked on this year!

The preliminary research has been done and the project is on the "PMIF" list. They are just waiting for the budget to be released so that they can plan the work.

He is also going to send me the details of the canal adoption program.

Wednesday, January 19, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 36

Spring-like weather this afternoon but the wind and returning low temps have kept my spirits from getting too high. The ice disappeared from the south-facing virginia side of the Island but the ferry is still caked in ice.

I was afraid to try the usual method of sliding across the ice today. Everything warmed up so much that I thought my canoe might break through the ice in the middle of the river and I would get stuck. I decide not to try it and looked for another way across the river.

I ended up launching my canoe from the captains float and paddling up-river to the edge of the ice flow, then I portaged the canoe over the head of the Island

to the other side where I found a stretch of open water that led to the mainland.

Tuesday, January 25, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 32

Here I am, back from the mountains, to give you your daily ice report. I wish I had more words to describe the ice. Like the Inuit people have a dozen words for snow, I need more words to describe all the different types of river ice. My favorite ice is the new ice with its kaleidoscope array of angular shapes and colors. The reformed ice from this past weekend's cold snap reminded me of a big glass coffee table. The ice was so perfectly smooth and clear that it looked like polished glass on a showroom floor. It was so clear in fact that it made me worry that it would not support the weight of the canoe. Thankfully, when I plopped myself into the canoe I could see that the ice was a solid inch and a half thick. I knew the ice would support me but it was a little creepy seeing the leaves floating by, just below the surface.

Thursday, January 27, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 32

When I walked out this morning it was hard to believe that just eight days ago I had been watching an eagle soar over the river while I paddled down to the dam, in sunny, fifty-degree weather. Today, the Island is snowy white and the river is covered in a grey slush. The slush is smooth except for those areas below where the big trees arch over the river. There, the snow had gathered and fallen in clumps from the branches, leaving the surface jagged and full of craters. There are also quite a few fallen branches out there below the sycamores, a testament to the weight of this wet snow. The rope for the bell, and my "Axillary Rope" are both frozen into the slushy river. The good news is that the ferry lines, phone line and power line are not frozen into the river. I have been talking a lot about the ice on the river lately and this has made me realize that this is definitely the worst winter I've had on the Island. The cold weather seems to have started very early this year making the coming and going especially. . . memorable.

It has been exciting dealing with the icy river and giving you all of these daily ice reports. I've enjoyed the unexpected adventures that the river has offered, but sometimes, when I come home, I'm just not in the mood. Like last night, for example, when I had to make it home in the middle of a thunder snowstorm/snow thunderstorm.



JOE HAGE

I had made the dire mistake of driving home at the chaotic height of rush hour and I could not believe how bad the roads were. I decided to park my van and walk the last three miles from Friendship Heights. It was a long walk in the blowing snow but I was glad to be out of my slippery van. I was especially pleased to be out of my van when I reached the hill on Massachusetts Ave. and found it to be completely impassable. Anyway, the difficult part of the journey came when I reached the ferry landing. The smooth, clean, easily-traversed ice that I had become used to, was gone, and in its place was a sea of cold slush about three inches thick. The canoe was filled with slush as well and it was now extremely heavy. I stood there for a moment with the snow pouring down and the lightning flashing through the clouds and I knew it was gut-check time once again. Should I stop the slush out of the canoe and try to yank myself through the muck or should I keep walking and find another place to sleep tonight? I decided to give it a try in the canoe. I carefully stepped into the canoe and with one strong jerk at a time I slowly inched my way through the slush. Of course the pull-rope was also covered with ice and it was difficult to get a good grip on it as I braced myself against the

canoe thwarts. I was half-way across, my muscles were aching and I was sweating profusely under all my winter layers. I was exhausted, but, like a mountaineer trying to reach the summit, I pressed on. Finally, with what seemed like my last ounce of strength, I was able to touch the canoe against the ferry and climb onto the Island. I slowly walked to my door, my arms limp by my side and the clumps of snow splashing all around me. I was happy and relieved to be back home.

Friday, January 28, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 32

I learned something new today. When it comes to shoveling snow out of a canoe, a plastic canoe paddle works even better than a snow shovel. The paddle works pretty well on removing the snow from the steps as well.

I'm a little worried about the eagles in their nest and I wonder how they deal with all this snow. There are times when that nest looks like a perfect perch, almost like an armchair high in the branches, and there are other times when it seems very much exposed to the elements.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

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C&O Canal Trust Seeks Volunteers

The C&O Canal Trust is looking for new Quarter Masters to oversee Lockhouses 10 (between Carderock and Glen Echo, off the Clara Barton Pkwy), 25 (Edwards Ferry), and 28 (between Point of Rocks and Lander).

If you are interested in this unique volunteer opportunity, please contact Jeff Hutman with the Canal Trust at 301.745.8889 or hutman@canal-trust.org. To learn more about the Canal Quarters program visit www.canalquarters.org

As a Quartermaster, you will view your lockhouse as you would your own property. You should plan to visit your lockhouse at least once a week. Twice a week is optimal and preferred. Strive to keep it cleaner than the cleanest visitor left it. It will be important to stay on top of general upkeep issues, too. Look for potential problems and address them as soon as possible. Much of this work may not be glamorous, but it is essential to the success of the program.

You will also be meeting park visitors while you are working at the lockhouse. You will be able to enhance the visitor's experience with your interpretive knowledge and experience. They will view you as an official "voice" for the park, so it is essential you are familiar with National Park Service policy and regulations and can explain the Canal

Quarters program, the interpretive theme of your lockhouse, and the work of the Trust.


We would like to have each lockhouse in the CQIP be visited by a Quartermaster a minimum of once a week in the winter and twice per week during spring, summer, and fall—seasons of heavier use. This will help us obtain detailed information about visitor use, provide an active presence, and ensure that the structures, valuable furnishings, and interpretive appointments are secure and protected.

Guests will be told that Quartermasters will not clean up between every group—that they are responsible for leaving the lockhouse in better condition than they found it. Moreover, Quartermasters are not a cleaning service, though it will be an important part of the job. Quartermasters are caretakers of these priceless historic structures and are asked to ensure that the buildings and its furnishings are properly maintained both for their own sake, as well as to guarantee the satisfaction of our guests.

If you are interested in this unique and limited opportunity to serve the C&O Canal NHP, the next training date for Quarter Masters is Saturday, March 5, at 10:00—at the Park's Headquarters, 1850 Dual Highway, Hagerstown, Maryland.

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. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to: Carol Beehler, cbeehler@comcast.net. The deadline for inclusion in the March issue is March 1.

Large Parties Scheduled



Saturday, February 19, Paul E. Hagen, winter bird walk with about 15 invited friends of the Potomac Conservancy, 8:30 a.m. to noon