



The Sycamore Islander

APRIL 2013 | VOLUME 92 NUMBER 4

President's Letter

The monthly meeting is on April 10 on the Island. Of course, we said that last month before a big rain and high water forced a quick change of venue—to our home. If the water level at the Little Falls pump station is five feet or higher, it is unsafe to use the ferry. Here is a good USGS web to check conditions: http://water-data.usgs.gov/md/nwis/uv/?site_no=01646500. This and other good sources are available on the Island's excellent web site. www.sycamoreisland.org.

Although it is snowing as I write this, spring really is here and the Island work fest is happening on Sunday, April 7. The work fest is important and fun. Bring a dish for the always sumptuous pot luck lunch.

For the last fourteen years the club has been fortunate to have Alan Gelb (assisted by wife Caroline) as the club's treasurer, who along with financial secretary Lisa Kliefoth, perform the vital functions of managing club finances. Alan, whose day job is at the World Bank, is going to step down as treasurer at the end of this year. His steady, professional work, all strictly volunteer of course, has been of signal service to the club. The club owes him a huge "Thank You."

We are fortunate that Ned Goddard, 56, a club

member and river enthusiast, has agreed to take over from Alan in January 2014, and in the meantime acquaint himself, under Alan's tutelage, with the intricacies of the job, particularly the governmental filings that the club is required to make as a not-for-profit organization.

The club voted at the March meeting to instruct the nominating committee, which convenes in November, to name Ned as treasurer for 2014. Ned and his son Grant, 17, have two kayaks and an old Grumman canoe. He lives in Cabin John and likes to fish on the river. He works as a program manager for Time Warner Cable's Advanced Technology Group. (This is a guy who has no problem programing the set top box.) He has had financial experience as the treasurer of the Bannockburn Elementary School PTA and as facilities director (with budget responsibilities) of the Palisades Swimming Pool Association. He has been active in the club since getting on the Wait List in 1999. He is also a quartermaster caretaker of Lock House 10 on the canal.

We are confident our finances will be in good hands with Ned!

BILL MARMON
President

Minutes for the March 13 Meeting

Attendees: Gerry Barton, Charlotte Brewer, Jim Drew, Sandy Robinson, Bill Marmon, Lucky Marmon, Jeff Komarow, Alan Gelb, Tryon Wells, Drew Walsh, John Noble, Joe Hage, Larry Heilman, David Winer, Jane Winer. President Bill Marmon called the meeting to order. The minutes for the February meeting were approved.

Bill thanked Gerry Barton and Tryon Wells for alerting members to the fact that the river level was too high to operate the ferry safely. The meeting was moved to the Marmon home.

Communications: Tryon Wells reported that the raccoon that had attacked a woman on the canal in February was dead.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Alan Gelb noted that the club was "on track."

Treasurer Alan Gelb confirmed his earlier notification that after 14 years as treasurer he will step down at the end of this year. Alan reported that member Ned Goddard, who has had experience as treasurer for other non-profit organizations, has agreed to take the job in January 2014. A motion to instruct the club nominating committee in November to name Goddard as candidate for treasurer was passed unanimously.



Ned Goddard

Financial Secretary's Report: The deadline for paying dues is March 31. At present, 29 members have not paid.

Captain's Report: Capt. Drew Walsh is preparing for the Work Fest on April 7th. He and his crew of member helpers are getting the stands set up for the swim safety equipment. The tool shed crew has been very industrious. Gerry Barton praised Dave Winer's contribution, noting that he had drilled holes for "hold down bars," and is making little stoppers that will be part of the workbench. Tryon has made shelves. Members reported that Joe Hage is a standout at organizing everything. Screws and nails are sorted by their use and size. Shovels and rakes are hanging in holders. We may soon have pegs on which to hang life vests.

Tryon Wells will send out an email publicizing the

Work Fest and the April 6th Flower Walk. The Flower Walk is on rain or shine.

Membership Chair's Report: Membership Chair John Noble nominated two families for membership. They have met all the requirements for membership. They are Ashley Baquie and Elizabeth Ewing and Louis Smith.

Ashley Baquie, a resident of the Washington area since 1992, is VP of Human Resources for Morgan Franklin Corp. in McLean. She is involved in scouting activities through her 10-year-old son, Finian, who is an outdoor enthusiast and eager to begin fishing and canoeing on the river with his granddad.

Beth Ewing and Louis Smith are the parents of outdoor sportsmen Will (12), Max (10), and Charlie (8). These boys love Sycamore Island. Louis is a lawyer/teacher and musician who plays in two bands; Beth is a consultant on energy and environmental issues.

The motion to admit both families passed unanimously.

John Noble suggested that the orientation on May 5 be open to all members and those on the waiting list.

Ad Hoc Safety Committee Report: Copies of Larry Heilman's comprehensive and detailed report were distributed to attendees. Drew Walsh reported that the committee is readying stands on all three docks, the swim float, the ferry, and the ferry landing. Each will hold variety of swim safety equipment, including whistles, bamboo poles, a safety ring, a torpedo-life safety tube. Everything will be installed by the beginning of the swim season in May. Work will begin at the Work Fest. The plan is to have a signs and possibly a publication that give clear directions about how the equipment is to be used and what steps to take to execute a rescue. There was a discussion of what kind of meter might be installed to indicate the water levels and the danger to swimmers. One possibility is a pole, which is red above a certain water level. Red would be a warning not to swim. Attendees voted to accept the report and congratulated Larry Heilman on his hard work on developing the plan.

Caretaker Joe Hage was encouraged to speak out whenever he witnesses dangerous behavior on the Island. Joe stressed the importance of members familiarizing themselves and their children with the rules of the Island, the operation of the ferry and the dangers of swimming in the river. He noted that many members' children have never attended an orientation.

Relief Caretaking Supervisors: Jody and Bobby Benjamin submitted the names of members who have served as relief caretakers since names were last published in the January minutes. They are: Cindy Bertaut, Jack Sanders, Cora Shaw, Bernard Veuthey, Joe Cecil, Patricia Benton, Wayne Limberg, Witt and Annie Farquhar, Meg Jones, Sue and Greg Super, Renee Dunham, Andy Malmgen. All members should remember to sign up for this duty.

The next meeting will be on April 10th at 8:00 p.m. on the Island .

Respectfully submitted,
LUCKY MARMON
Co-recording Secretary

Attention all Paddlers—Canoeing Class

The club will offer canoeing instruction again this spring for members and wait listers thanks to Frank Daspit, who once again has generously volunteered to lead the class. Mark your calendars now—the class will be held on the Island, Saturday, May 18th, starting at 10:00 a.m. Paddlers with all levels of experience are welcome and club canoes will be available. Frank will go over basic paddling techniques, how to enter a canoe properly, hazards of canoeing at the Island and, time permitting, other topics such as rescue techniques and equipment. This year we will be emphasizing safe techniques on the water and will discuss the unique challenges and hazards the Potomac presents. This is a great opportunity to learn how to make your river excursions safe and enjoyable. For more information, contact Canoe Supervisor John Membrino at 301.229.1154.

JOHN MEMBRINO

WORKFEST

Sunday, April 7



Wildflower Walk

John Parrish and RG Steinman will again lead the

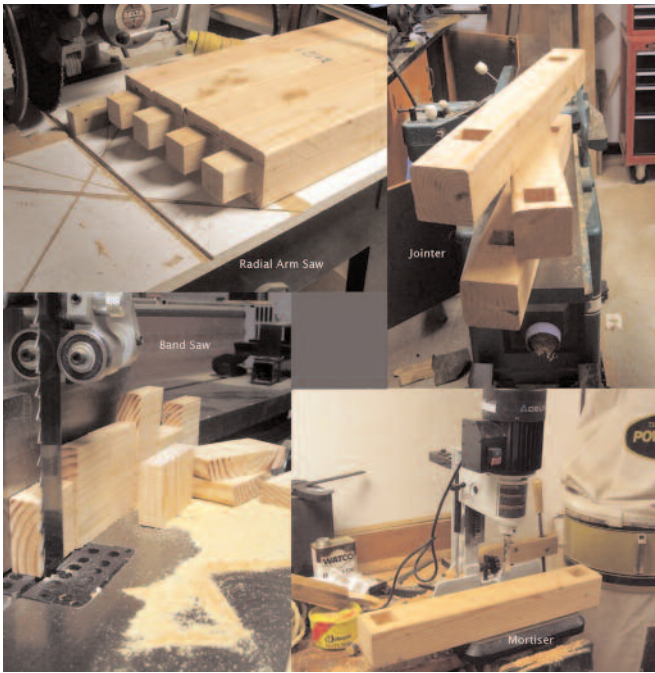
SYCAMORE ISLAND WILDFLOWER WALK

Saturday, April 6th, from 10:00 to 2:00

RAIN or SHINE!

Bring a lunch or snack, water, and dress for the weather. We will be exploring the area in the vicinity of Plummer's Island near lock 10. We will meet at the Lock 10 parking area at 9:50 and depart at 10:00. The parking area for Lock 10 is on the Clara Barton Parkway just inside the Beltway. It is only accessible from an inbound direction headed toward DC. (Carderock is a close by turn around point.) We hope to encounter such delights as Spring Beauty, Toothworts, Dutchman's Breeches, Trout Lily, Early Saxifrage, Bloodroot, Trilliums, Golden Ragwort and maybe even Golden Alexanders and Twinleaf. If the river level is low we may take a rock hop over to Plummer's Island.





Storage Shed Renaissance

It's surprising how one new thing leads to another. At the Fall Workfest a gang of would-be carpenters turned to an unusual project—converting the elevated shed behind the clubhouse into useable space. The ancient ladder access up through a hatchway in the center was not only difficult and hazardous, but didn't allow decent use of space inside the room. Solution: make a broad true stairway to the upstairs space and install a door. This major club improvement could not be finished during the Workfest and gave time later for Captain Drew Walsh and former Captain Tryon Wells to realize that the room could now be used for inside storage of tools and supplies plus a workshop.

Members engaged in several impromptu design sessions as to what sort of fixtures we would need. Before long we had a wish list. My contribution in these deliberations was that a core item in any workshop is a substantial workbench. I was uneasy at the notion of a group wrangling over design, so I volunteered to construct the workbench, more or less acquiring say-so in the matter. Surprisingly, no one objected.

I think Tryon had similar notions about design of the storage cabinetry. In particular he expressed opinions about dimensions, and how these shelving pieces would fit into the room. A main concern was to make them moveable for future layouts. So, he jumped in to volunteer construction of these units. Drew, as Captain,

approved. Alan Gelb, in charge of budgets, approved. It would take a couple of months working and planning in our home workshops.

I was surprised at all the different tools I needed. Before the finished product rolled out for delivery I had used almost all my large stationary machines, many portable power tools, and some hand-tools. My workshop was too cold for epoxy to set, so at one point in the joinery I set up shop in the dining room. There were two items I had to purchase. First was a tough woodworking vise that would become the heart of the bench. Second was the work surface, which had to be very sturdy and heavy to withstand who knows what pounding would take place over decades of Islanders making and repairing things. I found a wood shop to custom-make this major element—laminating thick ash boards together and sanding into a smooth, heavy-duty top. When these two items were combined this piece became much too heavy for me to muscle onto the base!

Meanwhile, Tryon was also busy designing, and then procuring the materials for his storage units. One day he invited me over to help with construction. He didn't really need help, but I got to see his design concepts—really impressive how he handled the problems of strength of materials and fasteners into economical and sturdy shelving units. With only modest tools Tryon had handled his assignment admirably. I learned a couple of tricks from this visit.



Delivery day arrived on schedule with Drew and his giant pick-up truck. We loaded up for the trip down the towpath from Lock 10 to the Island. Fortunately Joe Hage was on duty to help, as was Gerry Barton. Resembling a column of burdened army ants, the five of us moved all the assemblies and shelves from ferry dock to the new steps. With everything loaded inside, we looked back at the new furnishings with a sense of accomplishment. We left Gerry there by himself, happily brushing a coat of finishing oil on the cabinet tops.

DAVID WINER



ALL PHOTOS BY DAVID WINER

Notes from the Island

Monday, March 4, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.3 Water Temperature: 41
Jeez-Laweez this wind just won't quit! It's like living in a wind tunnel. I should build a kite!

There have not been many birds to speak of for the last few days. It looks like most of the winter waterfowl have departed for their breeding grounds up north and it is still too early for our spring migrants to arrive. This is sort of like the ebb-tide of bird migration, if you will. I did see a couple of cormorants at widewater and wood ducks at Seneca creek while I was on my hike, so it won't be long before our spring favorites arrive on the Island.

Speaking of spring, I also heard the choruses of the wood frogs while I was on my hike. I heard them at three different vernal pools near the towpath. First at Carderock, then at the top of wide-water and then again at the start of the a section of the Billy Goat Trail. It's an impressive sound if you've never heard it. From a distance I thought it was a very large flock of geese or crows about to come over the horizon. Soon we'll be hearing the spring peepers as well, yea!

I've been sick all weekend, which has allowed me to do more reading. I picked up the centennial issue of *The Islander* from 1985 and read about the 14-year canoe pool to the CIA. It's very interesting, but what stuck with me the most was what Robert Sicclair said about the experience, ". . . for a moment I get to evade modern man's almost complete dependence on second hand information . . . we have come to rely on what others tell us about the world beyond our narrow boxes . . . the canoe commute does give me a first hand glimpse of what is going on beyond the various man-made containers I inhabit . . . I benefit from regular access to information that clearly is unmediated." Mr. Sinclair has opened my eyes to something I've never thought about before—the unmediated information from the river.

Thursday, March 7, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.4 Water Temperature: 39
Well, it looks like our winter scare has passed and we can go back to documenting the signs of spring. It's too bad, I was really looking forward to skiing along the towpath.

Friday, March 8, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.1 Water Temperature: 39
That screaming wind is back, but the weekend forecast looks good. Warm weather and daylight-savings-time, could be a busy weekend. The down side is now I have to work until after 7:30 instead of 6:30, not sure I'm too crazy about this DST idea.

Last month I mentioned the cottages that used to be along the river near Sycamore Island. Well, I received an email from a guy that grew up here from '41-'62. Here's what he wrote: "I used to live on the hill (1942-1961) that overlooks Sycamore Island and recall a number of livable, often occupied cottages from lock six to lock seven. These cottages were on the flood plain between the canal and Potomac. There was a very nice cottage about 300 yards downstream from you, where the flood plain disappears. And another, on stilts, just below lock seven. Both had nice gardens. I guess the last of the cottages was torn down in the middle fifties.

Monday, March 11, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.4 Water Temperature: 45
Nice weather, busy river. Dozens of kayakers passed by our landing this weekend, all training for the season's upcoming races.

I'm getting reports of car break-ins along the parkway and Macarthur Boulevard. Never leave your valuables in your car while you're visiting the Island.

Dave Winer was here yesterday to do more fine-tuning of the new work bench he built.

Tuesday, March 12, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 45
THE FERRY IS CLOSED!

Lots of rain means a rising river and the ferry will be closed through Friday at least. The high water will peak on Thursday night at 6.9 feet on the little falls gage which means no meeting on the Island Wednesday night.

Thursday, March 14, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 6.3 Water Temperature: 42
The river is high and the wind is blowing. It's not going to be easy coming and going today. When you live on a river as finicky as the Potomac you just have to learn to factor in the river variables. Sometimes it's a real pain.

The geese are laying their eggs now and one couple

put their nest just below the deck, right by where everyone walks.

I just saw two pairs of wood ducks on the Island!

I was at the monthly meeting last night. The swimming safety committee has decided to do away with the slide on the swim dock, "too dangerous."

Friday, March 15, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 6.2 Water Temperature: 42

The river crested last night but it looks like the ferry will be closed all weekend.

Tuesday, March 19, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8 Water Temperature: 42

The ferry is back up and running but with the wind blowing and the river still above 4.5 feet, it is no picnic picking up passengers. I'm not sure whether to trust the predictions this week or not, but the river is supposed to rise above 5 feet by Thursday again.

Remember folks, the air is warm but the water is not. No club boats on the river until the temperature gets to 55 degrees or higher!

Thursday, March 21, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8 Water Temperature: 42

So, believe it or not, I take a lot of pride in being a good caretaker. That's why I feel so bad about not hearing a wait lister's ring yesterday morning. Lately, since I had the flu last week, I've been needing a lot of extra sleep so when the bell rang, I was oblivious to the world. The only way I knew that someone had been down was when I saw the voice mails on my cell phone. This was bad and I realized that something had to be done to ensure that I could hear the bell while in my bedroom with the door shut. The solution was to install a new bell, right outside my bedroom window. I've decided to call it the Ben Robinson Memorial Bell, in honor of the poor wait lister that tried to come to the Island but was denied access. Sorry Ben!

I saw a red-tailed hawk yesterday but this one wasn't soaring high overhead. This one was on the ground, right next to the ferry landing. I guess it was injured or sick or something.

I had to drive out to the dump today. After cleaning out the tool shed and discarding all of the unnecessary articles, I had twelve bags of trash. It was a lot of work loading all of those bags but it's nice to stay on top of the trash. We all know how easily it can get out of control.

Saturday, March 23, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.0 Water Temperature: 42

I decided that it would be a good idea to close the ferry today. The river is right at five feet and the wind is supposed to be around ten MPH. It just seemed like to much to ask the inexperienced caretakers to handle. We'll open again tomorrow.

Monday, March 25, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.6 Water Temperature: 44

The river is back down, the wind has lightened up, and it's snowing! I know we're all ready for warmer weather but things could be much worse.

It looks like the timing will be perfect for the flower walk scheduled for April 6. We already have some toad shade, Dutchman's breeches and, of course, blue bells, showing signs of blossoms.

The workfest is coming up too. It's early this year, Sunday, April 7! So get your dues paid, get your wait list passes, and get down to the Island and start enjoying the river!

Thursday, March 28, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 44

There isn't as much "Spring Break" traffic on the Island as I thought there might be. I guess it has a lot to do with the weather lately.

There are still a few wintering ducks around, horned grebe, hooded mergansers, but I also saw a group of cormorants arriving to their nesting grounds. Yesterday, I saw the cutest pied-billed grebe pop up to the surface next to the ferry with a squiggling minnow in its bill!

Sunday, March 31, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.3 Water Temperature: 48

The water temperature is rising and by the end of this week it should be above 55 degrees. Then we can start using the club boats again.

We saw a tunda swan resting between here and Rupperts yesterday. What a treat!

Mary found a beaver hole on the Island. I think it was a backdoor escape hole. I tried to crawl inside it but I guess the beaver is just slightly smaller than my hips.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Saturday Relief Caretakers April/May 2013					
APRIL	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	2 P.M.–DUSK	MAY	9 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
APRIL 6	Abigail Wiebenson 201.492.7086	Abby Porter and David Kay 202.270.3846	MAY 4	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
APRIL 13	Dirk and Kim Suringa 703.533.7715	Susan O'Sullivan 202.285.8271	MAY 11	Please volunteer!	Louise Meyer and Hester Obhi
APRIL 20	Cindy Bertaut	Stan Fowler	MAY 18	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
APRIL 27	Peter Levine 301.229.2986	Chris White and Tamara Zemlo	MAY 25	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!

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 May issue is April 26.