



The Sycamore Islander

MAY 2013 | VOLUME 92 NUMBER 5

President's Letter

The next regular club meeting will be on May 8, 8:00 p.m. on the Island. Come early, picnic and enjoy the bursting out of spring that is so special on the Island.

As you will read in greater detail in the minutes, the United States Geological Service has approached the club about relocating a water quality gauge to the Island from its current location at the Little Falls water intake station. The gauge would be submerged in the water but would have a monitor apparatus mounted in a tree and a small pier associated with it. A special committee chaired by Ann Marie Cunningham will evaluate the proposal, which will be presented in writing, and report back at an upcoming meeting.

The club had a highly successful work fest in April. Thanks to Joe Hage, Drew Walsh, George Malusky, and all who participated in making the Island sparkle.

Longtime swimming supervisor Larry Heilman is stepping down from that post as of May 1. Larry, a club member since the 1980s, embodies the spirit and elan that has made the club special. Larry will continue to provide leadership to the club. And he plans to make his annual swim across the river and back as soon as the water warms up. Club members interested in the post of swimming supervisor should communicate with me or David Winer, who has agreed to coordinate the replacement process.

The club offers condolences to former president and captain and current webmaster Tryon Wells, who lost his father, Bill Wells, recently. Many club members attended a memorial service at the Wells home in Bethesda, site of frequent off-Island meetings.

I will be on vacation in Scotland and Ireland for most of June including the June meeting. Vice-president Sherry Fizdale will be act in my stead.

BILL MARMON
President



DAVID WINER

Minutes for the April 10 Meeting

Attendees: Alan Gelb, Ned Goddard, Jody Benjamin, Barbara McCartney, Robert McCartney, Joe Hage, Jane Winer, Sherry Fizdale, Lucky Marmon, Star Mitchell, William Marmon, David Winer, Jim Drew, Lawrence C. Heilman, Marianne Ross, and Ann Marie Cunningham.

President Bill Marmon called the meeting to order.

River Gauge: Joe Hage introduced our guest, Joseph Bell of the United States Geological Survey. Joe Bell discussed a possible relationship between Sycamore Island and the USGS to resolve an issue that prevents the USGS from gathering accurate data from the Potomac at the Little Falls gauge. When heavy rainfall occurs in the area, it is especially important to gather accurate measurements of the pollutants in the stream.

However, the readings are skewed when the nearby streams and the canal overflow. The USGS would like to place some instruments underwater in the main channel of the river near Sycamore or Ruppert's Island to provide more accurate measurements. The Little Falls gauge would continue to operate and provide data such as the water level and flow rate. These instruments would be evaluating the chemical composition of the water, including the PH level, dissolved oxygen, nitrate level, turbidity, dissolved organic matter, and others. The members in attendance were very interested in the concept and had many questions. Joe Bell will be writing a detailed proposal that will address possible locations of the instruments, locations of the equipment, power sources, access to the equipment, contract details, and safety concerns. A committee that includes Alan Gelb, Jody Benjamin, Sherry Fizdale, and Ann Marie Cunningham will review the report and present recommendations to the membership.

Minutes: The minutes were approved as published in *The Islander*.

Communications: Our president received an email from the Montgomery County police concerning a party on March 30 that resulted in a fight and injury. Joe Hage's daughter hosted the party. The personnel committee will meet with Joe to discuss the incident and appropriate guidelines.

Bill learned that William W. Wells, the father of Tryon

Wells, our current webmaster and former president and captain, died on Saturday, April 6. The members present all expressed condolences to Tryon for his loss.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Alan Gelb has completed the annual federal reporting required of a tax exempt organization. Contact Alan if you wish to review the submission.

Alan introduced Ned Goddard to us. Ned is honored to be asked to follow in Alan's very large footsteps next year. Alan and Ned have already had several transition meetings.

Membership Chair's Report: John Noble, via a written report, nominated Robert and Barbara McCartney to membership. Bob and Barbara received letters of recommendation from Carole Hearle, and Craig and Rosemary Iscoe. Bob is a columnist for *The Washington Post*, and Barbara is works with special needs children at Somerset Elementary School. They were accepted into membership.

The period for payment of the 2013 dues has ended. Current membership status is 157 regular members (with the McCartneys having just filled one vacancy), 63 senior members, 18 inactive members, 14 honorary members, and 60 on the waiting list. The next three applicants, Miriam and Alan Pemberton, Jason Waite and Alice Bullard, and Robert McNish and Shira Stutman have been asked to submit letters of recommendation. A new membership directory will be distributed in the near future.

The new member orientation will be May 5. Please contact John Noble if you wish to attend or participate.

Captain's Report: Bob Whelan and Drew Walsh will get the swim safety equipment in place in the very near future.

Joe Hage will be on vacation from Wednesday, April 23 to Saturday, April 27. Substitute caretakers have not yet been hired. Contact Drew or Joe if you are willing to spend one of the days on the Island.

Joe and Drew did a terrific job of organizing the workfest. Thanks to them and to all the members who came and pitched in that day.

Relief Caretaking Report: Jody Benjamin reported that since the March meeting, Adrienne Allison, Abigail Wiebenson, and Abby Porter/David Kay have served as



RG Steinman and John Parrish, leaders of the April 6 Wildflower Walk. A dozen participants and more than fifty wild flowers seen.

relief caretakers. On two weekends the Island was closed for high water, which foiled the caretaking plans of Peter Winkler, Louise Meyer/Hester Ohbi, Penelope Mitchell, and Donna Messersmith. We're grateful to all of them.

New Business: The annual Downriver Canoe Race will be held on May 11. If you are interested in helping with the safety group, please contact Star Mitchell.

Members found cigarette butts in the couch and on the floor of the clubhouse, and on the captain's deck, potentially a serious fire hazard. A motion to amend Standing Rule 2 Clubhouse Rules by adding section g, which would read "Smoking is prohibited in the clubhouse, decks and tool shed." It was pointed out that there were really only two isolated incidents where smoking was a problem, and that the bigger problem was unsupervised teens. The motion will be discussed and voted on at the May meeting.

Larry Heilman spoke eloquently about the need to put the swim safety equipment in place as quickly as possible, as the floats are now in the river. He quoted Davey Hearn as saying that each time a river is a different river. Never dive or jump into a river. Always enter the water gently.

The next meeting will be on the Island on May 8 at 8:00. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-recording Secretary

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

If I am on the waiting list but I don't pay for an annual guest pass, do I still get to use the Island?

- Not for general use, but you are encouraged to come to Island events and activities such as the workfests, fishing derby, monthly meetings, and flower and bird walks. You may also volunteer for relief caretaker duty, which entitles you to a lovely time time on the Island.

If I have purchased an annual waiting list pass, when am I allowed to use the Island?

- Annual guest pass holders may use the Island any time between November and April, inclusive, and from Monday-Friday during the other months (May through October, inclusive), except for national holidays.

If I have purchased an annual waiting list pass, do I get to invite guests other than my family onto the Island?

- Yes, you may invite up to four guests.

Why am I a higher number on the waiting list this year than last?

- You may not have calculated in the people from the old waiting list. About 12 applicants are still on the old list and therefore precede you.

How old do you have to be to be a senior member?

- Age doesn't factor into senior membership. You're a senior member if you've been a regular paying member of the club for 20 years or more.

How do I schedule a large party on the Island?

- All the info you need (and there is a lot of it) is on our website under "How to Host A Large Party." Notice that 1) you have to have completed at least three activities in the past year from the list provided; 2) weekend large parties can only be scheduled on odd-numbered dates; 3) you have to fill out a request form through Jonathan Zimmerman (jonathanzimmerman@mac.com); and 4) all hosts are responsible for the conduct of their guests.

When and where are the monthly Club meetings?

- The second Wednesday of every month at 8:00 p.m. Meetings are on the Island, March through October, ferry operation permitting, and at member homes over the winter months. Wait listers are welcome. The ferry cannot operate if the water level at the Little Falls

pumping station is five feet or higher. Water level information is available from club website sources.

When's the next chance to apply for membership in the club?

- Application for membership may be filed from January to March 2014, with a lottery held in April 2014, to increase the wait list to 60 persons.

LISA KLIEFOTH
Financial Secretary

Attention 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 at the Island Saturday, May 18, 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.

Wildflower Walk, April 6, 2013

We must change the name of these wildflower walks to a more descriptive title. Leaders John Parrish and R.J. Steinman are so thoroughly versed in all phases of botany, and they share their knowledge so freely with the group, we come away with a wider understanding of the natural world that encompasses far more than flowers. Early this April they took a goodly crowd of Sycamoreans on a hike of discovery in the Potomac woodlands near Lock 10, between the river and canal.

Immediately we began to see spring wildflowers, but simultaneously John and R.J. found other interesting plants to discuss. For instance, the group showed great



Twinleaf

interest in a stand of poison hemlock, famous for its toxicity. By identification and instruction from the leaders, we took caution not to tread on valuable native species and to direct our feet to walk freely on undesirable invasive species—the latter much in evidence throughout the woods.

It was a good time for emerging wild flowers and a gorgeous day for it. Soon everyone was bending close to peer at and to photograph spring beauties and trout lilies, and other flowers pointed out by John and R.J. They announced that it would be especially lucky to come across the rare twin-leaf—that this would be a prized find. On a drizzly walk a few years ago the Sycamore group had encountered one of these beauties. So we proceeded on paths and open woods, along the river bank and up and down hillsides, all the while learning about the various growths we ran into. The group seemed never to lose interest as the hike wore on to the next stages of the hunt. And we did find a couple of twin-leaf flowers on a hill side, growing among ordinary vegetation.

At some point those lagging behind caught up with the main group peering and bending over a shallow pool. What was happening? John Parrish was scooping up handfuls of water at the end of the tiny pond and replacing them in slightly deeper water next to him. Explanations of vernal pools and wood-frog tadpoles soon had others scooping up makeshift cups of stranded tadpoles into safer waters! It seems that good Samaritans have a place in nature too.

DAVID WINER

How Sycamore Island Took Me Home

When I first visited Sycamore Island about 30 years ago, it was the beginning of my journey home.

I was born and raised next to Lock 8 in Cabin John in a house my father built with his own hands. I had to learn to swim in the canal at the age of two because it was in my front yard and I had already almost drowned in it. The canal, towpath, and Potomac River were my playgrounds.

My cousin Boots helped me paint a little rowboat that was so small it would sink if you weighed more than 60 pounds. We called it the *Canal Clipper* and I rowed it up and down the canal. Mr. Muck, the lockkeeper who lived with his wife in the lock house, once opened the lock so my pet duckling, which had fallen 15 feet down and was peeping in desperation, could swim out to safety.

I loved riding my bicycle up and down the towpath. In those days it was rare to see another cyclist. Sometimes I'd pretend to be a great explorer discovering the river islands for the first time or Tarzan swinging on a vine from the towpath almost to the river. To me, swimming in the river was far better than any swimming pool. (I guess my immune system got a good workout since the river was very polluted back then.)

In winter the canal would freeze over and we would ice skate right outside our front door. We played hockey using a stone and sticks we would find nearby. Then we would all pile together around a big fire on the bank of the canal and warm our hands and feet.

My river world gave me a soul-deep love for nature and connection to the sights, sounds, smells, and feel of that particular place on the planet. That deep connection has informed my life and has passed on to my children.

When I was 10 years old my family was forced to move from the home we loved. It was a matter of eminent domain; I'm told the laying of the Dulles sewer pipe along our land was the reason. The loss of our home and the river was devastating to our family. Within a few years, I also lost both my parents and was separated from my sister.

For years it hurt too much to return to the river. One day a friend, Mardy Burgess, invited me to

Sycamore Island, and I found the familiar beauty of the place striking. My husband and I soon joined. We were on the wait list for 10 years and about 17 years ago became full members. Through Sycamore, I discovered the Potomac could help me heal—and I came to know a new, cleaner river, where blue herons spread their expansive wings freely instead of ending up on hunters' dinner plates.

Steve and I spent every birthday (weather and water level permitting) in the middle of the river in our Sycamore Island canoes. It has been our family's go-to place to be together with the sky, the birds, the rocks, and the river. Sometimes we canoe all the way up to Lock 8. One of my last memories of Steve full of life is from the 2011 Sycamore Island summer solstice party with Joe's band, when we danced the Lindy Hop for almost three hours straight. He died of cancer exactly three months later.

Sycamore Island helped me return to the place I knew as a young child before things got hard, and now it's also a place that I associate with the lifetime I had with my soul mate. For me, it is everything that is most important.

KATHY CARROLL



SUE SUPER

Notes from the Island

Wednesday, April 3, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.4 Water Temperature: 48

Cold and windy again today! I was hoping that once we got into April we might get a break.

Thursday, April 4, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.6 Water Temperature: 48

The river level is creeping up a little bit but it looks like it will stay low enough for us to have our big work day here on Sunday. It also looks like the weather is going to be decent too, so no excuses—see you on Sunday! Bluebell Report: There are one or two bluebells blooming right now but it looks like it will be about a week before they hit their peak. We do have cut-leaf toothwort and dutchman's breeches in full bloom. I've been busy taking care of a few overdue projects. I suppose I could have waited and have the chores done at the workfest but I guess I'm a little like the housewife that cleans the house just before the housekeepers arrive. I had to save myself the embarrassment.

Monday, April 8, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 53

I spent the entire weekend hanging out with Sycamoreans and let me just say what an interesting and fun (not to mention hard-working) group of people they are. First, it was Saturday morning when we all met to walk in the springtime woods to look at wildflowers. I did not count our number but there were over 12 of us traipsing, single file, behind John and RG as they gave us a tour of the woods they are so familiar with. The weather was gorgeous and it was a real treat to be with such experts as they led us from one delicate beauty to another, the highlight being the white flowers of the "twinleaf." We also helped save some tadpoles that were struggling in a vernal pool that was rapidly drying up.

Then it was the Workfest on Sunday. It was another great-weather day but the wind from downriver was blowing at 15 mph and the river was over four feet making the ferry a real chore. Luckily we had good-natured members picking up the slack and getting everyone over to the Island safely. I was really impressed by the enthusiasm and passion that all of the work-festers brought to the table. We managed to complete a lot of tasks and the Island looks so clean and tidy now.

Wednesday, April 10, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.0 Water Temperature: 64
Club meeting tonight on the Island! The meeting starts at 8:00 but it's such a nice day, you should come down early! Plus I have a guest speaker tonight. Joseph Bell of the USGS will be giving a short presentation about the river gauges that we depend on so much.

Sunday, April 14, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.01 Water Temperature: 64
The river is rising and the ferry is closed.

Monday, April 15, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.00 Water Temperature: 64
Ferry is back in operation.
No tax worries on the Island, just bluebells!

Tuesday April 23, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.6 Water Temperature: 64
Everything has changed since I wrote last. The trees are now full of leaves, the wildflowers have come and gone and all the docks are out.

There is also water in the canal! I'm not sure what's happening but it looks like we can paddle in the canal again, just like the old days.

I've been doing a lot of carpentry jobs lately, i.e. replace rotted wood on ferry, install screen door, rebuild ramp to canoe dock, and it's great having all of the tools neatly stored in the work shed. It really makes the work go faster. It's also nice to have all of the materials I need on hand. All those years of salvaging lumber from the river are paying off.

Whit Overstreet, of Potomac Riverkeeper, and myself will be giving a presentation at the Canoe Cruisers monthly meeting, on Monday, April 29. It will be at the Clara Barton Community Center. We'll be talking about our second Island-to-Island kayak trip down the Potomac to the Chesapeake Bay.

Tuesday, April 30, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.88 Water Temperature: 64
Finally, the river level has dropped below four feet on the little falls gauge! The river has been at four feet or higher since February 27! So far this year there have only been about three weeks where the river has been forgiving and dropped below four feet.

Joe Bell, of the USGS, gave his presentation to the club at the last meeting and it looks like there is a

chance the gauge at Little Falls that I refer to so often, may someday be called the Sycamore Island gauge. How cool would that be?

I gave my presentation at the CCA meeting last night. It was a good turnout and there were a few Islanders there. The Cunningham's reported that they had a great trip doing the Seneca Breaks last Saturday. They also reported that there is once again plenty of water in the canal to do the loop back to your car at Violette's lock.

I took a canoeing trip myself last week. Mary and I drove up to central New Jersey and paddled two separate rivers in the Pine Barrens. We did an overnight on the Mullica (pronounced like you're saying "mulligan") and then a half-day paddle and half-day hike back on the Batsto River. Both rivers are aquifer-fed, narrow, and fast moving. They also have an infinite number of hairpin turns and it took all of our skills to make it through the narrow passes and fallen timbers. There were times we were able to slow down and enjoy the view, where the river was dammed by beaver, and the scenery was spectacular. The most exciting part was running the "falls of the Millica," the two-and three-foot drops over the beaver dams.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker



SUESUPER



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JENNIFER HEARN



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The Sycamore Islander

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Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Saturday Relief Caretakers May/June 2013					
MAY	9 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK	JUNE	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
MAY 4	David Lyles	Norman and Nancy Metzger	JUNE 1	John Butler 301.263.0141	Birgit Anne and Brian Waidmann 703.408.3185
MAY 11	Linda Greer 301.922.2596	Louise Meyer and Hester Obhi 202.328.6834	JUNE 8	David Powell 202.460.0620	Penny and Bob McNulty 202.489.6687
MAY 18	Paul E. Hagen 202.412.4685	Fred and Tina Ohly 703.772.1962	JUNE 15	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
MAY 25	Joe and Tammy Belden 240.994.2573	Mike Petrilli 301.641.6395	JUNE 22	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
			JUNE 29	Penelope Mitchell 240.481.4601	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 June issue is June 1.

Masthead photo by David Winer

Large Parties Scheduled

May 16, 4:30–8 p.m., Abigail Wiebenson, fewer than 20 guests

May 19, 2012, afternoon, John Noble, 30 guests

Friday, June 14, 1–5 p.m., Cecily Abram, 21–35 guests