



The Sycamore Islander

DECEMBER 2013 | VOLUME 92 NUMBER 12

President's Letter

Come everyone to our Holiday Party and December meeting starting at 8:00 p.m. Wednesday, December 11, at the home of Gary and Linda Slayen, 6605 River Crest Court, Bethesda (off MacArthur Boulevard). Please bring food and drink to share. There will be a short business meeting to elect officers for next year and approve the 2014 budget. And then fun and fellowship with fellow Sycamore Islanders—a very special group.

Lucky and I took a walk on the Canal on Thanksgiving morning and ended up on the Island. It was a glorious, sunny, cold day, and the Island radiated its wintertime magic. We met two young college girls on the low path that winds along the river bank north of the Island. When we said we were headed for Sycamore Island they had never heard of it so we invited them to come along. Showing others the anachronistic charm of the Island is always a fantastic treat—the sharing of a beautiful secret. Crossing on the ferry is a journey into another time and space. What a great way to start Thanksgiving Day. Thanks to the workfest earlier in November, the Island looked ready for winter. I marveled again at the stacked-up dock pieces. Hauling in the heavy docks always is an amazing feat and a good example of the teamwork it takes to keep the Island running. Our young guests were dazzled and took pictures to show their parents their good luck in seeing something so unusual, and we appreciated again the special privilege of being members of the Sycamore Island Club.

Note: Application forms for places on the waiting list will be available on the Web Site, www.sycamoreisland.org, and may be sent in to Membership Secretary John Noble from January 1 through March 31. We do not anticipate more than dozen openings this time around for the lottery that will be conducted probably at the May, 2014 meeting to bring the Wait List up to 60 in accordance with our rules. Also remember that the successful applicants will be divided into two groups, 1. those thirty nine years old and younger and 2, those forty years old and older. Details are in Standing Rule 12 on the web site.

As I come to the end of my first year as President, I want to thank all officers, members and our caretaker Joe Hage for making this year a memorable and fun experience.

BILL MARMON
President



Minutes for the November 13 Meeting

Attendees: Gerry Barton, Lucky Marmon, Bill Marmon, Karen Possner, Judy Lentz, John Lentz, Ann Marie Cunningham, John Cunningham, Bill Eichbaum, Jim Drew, Jane Winer, Dave Winer, Larry Heilman, Charlotte Brewer, Ned Goddard, Alan Gelb, Jeff Komarow, George Dunham, Renee Dunham, Mary Kearney, Joe Hage, Sherry Fizdale.

Prior to the meeting, our club's ardent and expert canoeist John Lentz treated us to a peak into his new book, *Tales from the Paddle*, a two-year endeavor describing his more than twenty boating adventures in Canada and two to the Soviet Union. "Tourists don't travel by canoe," Lentz was told by Intourist officials in response to his initial 1965 inquiry that proposed a trip down one of the Soviet Unions enticing rivers he had spotted on a map while traveling back from Canada's Northwest Territories. "It took a lot of pounding on the door," say Lentz. Eventually, he prevailed, making his first Soviet foray in 1987, paddling Soviet catamarans. Old Town Canoes transported everything for the second trip in 1990...three 17 ft. Tripper canoes, life vests, decks, supplies...to Khatanga near the Arctic Ocean. He remembers the Russians laughing hilariously as the Americans fitted the decks onto the canoes. The source of their amusement: "Tripper" written in Cyrillic spelled "gonorrhea." Later, when the Russian canoeists visited the U.S., Sycamore Island veteran John Thompson, with help from the U.S. Park Service, put together a fabulous day of canoeing topped off by a party (and much swilling of vodka) at Lentz's home.



DAVID WINER

November meeting at which John Lentz gave a talk about his canoe explorations in northern Canada and Siberia.

One Russian was so delighted that he lay down on the carpet—apparently the ultimate expression of gratitude in Russia. Lentz calls the book “a family project,” praising his wife Judy’s tolerance of his many summer excursions and his two sons’ contributions of photos and maps. Copies of John’s book are available through Amazon or contact him directly at jjlentz@verizon.net.

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

Communications: None

Treasurer’s Report: Treasurer Alan Gelb reported that the club is financially on track with \$98,000 in the bank.

Bonus and salary increases for Caretaker Joe Hage were recommended and approved.

Captain’s Report: Captain Drew Walsh reported on a successful Work Fest. He noted several projects that remained to be tackled. Our member handymen have opted for new wooden screen doors for the club house. Dave Winer spearheaded an electrification project for the tool shed. Steve Newman has designed the system. Gerry Barton suggested making a list of how everything in the club works as a great deal of information about things such as the cable, infiltration system, septic system, etc. is now stored only in the heads of a few people. Gerry also suggested creating more storage capacity so that equipment and supplies can be better organized.



JANE WINER

Membership Report: Membership Secretary John Noble will send a letter to persons on the old waiting list who are now eligible to join, informing them that they must join and pay dues by April 1. They cannot remain on the waiting list. This wait list group will not affect the number of vacancies to be filled by those whose names are drawn in the spring lottery.

New applicants may file applications beginning January 1, 2014. The application form is available on the website, www.sycamoreisland.org. The new waiting list will have a maximum of 60 people.

Elizabeth Thomas will assist John Noble with organizing the Spring Lottery in April or May.

Relief Caretaking Report: Thanks to the following members who volunteered for caretaking duties since the October meeting: Christy and Garth Ross, Michael Petrilli, Ben Robinson, Gordon and Linda Phillips, Penelope Mitchell, Pam Sommers and Fred Pinkney, Marianne Ross, Debbie and Peter Friedman, Maureen Jeffreys, Michael Bergsman.

Archives: Archivist Karen Possner, along with Tryon Wells, will be sorting through the club material in Tryon's possession and working on a more appropriate way to store the Island's valuable historical record. They will also create an index.

Drew Walsh suggested that some of the older long-term members might want to record their experiences on the Island.

New Business: Alan Gelb reports that he has met with Law Supervisor Maurice Tobin to discuss insurance issues.

President Bill Marmon announced the slate of club officers for 2014. It was published in the November *Islander*. The slate will be voted on at the December meeting.

Bill thanked outgoing office holders, Alan Gelb, Sherry Fizdale, and Larry Heilman, for their excellent service to the Club.

The Holiday Party/December Meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 12th at 8:00: Place: The home of Garry and Linda Slayen, 6605 River Crest Ct., Bethesda, MD.

Important: Please bring food and drink to share.

Throughout the meeting, attendees munched on delicious cookies, homemade by Jane Winer. Gerry Barton generously put out tea and scavenged other tasty snacks from the larder. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

LUCKY MARMON

Co-Recording Secretary

From the Archive

Mary Mulford Gets a Ducking

This story has been delayed as we want to use it as a warning to those of our members and their guests, who sometimes get too close to the dam and feeder canal.

On Thanksgiving Day Mary and a friend, a good canoeist, went for a ride. Near the canal feeder entrance the current caught them and in trying to turn around a paddle broke. The gates were all open in the feeder lock and the feeder current was swift. They missed crashing on the lock by catching hold of some branches on the bank.

Back up the feeder they struggled nearly to the entrance where they lost their balance and were capsized. Mr. Ruppert, who lives near, came to their rescue, and the next day brought their canoe back to Sycamore Island. Mary caught a bad cold and was laid up with it, and the flu, for six weeks.

Years ago, Sycamore sported a "Sinkers' Club" made up of those that capsized during the year, and the first one to capsize in any given year was made the "King Sinker" The honor of membership was questionable and for matters of safety and health we urge our members to avoid becoming eligible for membership.

This old story shows how much things have changed around here, (like a new, bigger dam, and operating feeder locks) but it also shows how some things on Sycamore Island, (like going for a ride in a canoe) haven't changed in over 70 years.

And where did Mr Ruppert live anyway, on High Island?

The Sycamore Islander, March, 1944

workfest



SUE GREG SUPER



DREW WALSH



DREW WALSH



DREW WALSH



DREW WALSH



DREW WALSH



SUE GREG SUPER



SUE GREG SUPER



JEFF KOMAROW

Notes from the Island

Friday, November 8, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.86 Water Temperature: 52

It looks like the river and the weather are going to cooperate and I think we're going to have a good day for the workfest on Sunday. I was afraid that the leaves wouldn't be down in time but things look a lot different now than they did last week. Early last week most of the silver maples on the Island were still green, but now, with all of this wind and rain, most of them are leafless.

The river is very low now and very clear. It's amazing what you can see on the river bottom (including an old bed spring by the ferry landing) when the visibility in the water is 10 to 12 feet.

Monday, November 10, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.86 Water Temperature: 52

Great workfest yesterday! We got all of the docks in before noon and all of the fallen leaves got picked up. There was a crew doing brickwork on the walkways and another crew adding more lighting and plugs in the tool shed. The clubhouse got cleaned, the food was excellent and I think everyone had a great, Sycamorean time.

Thursday, November 14, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.86 Water Temperature: 45

We had a good turn out for the monthly meeting last night. Everyone wanted to be here to hear John Lentz talk about his new book, *Tales From The Paddle*. The book is John's first, and it is a beautifully bound collection of his canoeing adventures on some of the most remote rivers of Canada and Russia. It's an honor to have such an accomplished wilderness paddler and author as one of our members.

Winter has arrived but since the wind has died down it's actually pretty nice out. The trees, without their leaves, allow the sun to reach its warmth down to the river and the light reflects a blue sky between the newly fallen yellow leaves floating by.

Sunday, November 17, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.87 Water Temperature: 46

Our crystal-clear river of yesterday is gone and today the river beneath the ferry is ink black, like a strong cup of tea. I suppose the change is due to the amount of leaves that have fallen into the river but it's still surprising to see the river change so much. Suddenly, the

Potomac looks like a river in the Pine Barrens on the Eastern Shore.

Speaking of the eastern shore, Mary and I paddled the Tuckahoe River in Hillsboro, Maryland yesterday. The weather wasn't perfect but there was little wind and the temperatures were tolerable. We put in at low tide, near the birthplace of Frederick Douglas, and paddled easily past mud flats surrounded by wooded bluffs covered with colorful oaks and beeches. We saw killdeer, kingfishers, bald eagles, hawks, waxwings, warblers, thrushes, and lots of ducks and geese.

We came around one bend early in the trip and noticed some Canada geese a few hundred yards in front of us. We held our binoculars up to get a better view when suddenly the still air was broken by the sound of shotguns blasting from the right bank. We became alarmed since we could see the buck shot hitting the river, right in front of where we were headed! It was obviously goose-hunting season and the "geese" we saw on the water were merely decoys. We turned the canoe around and just then we saw someone emerge from the right bank. We got his attention and waved, and as we weaved between the fake geese we noticed two more hunters in a blind to our right. We thought that they might be mad at us for interrupting the hunt, but they were nice and we wished them luck. They also reassured us that it was safe to travel down the creek, past the other duck blinds.

We went down for a couple of hours and found a nice place to stop for lunch and watch the tide turn. We paddled downstream a little further but then let the rising tide carry us back up river to our car.

Wednesday, November 20, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.87 Water Temperature: 46

The Island is covered with leaves and they're still falling! It's hard to tell that the place was raked clean just last week at the workfest.

Remember folks, the river is cold, no use of club boats now that the river is below 50 degrees.

Saturday, November 23, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.9 Water Temperature: 46

The river has been below three feet for all of November and it looks like the entire month will be below three feet. I'm not complaining. I like it when the river is low, but seems unusual for this time of year.

The river is low but the canal actually has water in it.



So much so that instead of walking to the Brookmont Church for the art show last night, we paddled a canoe there and back. We had to dodge some fallen trees but the route was clear all the way to Lock 6. It was a little creepy coming back in the dark, in the realm of beavers, owls, and other unidentified creatures in the night. At one point, one such creature splashed next to our bow suddenly, causing us both to jump and scream.

Monday, November 25, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.78 Water Temperature: 40

Holy Cow! It's cold out there! There were big whitecaps on the river all day yesterday and there was ice forming on the edges of the river and on the tiny rocky islands. The wind has died down now but it still feels like January. I'm not too worried about the river freezing over yet, but I did have to winterize the bathrooms and club kitchen yesterday. That means that the only working bathroom will be the men's room and you'll have to fetch your water from there as well.

I'll be working on collecting, splitting and stacking firewood for the clubhouse but please, if you use the wood stove, replace any wood you use.

This burst of cold air, along with the coming storm front should bring us some winter fowl. So far I've only seen the occasional pied-billed grebe. The Canada geese aren't even here yet.

Friday, November 29, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.0 Water Temperature: 38

Happy Thanksgiving! I hope everyone had a fun, family-filled day yesterday!

The river shot up to four feet on Wednesday and it looks like it's going to stay that way all week. It's a great level for paddling.

As predicted, there were three beautiful buffle head ducks on the river yesterday morning. Let the migration begin!

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

Come to the
 SYCAMORE ISLAND
Holiday Party
 WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11TH
 8:00 P.M.
at the home of
 GARY and LINDA SLAYEN
 6605 RIVER CREST COURT, BETHESDA

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Happy Holidays

Saturday Relief Caretakers **December 2013/January 2014**

DECEMBER	11 A.M. – DUSK	JANUARY	11 A.M. – DUSK
DECEMBER 7	John and Susanna Membrino	JANUARY 4	John Lord
DECEMBER 14	Miriam and Alan Pemberton	JANUARY 11	Robert Braunohler
DECEMBER 21	Joan Barron	JANUARY 18	Please Volunteer
DECEMBER 28	Sherrie Pettie Fizdale	JANUARY 25	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. 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 January issue is December 28.



JOE HAGE