



The Sycamore Islander

JANUARY 2014 | VOLUME 93 NUMBER 1

President's Letter

Happy New Year to all!

I recommend a visit to the Island in winter. It makes a great stop on a canal walk or bike. With no leaves on the trees, the docks stacked and racked, generally high water and almost no visitors, the Island looks different—smaller, more vulnerable but no less charming and exotic. I had a wonderful couple of hours there just before Christmas. Picnic, ping-pong with a friend, music from the old 33-Victrola Joe has set up, and that special serenity that is even more intense in winter. Try it. You will not regret.

The January meeting will be at the Marmon's house at 4921 Cumberland Avenue, Chevy Chase

(Somerset) at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, January 8.

Mark your calendars for the Winter Bird Walk with Paul Hagen, on Saturday February 22, at 8 a.m. on the Island. The annual Bird Walk is one of the Island's great events.

As of January 1 and through March 31, new member applications may be forwarded to membership secretary John Noble for chance in this year's lottery in May. We do not expect more than 12–15 vacancies on the wait list. Remember chances are likely better for under 40-year olds.

Please contact me if you would be interested in joining the leadership team as "Law Supervisor."

BILL MARMON
President

Minutes for the December 11th Meeting

Attendees: Karen Possner, Stan Wiggins, Jane Winer, Steve Newman, Star Mitchell, Richard Lodish, Jonathan Zimmerman, Michael Bergsman, Maureen Jeffreys, Rodolfo Castro, Bill Eichbaum, Gerald Stanley Barton, Drew Walsh, Jeff Komarow, Ann Lucy, Jim Drew, Louise Meyer, Lucky Marmon, John Butler, Renee Butler, Tryon Wells, Rosalie Fedoruk, David Winer, Jody Benjamin, Robert Benjamin, Sherry Fizdale, Joe Hage, Christine Henny, Natalie Ambrose, Davey Hearn, John Noble, Penelope Mitchell, John Cunningham, Susanna Membrino, John Membrino, Charlotte Brewer, Lynda Slayen, Gary Slayen, Judy Lentz, and Ann Marie Cunningham.

The meeting was called to order by President Bill Marmon at the lovely home of Lynda and Gary Slayen.

Minutes: The minutes of the November 13, 2013 meeting were approved as published in *The Islander*.

New Business: Election of Officers

The following officers and supervisors were elected to serve during 2014.

OFFICERS

President: Bill Marmon
Vice President: Tryon Wells
Co-Recording Secretary: Ann Marie Cunningham
Co-Recording Secretary: Lucky Marmon
Treasurer: Ned Goddard
Financial Secretary: Lisa Kliefoth
Membership Secretary: John Noble
Editor: Carol Beehler
Archivist: Karen Possner
Captain: Drew Walsh
Deputy Captain: Steve Newman

SUPERVISORS

Finance: Bill Eichbaum
Law: Vacant
Clubhouse: Marianne Ross
Grounds: Ann Lucy
Painting/Carpentry: Karl Kosok
Website: Tryon Wells
Entertainment: George and Shelley Malusky
Camping/Parties: Jonathan Zimmerman
Canoeing: John Membrino
Swimming: Roger Herst
Relief Caretaking Scheduling: Jody Benjamin

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer-elect Ned Goddard provided the budget report on behalf of out-going treasurer Alan Gelb, who is in South Africa. Ned reported that the actual expenditures thus far and the estimated ones for the remainder of this month put the 2013 expenditures very close to the budgeted amount of \$82,828. There have been no significant surprises this year. If estimates are close to accurate, it leaves \$84,000 in the treasury, up from \$78,182 last year, which is significant in that it would be the first time in Alan's memory that the carry-over is as great as the actual budget.

The proposed budget for 2014 is \$85,086, an increase of 1.5%, which is approximately equal to the Consumer Price Index. The second largest part of the budget continues to be insurance, which is \$21,000 for all types combined, including medical, liability, and flood. Changes and/or additions to insurance will be considered in 2014 and will be discussed after further investigation. The budget also includes service on the construction notes, which will end in 2019. There will be no dues increase.

A motion to accept the budget was made and approved.

Many of the members expressed praise and gratitude for the service Alan Gelb provided to the club in his many years as treasurer. Ned recognizes the big shoes he has to fill. There was a round of applause that Alan couldn't hear in South Africa, but his wife Caroline probably heard it in Bethesda. Bill Eichbaum offered a resolution commending Alan for his service, which was carried by acclamation.

Membership: John Noble reported that the club has its full complement of 160 member families. The application for membership form is on the website. Between January 1 and March 31, John will accept applications. A lottery will be held to select those that will be placed on the waiting list. A year end report in the next *Islander* will provide details.

A concern was expressed that the form requires that the applicant assume liability for himself and family, but not guests. The form will be reviewed.

Relief Caretaking: Jody Benjamin reported by email that Ned Goddard, Robert Braunohler, David Lyles, Nancy Shute and Roman Kulbashny, Kathy Carroll, Julia Strasser, Meg Beuchert Jones, Rodolfo Castro, and

WINTER BIRD WALK

Please join us for the Fifth Annual Sycamore Island Winter Bird Walk scheduled for Saturday, February 22nd, 2014. As in past years, we will begin the outing at 8:00 a.m. with bagels and coffee at the clubhouse. Our plan is



Eastern Bluebird

to walk the Island and the towpath in the vicinity of the Island from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 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.

This walk has often delivered good looks at winter visitors such as Ring-neck Ducks, Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, Common Mergansers, Grebes, flocks of Blue Birds and a host of resident woodland song birds and woodpeckers. Our resident Bald Eagles are typically back on their nest this time of year just downriver

from the Island on the Virginia side. Returning Wood Ducks are also expected. If you would like to attend this year's event, please contact our trip leader Paul Hagen at phagen@bdlaw.com or 202.789.6022 by February 20th.

Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather.

John and Susanna Membrino served as relief caretakers in November. While we greatly appreciate all that volunteer, it is especially noteworthy that Ned Goddard, David Lyles, Julia Strasser, and Meg Jones served as relief caretakers twice this year.

Our president expressed gratitude to our hosts Lynda and Gary Slayen, applicants for membership, who graciously invited us into their lovely home where the red sofas and colorful décor created a very festive environment for the annual meeting and holiday party.

The meeting was adjourned so that all could enjoy the hospitality, food, drink and camaraderie.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-Recording Secretary

Winter Fishing on Sycamore Island

If you're dreaming of summer and the big fish you plan to catch, give winter fishing a try. Islander Jim Drew and his brother-in-law, Ali Khan, did just that on December 21, 2013, a beautiful winter day. Using rolled up, thin-sliced salami for bait, the pair fished off the old captain's float. In about an hour, Ali Khan had four bites, one broken line, and two really big catfish. The larger was 21 inches and the smaller measured 16 inches.

JIM DREW



VIRGIL BECK

Notes from the Island

Monday, December 2, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.63 Water Temperature: 38

Took a canoe out last evening and saw a lot of winter water fowl; Hooded mergansers, common mergansers, buffle heads and lots of ducks. We couldn't identify all of the ducks, most were only silhouettes in the fading light, but dozens and dozens of them flew overhead as they headed downstream.

I've been doing a ton of leaf raking lately, big, huge sycamore leaves. The strong winds of last week pushed all of the leaves into piles and I've been tarping up those piles and carrying them over to the river bank and off of the field. I also wanted to be sure and clean all of the leaves out of the canoe shed. The leaves get stuck in there and stay dry and don't decompose which creates an inviting dry shelter for unwanted critters. While I was working I noticed how the fallen leaves seemed to gather in the "wind eddies; behind picnic tables and trees or down-wind of the canoe shed.

Wednesday, December 4, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 40
Special Announcement; The Canoe Cruisers annual Holiday Party will be this Friday night, December 6, at the Clara Barton Community Center in Cabin John Md.!

We'll have hot cider, beer and wine and some buffet platters but Please bring a dish to share. Bring your old boats and gear to sell or swap. Bring your friends. All are welcome.

Our feature is a movie titled *Remains of a River*. From October 2011 to January 2012, Will Stauffer-Norris and Zak Podmore hiked and paddled from Wyoming's Wind River Mountains to Mexico following the Colorado River system from its farthest inland source to the sea, filming and narrating on the fly. The resulting film, *Remains of a River*, is an unforgettable story of friendship, adventure, and environmental degradation.

Before the movie starts, Colonel Josh and the Honky Tonk Heroes will be playing for your listening pleasure.



JOE HAGE

Saturday, December 7, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 45

The ferry is open today but by tonight the river will be too high to run the ferry. The prediction is or the river to get above six feet by tomorrow night, so it looks like the ferry will be closed through Tuesday at least.

Tuesday, December 10, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.5 Water Temperature: 45

The river is on its way down and should be low enough to run the ferry by tomorrow.

Well, I had to put down the rake and pick up the snow shovel. I cleared the snow from the steps and the bridge over the canal. Not a hard job. It was actually kinda fun to watch the slush sail into the water below and make a big splash. Clearing the bridge also counts as volunteering in the park so I was able to log in a few more Canal Steward hours. Remember folks, Sycamore Island Club is the Canal Steward for Mile 6 on the towpath so let me know if you want to help maintain your National Park.

Speaking of volunteering in the Park, a crew of saintly men came down the towpath last week and filled the giant pot holes. It's a big improvement, now the rain doesn't puddle up on the trail. Thanks guys!

I don't know if it had anything to do with the snow and freezing rain but an old sycamore fell near the head of the Island. It had long been dead and rotting and it finally just keeled over.

Thursday, December 12, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.95 Water Temperature: 45

The river dropped to just below five feet so if you want to come down and freeze your butt off, the ferry is open.

It was a great party last night, and well attended. Thanks to Lynda and Gary for hosting. It was heartwarming to see the ever-growing Sycamore Island family, all together in one place.

Wednesday, December 18, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 39

There is ice on the canal! Every winter I have a devout few who wait to hear those glorious words. Alas, so far this winter there has only been a trace of ice on the canal and with the temperatures expected to climb into the 70s on Sunday our dream of once again skating on the canal will have to wait.

Speaking of winter sports, we went skiing/sledding

on last Saturday. While Bethesda and the rest of the lower county were getting rain, the upper parts of the county got four inches of snow, on top of three inches of base. The Islanders that were here when we left the Island were surprised to see Mary and I carrying skis and sleds down to the ferry. They didn't seem to hold out much hope that we would be skiing that day.

What they didn't know was that we had been tipped off earlier in the week by a Sycamore Islander who told us about a great place in Montgomery County for cross-country skiing. I have to admit we were skeptical as we drove north on 270, seeing only small patches of snow on the way. But when we arrived at our destination (near the highest point in the county, about 650 feet above sea level), we were thrilled to see rolling hills of white, looking like giant piles of sugar. The snow was coming down pretty hard as we spent three hours playing in the fresh powder. Thanks to John Butler for the tip, who knew that just 300 feet in elevation change could make that much difference in the climate.

Friday, December 20, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.1 Water Temperature: 39

We may want to consider changing the name of the Island from Sycamore Island to Beaver Island. Last night I counted eight beaver hovering like hungry sharks off the southern shore of the Island. It is not unusual to see the occasional beaver swimming around the Island, or even catch one on the Island chewing on a tree now and then, but last night blew me away. I knew that they were around because I had seen some damage to our trees, but I had no idea that there were multiple generations of them. I hope they don't gang up on me.

I broke out my Christmas decorations last week but no tree on the Island this year. I think I'll just hang some ornaments in the windows. It was nice to see the big Christmas tree on the porch of the renovated castle on the hill. That big semi-circle porch is perfect for a big tree, right where everyone can see it from MacArthur Boulevard. My favorite though, since way back when the kids were here, is the big Santa with his sleigh and his Reindeer on the roof of our neighbor's house on the hill in Glen Echo Heights. I get a good view of it as I'm climbing up the spiral bridge. As far as lights on the Island, it seems like a waste since very few would people see them way down here. Too bad too, the colorful lights look so pretty reflecting off of the river.



JOE HAGE

The largest tree in Maryland, a 450-year-old sycamore is 25 feet in circumference

Tuesday, December 24, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.7 Water Temperature: 45
FERRY CLOSED!

Sorry folks, no Christmas walks on the Island this year. The river is up to 5.7 feet and it isn't predicted to go down until Friday.

I had some trouble with the ferry last night and I spent a few minutes stuck in the middle of the swollen river. It wasn't real late at night, but it was after dark when I stepped onto the ferry with the river at 5.5 feet and rising. I got about two ferry lengths away from the mainland when suddenly I could go no further. Somehow the chain had become snagged in the tree branches overhead. I clipped the carabiner at the bow and went to the back of the ferry to try to shake the chain free.

The force of the river was bearing down hard and with the ferry now broadside to the current, the ropes

and chains were straining against the pressure. I pulled hard on the chain to try to free it, but it was useless, the current was too strong. I really didn't like being on the outside of the ferry railing pulling with all my might so I had to come up with another plan. I thought about going back to the mainland and starting over but decided instead to wait until daylight. Then, I had to do something that I've never done, I unclipped the stuck chain from the ferry. I was very apprehensive about letting go of that chain and running the ferry with just the one safety chain but it was the only way out of my predicament. I had to lie down to get the leverage I needed to unhook the chain, but once I did the back of the ferry quickly swung around, and for the first time ever I was pointed straight up river, perfectly parallel to the current.

It was easy sailing after that but I sure am glad it happened while I was on the ferry and not someone

else. Obviously, we need to do something to keep the ferry chains free of overhanging branches.

Merry Christmas!!

Friday, December 27, 2013

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.9 Water Temperature: 45
THE FERRY IS OPEN!**

The river has dropped below five feet, just barely, and the ferry landing has emerged from the river.

We're below five feet but that does not mean that it will be easy to operate the ferry. There is still plenty of volume in the river so please be careful while running the ferry tomorrow.

Also, I cut the offending branches that had me stuck on the river Monday night. The cables and pulleys are all free and working fine once again. That tree may be starting to drop a little but the current was very strong that night, so the cable was being pulled further down stream than normal.

Monday, December 30, 2013

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

The river has been see-sawing up and down lately and this time it looks like it will get all the way up to 7.5 feet. They are expecting it to crest tomorrow night and it will probably be above five feet until the weekend. No New Years Day visits to the Island this year.

We had over two inches of rain yesterday so we decided to walk up to see the effects on Cabin John Creek. It was cool to see that tranquil stream turned into a real live river.

Tuesday, December 31, 2013

Water Level at Little Falls: 7.0 Water Temperature: 45
Did you know that the biggest tree in all of Maryland is right here in Montgomery County? And did you know that it is a sycamore tree? The old champion tree of Maryland was the famous Wye Oak on the eastern shore but since that one died few years ago the monster sycamore has taken its place. The cool thing is that this new champion is growing on public land at the Dickerson Conservation Park in Dickerson Maryland.

Mary and I decided to go up there and pay our respects to a tree that is probably 450 years old. It was a nice drive out there but when we finally found the tree there was no sign or any other indication that we were looking at the right tree. We compared our tree to the

picture of the champion on the internet and we felt assured that we were looking at the right tree. The champion Sycamore is 25 feet in circumference.

For comparison, the largest sycamore I could find on the Island is a mere 15 feet in circumference.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker



JOE HAGE

Sycamore tree on Sycamore Island

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Happy New Year

Saturday Relief Caretakers **January / February 2014**

JANUARY	11 A.M. – DUSK	FEBRUARY	11 A.M. – DUSK
JANUARY 4	John Lord	FEBRUARY 1	Clayton and Ellen Teague
JANUARY 11	Please Volunteer	FEBRUARY 8	Please Volunteer
JANUARY 18	Please Volunteer	FEBRUARY 15	Please Volunteer
JANUARY 25	Trip Reid	FEBRUARY 22	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 February issue is January 31.



BILL MARMON