



# *The Sycamore Islander*

APRIL 2014 | VOLUME 93 NUMBER 4

## President's Letter

**The next club meeting is on Wednesday, April 9, at 8:00 p.m. on the Island.**

I write this on the next to last day of March, and ten days into spring the same day Captain Drew Walsh hosted a meeting on the Island to plan for the upcoming workfest on Sunday, April 13, and go over proposed improvements to club facilities. We (Drew, Deputy Captain Steve Newman, Financial Secretary Ned Goddard, Caretaker Joe Hage and myself) did not expect to face a river well over 5-feet high with snow, hail, and freezing temperature to boot. As we sat huddled by the roaring wood stove, it hardly seemed possible that real spring is imminent. And by the time you read this, the cherry blossoms may be poking out, and picnics on the Island will sound like fun.

The April 13 "workfest," where the docks are put back in the water and when facilities are fixed and cleaned, is important. (See details in separate article.) We need a good crowd—including wait listers. Bring a dish to accompany the burgers and dogs prepared by George Malusky.

It's also important to remember that relief caretaking duty on Saturdays when Joe is off the Island is the

responsibility of every member. Our wonderful Relief Caretaker Supervisor Jody Benjamin should not have to beg and wheedle to fill the relief caretaking schedule. Every member is expected to take a turn once a year. Please call Jody and pick a convenient date or ask for an assignment.

At the April 9 meeting we will hold the every-other-year lottery to select new additions to the wait list. Membership Secretary reports that he has received 100 applications for the estimated 15–20 spots.

Swimming season is right around the corner and safety in the water needs to be uppermost in every member's mind. The river can be dangerous with unexpected currents and debris. We must not jeopardize our special grandfathered permission to swim in the river with a serious accident. Children **MUST** be supervised by parents. And everyone needs to pay attention to conditions. Swimming Supervisor Roger Herst and Captain Drew Walsh report that new safety equipment, specified and approved by the club last year, will be installed this spring before swimming season begins.

BILL MARMON  
President

## Minutes for the March 12 Meeting

**Attendees:** Star Mitchell, Fred Pinkney, Bill Marmon, Lucky Marmon, David Winer, Karen Possner, Tryon Wells, Drew Walsh, Gerry Barton, Marianne Ross, Jim Drew, John Noble, Mike Petrilli, Davey Hearn  
Because of predicted high winds, the meeting was held at the home of Bill and Lucky Marmon instead of on the Island.

**Minutes:** The minutes of December, 2013, were approved. Because of the lack of quorums at the January and February meetings, there are no official minutes for those meetings

**Communications:** Star Mitchell brought to our attention the recent death of long-time club member John Heidemann. John is remembered by many for his contributions to the life of the Island. He, along with John Thompson and a few others, paddled across the river from Sycamore Island and climbed the hill on the Virginia side to their offices at the CIA. His little dog often accompanied him in his canoe. John was editor of the Canoe Cruisers Association newsletter and for years taught canoeing at Fletcher's Cove and Swain's Lock. John was also a mainstay of the Flower Walk.

**Relief Caretaking:** Supervisors Jody and Bobby Benjamin wrote to club President Bill Marmon about the difficulty she is having getting members to fulfill their obligation to serve as relief caretaker as least one Saturday per year. This issue was discussed and suggestions as to how to remedy this problem were discussed. Members will be reminded that the question is not "if" they will substitute as caretakers, but "when."

**Treasurer's Report:** Treasurer Ned Goddard was out of town but submitted this report. Officers and Directors insurance is in place for officers, supervisors, and those serving official offices of the club.

Ned is preparing the 2013 tax filings to meet the April deadline. Ned continues to receive guidance for this job from Alan Gelb to whom he is very grateful.

**Captain's Report:** Captain Drew Walsh reported that he planned to meet with Swimming Supervisor Roger Herst to discuss the various safety issues that have been addressed at previous meetings and to make sure that

the proper equipment is in place when the warm weather arrives. Drew is considering putting some of the equipment on the shore instead of on the docks where it is often mistaken for swim toys.

Supervision of children who are swimming and canoeing remains of paramount concern. There seems to be a consensus that parents are responsible for the supervision of their child and their child's guests. Karen Possner suggested that it be the part of the caretaker and relief caretakers' duties to advise persons coming over on the ferry of this responsibility. It will also be announced during the orientation of new members. Captain Drew Walsh recommends that supervision be mandatory for children twelve and under.

Star Mitchell talked about the difficulty of docking the ferry when the wind was strong. Later in the meeting, Dave Winer shared his technique for accomplishing this. Drew will talk to Joe about how to instruct new members to successfully dock the ferry.

**Environment Committee:** The Greens Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Environment Committee, is planning a Tree Planting Day. The purpose is to prevent erosion of the Island. Committee members are planning to stake off and grid the Island so that it can be studied section by section. They are hoping to find some Google Earth satellite photos so that they can compare the Island of today with the old one.

**Work Fest:** The Work Fest is Sunday, April 13, 9:00 a.m. Raindate: Sunday, April 27th. Drew will start planning the Work Fest with Steve Newman, Gerry Barton, and Tryon Wells. They will develop a master plan for repairs. Drew will work on a list of tasks to be posted in *The Islander*. The canoe dock will have to be repaired before the Work Fest. Drew will also contact George Malusky, our master chef at the Work Fest.

**Membership Report:** Membership Chair John Noble proposed for election to membership the following four families: David and Jennifer Hearn and son, Jesse; W. Parker and Molly Moore and their son, Rawles; Mike Petrilli and Meghan Mullan and their sons, Nico and Leandro; Fred Pinkney and Pamela Sommers and their children Gabriel and Gregory.

The Hearn's are volunteer quartermasters of Lockhouse 6 and owners of Sweet Composites, offering everything you need to build your own canoe or kayak.

David was a member of the US whitewater Team for 26 years and won the World Championships twice. W. Parker Moore is a principal with a large environmental law firm in the U.S. Their focus: clean water and wetlands. Fred Pinkney works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Annapolis, where he studies the effects of contaminants on the tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. Mike Petrilli works at the Fordham Institute, an education policy think tank. He bikes to work on the towpath. All four applicants were voted membership unanimously. Two additional

applicants will be voted on at the next meeting.

**Lottery—April 9th:** The lottery to select new wait listers will be held at the club meeting on April 9th. So far, 70 applications have been received, twenty-two in the under-40 category. Those selected in the lottery will be added to the waiting list. Membership Chair John Noble predicts that 10 to 15 openings will be filled on the waiting list.

**Dues:** March 31, 2013 is the deadline for payment of membership dues. As of the meeting, a total of 41 (regular, seniors, inactive, and waiting list) persons have not paid their dues. Membership stands as follows: 154 regular, 67 senior, 20 inactive, 14 honorary, 56 waiting list.

**Caretaker's Report:** Relief Caretaker Supervisors Jody and Bobby Benjamin say that a frequently asked question by prospective caretakers is whether there is WiFi on the Island. The answer could be "Yes," according to Tryon, who will look into installing a router to hook up with the internet connection already on the Island.

The following members have volunteered as relief caretakers since the last published list: Jim Drew, Pat Roth, Robert and Barbara McCartney, Benjamin Robinson, Trip Reid, Star Mitchell, John Cunningham, and Clayton and Ellen Teague..

**New Business:** Gerry Barton noted that parking on both levels is a problem during the eight weeks that kayakers and canoeists are training for various races. They use the steps leading down to our ferry to access the river. These steps are the club's to maintain, but are not on property owned by the club.

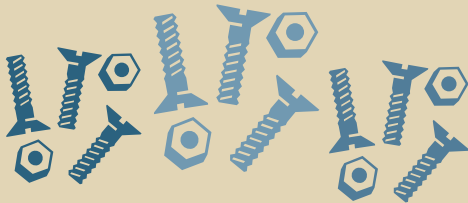
**Archivist Report:** Archivist Karen Possner reported that all necessary documents have been delivered to the D.C. Historical Society and stored in an acid-free storage box. So far, there are 155 folders containing documents dating back to 1885. Karen asked that any member possessing important documents concerning the Island give them to her or to the Historical Society.

The meeting was adjourned. The next meeting will be held on the Island on April 9th at 8:00.

Respectfully Submitted,  
LUCKY MARMON  
Co-Recording Secretary

# WORKFEST

Sunday, April 13



Come celebrate the end of winter and help Sycamore Island welcome the Spring! It is time to prepare our Island for the busy season, Sunday, April 13th (backup date is April 27th).

Some will help set the docks in place, rake up any remaining leaves, and collect driftwood. Others will organize the canoe paddles, scrub-down the clubhouse, and set up the charcoal grills. Finally, a work party might set out in a canoe to pick up the litter in the area surrounding our club.

A few special projects are planned, but more importantly, full time members and those on the waiting list will descend on the Island to enjoy comradery as we work and share our potluck lunch together.

See you on the Island!



FAMILY ALBUM

John Heidemann

### Tribute to John Roger Heidemann

John Roger Heidemann was born 11/17/1921 in LeSeur, Minnesota and died 3/11/2014 in Bethesda, Maryland at the age of 92. John and his wife, Joan Frances Mckenzie Heidemann (1923–2009) joined Sycamore Island Club on December 1, 1961, and resigned September 3, 2008 (47 years). John and Joan were active pillars of Sycamore Island. John was an avid birder and he and Joan often led bird and wildflower walks. They are survived by their two children, Kristin Barbara and Andrew Guy.

John joined the Canoe Cruisers Association (CCA) in the early 1960s. He and John Thomson (club member) were inseparable buddies. They started the paddling instruction at Fletcher’s Cove on Tuesday evening and Swain’s Lock on Thursday evenings. These free lessons (instructed by volunteers from CCA) went on for some 50+ years and only ended in 2009 when the Park Service took the event away from the CCA. Until as late as 2007, John was still going with Ed Pilchard to Fletcher’s to teach. After that, John (age 86) said he had become too stiff to get into a canoe any more.

John H. & John T. along with Bob Sinclair (and a few other men at times whose names I cannot locate) started a “canoe pool.” They all worked at the CIA across the river from the Island. Rather than driving all the way to VA, it was easier to go down to Sycamore Island, get in a canoe, and paddle across the river to the CIA. They paddled across the river in some rather high water at times. In the winter when the river was frozen, John H. would drive to work (so he told his family), but I understand John T. was known to sometimes ice skate across the river. Another trick when the river was frozen was to drag a canoe across the ice and be ready to jump in should the



FAMILY ALBUM

Joan and John Heidemann

ice give way. Another “ice safety measure” was to take a 20-ft. bamboo pole across the ice in case of breakage and use the pole for flotation.

John H. was the editor of the CCA Cruiser newsletter for 19 years. (John T. was SI’s news editor.) This newsletter was done with the help of Dave and Martha Foley (formally SI members). Everyone would take turns typing up the handwritten stories that had been submitted. Then the stories were cut and pasted onto sheets of paper to make them fit on the proper size paper. Beautiful newsletters were produced and mailed to all members each and every month. Members couldn’t wait to receive their copies to read about previous trip reports, river news, and up-coming paddling trips. Of course, there were no computers, e-mail, cell phones, or message boards. There was something so old fashioned as a “hot line” on the phone to find out about “pick-up” trips for the up-coming week.

There is an old proverb, “When a man dies an entire library dies with him.” How well that fits John Heidemann. Right now there are 10 boxes of memorabilia at John’s house that I am supposed to go pick up. For years we had planned to get together and I would take all of this material. This tribute is so short for 92 years of the life of a man that did so much. I remember John as a humble, gentle, and modest man, a canoeist who had a very strong stroke (half the paddle—twice the paddler), a great canoe teacher, a great trip leader, a great editor, a great club guy, and a great friend to me and to so many other people—who knows what he did at the CIA!

What a giant of a man we have all lost.

V. STAR MITCHELL

## Notes from the Island

**Saturday, March 1, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.9 Water Temperature: 37**  
The ferry is open.

**Wednesday, March 5, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 35**  
Thankfully, the river did not freeze and the ferry is open.

Lots of good birds around right now. We have the winter birds, like the red-necked grebes and American widgeon, but I also saw a yellow-rumped warbler and a group of male red-winged blackbirds visited the feeder. We even had a hermit thrush trapped in the screen porch!

**Thursday, March 6, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 35**  
Yesterday I mentioned the unusual abundance of waterfowl around here lately. This year we've been seeing many birds that we don't normally see and I just learned why that is. It turns out that the red-necked grebes that I mentioned yesterday would normally be wintering in the Bay of Fundy, but since it's been so cold, they have been force down here to find open water to feed in. Likewise, with many of the other birds that would normally be wintering along the Great Lakes. They have to head south to find open water and the first stop is the Potomac River! I guess it wasn't so far fetched for us to have white-winged scoters here after all.

**Friday, March 7, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 35**  
The rare bird sightings continue. Yesterday we had four tundra swans hanging out near the bottom of Rupperts!

**Monday, March 10, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 42**  
I got home yesterday morning to find the ferry moored to the mainland, but for some reason there was a club canoe with paddles on it, unlocked? I'm curious about what chain of events led to someone irresponsibly leaving a canoe over there.

I finally did it. I was finally able to remove that ancient cable that was hanging from that sycamore by

# Wildflower Walk

John Parrish and RG Steinman will again lead the

## SYCAMORE ISLAND WILDFLOWER WALK

Saturday, April 5th, from 10:00 to 2:00

RAIN or SHINE!

Bring a lunch or snack, water, and dress for the weather. We will be exploring Section B of the Billy Goat Trail. We will meet at 10:00 at the parking lot indicated in the following directions: from Clara Barton Parkway, take the Carderock exit (which is adjacent to the U.S. Naval Facility). Proceed through the canal tunnel. After passing underneath the canal tunnel, you'll come to a stop sign. TURN RIGHT and proceed to the LAST parking lot, which is the 3rd parking lot you'll come to. We will be waiting there for you!

We hope to encounter a variety of spring wildflowers such as Spring Beauty, Toothwort, Dutchman's Breeches, Trout Lily, Early Saxifrage, Bloodroot, Trillium, Golden Ragwort, Moss Phlox and Violets. Given the wintry weather, no telling what else we might see in bloom. Questions: Call 301.565.2025 or email [lifeonurth@gmail.com](mailto:lifeonurth@gmail.com).





JOE HAGE

the ferry landing. That remnant of a cable has been bugging me since I moved here and now it's gone! My guess is that the cable once supported one of the early power lines to the Island. The question is when. It is possible that that cable has been there since before the major flood of 1936! I guess we'll never know for sure but I'm glad it is gone. That cable was a nuisance during the times when I had to paddle over in high water and I'm sure that the fishermen will be happy that there is one less cable over the river to snag their lines.

This is really cool! There are over forty tundra swans sitting in the river about halfway between here and the eagle's nest! By the way, it looks as if the eagles may still be sitting on their eggs. I thought maybe the eggs had hatched but it's really hard to tell from here.

#### Wednesday, March 12, 2014

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8 Water Temperature: 44**

The river is on its way up and it should be over five feet by the time the meeting ends tonight. I hope the meeting ends before the river gets too high. Judging from the latest predictions, the ferry will be closed tomorrow, and Friday and maybe Saturday as well.

We had a visit from a curious otter yesterday. The thing was four to five feet long and came swimming up to Mary while she sat on the sailing dock. She called me down and we watched it as it swam up to the head of

the Island and then disappeared. I don't remember if I had mentioned this before, but we knew there may be an otter around when we found a half-eaten catfish lying in the snow by the ferry one day.

#### Thursday, March 13, 2014

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.9 Water Temperature: 44**

If you must come down to the Island, I might be able to get you on the ferry, but with the river just below five feet and the wind blowing at a steady twenty miles per hour, I'm not positive that I would be able to hold on to the tow rope. If you had any doubts about the force of the wind last night listen to this. The wind was pushing so hard on the ferry last night that it broke the 4 x 4 post that the ferry was hooked to. Wow!

There is a red flag warning today, which means, not a good day for a camp fire as the air is super dry, the wood is really dry and of course the wind is blowing like hell.

Next week is flood awareness week, who knew?

#### Friday, March 14, 2014

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 44**

The ferry is closed today but the river should be back down for tomorrow and Sunday.

Remember, Sycamore Island Club is now on Facebook and you don't have to have facebook to check

it out! I've posted some good pictures there and even a video of the windy conditions yesterday!

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sycamore-Island-Club/115527501803844>

**Monday, March 17, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.6 Water Temperature: 44**

Happy St. Patrick's Day! Five inches of snow and the river is running green!

**Tuesday, March 18, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.6 Water Temperature: 42**

It's a little hard to imagine with all of this snow on the ground that the first day of Spring is on Thursday.

**Thursday, March 20, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.4 Water Temperature: 42**  
Happy Spring!

I saw my first cormorants of the season, a sure sign that warmer weather is on the way!

**Tuesday, March 25, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.6 Water Temperature: 44**

It's been sixty years since Justice, William O. Douglass did his famous hike to save the towpath and canal. It must have been an exciting day for Sycamore Island that day in 1954 when Justice Douglass and his fellow hikers finally made it past here. There is actually a popular picture of the event taken from the Sycamore bridge. Imagine what would have happened to Sycamore Island if they had built a parkway through here.

Speaking of the canal, I'd like to encourage you to go to The C & O Canal Trust website and support the great work they do for us and the canal, [canaltrust.org](http://canaltrust.org)

Mary and I are so inspired by The Canal Trust and their website that we've decided to paddle down the Potomac from Cumberland to Georgetown to celebrate the canal! More on that later.

I dewatered the club bathrooms and kitchen and turned the water back on. It's pretty late in the year for finally turning on the water but it looks like I should have waited even longer with these winter-like temps. Last year we had the water back on on February 28!

I wear many different hats here as caretaker. This past week it's been electrician and phone repairman. I had to trouble-shoot the phone wires when the phone and internet started cutting out every time that it



JOE HAGE

rained. I found a couple of probable causes for the problem and so far my connection is good. While I was on the ladder checking the phone wires I decided to move the trail lights off of the tree that is about to die. It was a little tricky to keep the power lines out of the canal but I got the lights reinstalled on the utility pole by the towpath. I also went up the hill and cut away some of the menacing branches that were interfering with the wires up there.

**Monday, March 30, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 6.4 Water Temperature: 44**

The ferry is closed. I guess that should not be too surprising since it rained all weekend. The river shot up quickly yesterday but it's going to be a slow ride back to lower water levels. It looks like the ferry will be closed most of the week.

It's very questionable whether it was worth the effort, but I managed to get everyone across the flooded river in the freezing wind, snow and rain for the planning meeting yesterday. It sure is nice to have the sun come out after a day like that.

Check out "Canal by Canoe," it's a new blog site that Mary and I will be hosting as we do our canoe trip from Cumberland to Georgetown, May 5–May 18. [www.canalbycanoe.com](http://www.canalbycanoe.com) coming soon!

JOE HAGE  
Caretaker

# The Sycamore Islander

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ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

## FIRST CLASS MAIL

Saturday Relief Caretakers <b>April/May 2014</b>					
APRIL	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK	MAY	9 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
APRIL 5	Steve Taswell and Joey Lampl	Molly Carr and Mac Thornton	MAY 3	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
APRIL 12	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!	MAY 10	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
APRIL 19	Please volunteer!	Kim and Dirk Suringa	MAY 17	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
APRIL 26	Rachel Rudy and Nat Reid	Please volunteer!	MAY 24	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
			MAY 31	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.