



The Sycamore Islander

FEBRUARY 2015 | VOLUME 94 NUMBER 2

Minutes for the January 14th Meeting

Attendees: Star Mitchell, Jim Drew, Tryon Wells, Dave Winer, Jane Winer, Karen Possner, Meredith Griggs, John Noble, Bill Marmon, Lucky Marmon, Jody Benjamin, Gerry Barton, Marianne Ross, Ned Goddard, Gary Slayen, Lynda Slayen, John Butler, Renee Butler.

Club President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order.

Minutes: The December Minutes were approved unanimously.

Communications: None

Relief Caretakers Report: Jody Benjamin reported that she and Bobby Benjamin made a special appeal to members to sign up for relief caretaking both on Saturdays and during Caretaker Joe Hage's vacation periods. The response for relief caretakers was very successful. Ten new names were added to the list of those willing to volunteer for special activities, such as the

Spring and Fall Workfests. This appeal appears again in this month's *Islander*.

Thanks to those who have served or signed to be Relief Caretakers since the December meeting. They are: Richard and Jan Pappalardo, Witt and Annie Farquhar, Meredith Griggs, Trip Reid, and Avi Gabrow.

Captain's Report: It was noted that the buoys and signs on both sides of the shore and on Sycamore Island that warned boaters and swimmers about the dangers of the water intake dam just below the Island are no longer there. Most likely they were swept away during storms or high winds. These signs had been placed there because of an incident in the early 1980s in which several people who went over the dam lost their lives. Gerry Barton said he planned to attend a late-January meeting sponsored by the Army Corp of Engineers and other groups where the issue of the signs can be discussed. Jim Drew suggested that the club use its "suasion" to have the buoys and signs on shore restored, but agreed with others that the sign on the Island was an eyesore.



DAVID WINER

Volunteer members processing dues statements for mailing at Tryon Wells' house. Tryon gets a group together every year for the "stuffing and mailing" session.

It was suggested that someone do an article on the dam incident for *The Islander*. Our former caretaker, Doc, might have written one.

Membership Secretary's Report: John Noble announced that the annual dues notice had been mailed out.

He reported that 12 persons were now eligible for senior membership, which will reduce their annual dues by 50 percent and allow 20 waitlisters to join the club.

There was a lengthy discussion about the future distribution of *The Islander*. Responding to a general consensus, Lucky Marmon proposed that beginning with the March issue, *The Islander* would be sent by email. Those members who still wish to receive *The Islander* in hard copy must send a check for \$32 to Financial Secretary Lisa Kleifoth by February 15th. This proposal was passed. Lisa Kleifoth's address is: 6613 80th Place, Cabin John, MD 20818.

There are several community service organizations which receive *The Islander*. It will be sent to their preferred emails.

Archivist Karen Possner will send a hard copy of *The Islander* each month to The Washington Historical Society, where they are routinely stored.

Ned Goddard volunteered to print out copies of *The Islander* on his color printer each month and bring them to the Island.

New Business: President Tryon Wells listed the various events to be scheduled on the Island during 2015. They include the following: Fall Work Fest; Spring Work Fest;

Good Times/ Old Timers, Lucky Marmon/ Sept. 16th Raindate October 14th; Bird Walk, Paul Hagen; Flower Walk, Jane Winer; Down River Race; Bar-BQ and Hootenanny; Soltice Party, Lynda Slayen; Canoe Class; Fishing Derby, George Malusky; October Dance, Robin Richter; Labor Day Regatta. Volunteers willing to head up these events are needed. Tryon will follow up on scheduling dates.

It was suggested that more members might attend monthly meeting if there were interesting speakers on the agenda. Some suggestions: the chief scientist of the World Wildlife Fund, the head of the DC Historical Society. Tryon requested that suggestions for speakers be sent to him.

Thanks to Gary and Linda Slayen for hosting the January meeting in their lovely home. The atmosphere was warm and welcoming and the food delicious.

The February meeting will be held at 8:00 p.m. at the home of Vicki Judson and Michael Esoh at 6203 Dahlonge Road, Bethesda.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted

LUCKY MARMON

Co-recording Secretary

Dear Islanders:

As the calendar turns, I hope one of your resolutions will be to visit Sycamore Island more often—to relax or recharge or just escape to the slower Island tempo. And when the weather warms, to get into a canoe to feel river life in that unique way.

It's a two way relationship between you and the Island: Sycamore depends on its members to help out; it is an expectation of membership. To volunteer, just send me an email at benjafamily@gmail.com and I will put you on the schedule. There are four ways to do so.

Spring and Fall Workfests. Just watch for the dates in the *Islander* newsletter and come on down! There is always something to do to fit any skill level. Along with the chance to enjoy delicious food while socializing with fellow Islanders.

Saturday Substitute Caretaking. Joe Hage's regular day off is Saturday and Island members serve as

substitutes. The primary duty is ferrying visitors to the Island and being eyes and ears for the club, communicating any comments or issues to the Captain or the President. At present, only two Saturdays in all of 2015 are covered, so getting some Saturday volunteers is an immediate need.

Special Ops Team. There is always a to-do list at Sycamore, and sometimes the Captain needs to form an ad-hoc team for a limited time to tackle projects as they arise. It might involve carpentry, grounds work, flood preparation, or flood cleanup. There might be a long lead time, or it might be an urgent need. Brains and/or brawn are the only qualifications. If you would like to be notified when there is a special project that needs our attention, send me an email and I'll put you on Captain Drew Walsh's email list. He'll explain the project and solicit volunteers from that list.

Substitute Caretakers for Joe's vacation days. Believe it or not, Joe Hage actually takes a vacation now and then. When he does, the Island needs a substitute caretaker for weekdays and Sundays. Substitutes can take one or more days. Staying overnight is optional. For those who wish it, there is also a \$50 stipend, as this particular activity is not an expectation of membership. If you would like to be on the list of possible substitutes, send me an email and I will notify you when Joe plans a vacation.

Special Note to Waitlisters: When you volunteer to help out on the Island, you may ask for a pass which allows you to bring up to 9 people to the Island on the day of your choice—like a weekend day in the summer. You do not need to have purchased a guest pass to take advantage of this. All you need do is notify whoever schedules your service that you want a pass. (Note: if you receive pay for being Joe's vacation substitute, you may not also ask for a pass.)

The choice is yours, and the Island needs your help. I hope to hear from you. And I hope to see you on the Island in 2015.

JODY BENJAMIN

In Memoriam to John William Lentz

John was born May 24, 1936 in Allenton, Pennsylvania. He departed this earth January 16, 2015, at the age of 78. John joined the Canoe Cruisers Association (CCA) in 1962 and he joined Sycamore Island May of 1970. John was an excellent canoeist who did a descent of the Back River, North West Territory; logged twenty-one major Canadian paddling expeditions; plus two Siberia/Russia expeditions; and in 2013, he authored his first book, *Tales of the Paddle*. At one Sycamore Island meeting, John gave an interesting presentation about his book and paddling in Siberia. For years, John was Sycamore Island's canoe supervisor and he and Judy were always happy to have club meetings at their home in the winter or when the river was at a flood stage.

I don't remember when or where I first met John and his wife Judy, but paddlers and Sycamore Island people are like siblings—you can't remember when or where you first met them, you've just always known them, and so it was with John and Judy. In his earlier days, John often participated in the Downriver Race (and Judy paddled it once), but my involvement with John (when I was Chair of the Downriver Race) was that he would serve as a race safety boater for the race. One year, he told me he just really could no longer carry his boat. So I asked John if he would be a Sycamore Island safety boater on the day of the race and just paddle up from Sycamore Island to cheer on the tired racers and show them the way through the small island mazes. John said he would be happy to do that as he only had to drag a canoe to the river and back.

This past year at the 2014 Downriver Race, John was the only person that showed up to be a Sycamore Island safety boater (usually there would be about 4 or more)! The river was just above 5 feet. I was troubled that John was going out alone with the river slightly over 5 feet, but he donned a CCA safety vest, dragged a canoe to the river, and with strong, effective strokes (half the paddle twice the paddler) off he went upriver with his usual cheerful smile.

The last time I saw John was at the CCA December Holiday Swap. John was selling a lot of things he knew he wasn't going to need any more (how literal that was). If you bought any of John's items, I hope that you will treasure them. I know John is up there paddling the clear blue sky and surfing the foaming white

clouds. How much we will all miss the legend of the man John Lentz. John is survived by his wife Judy and their sons Michael and Christopher. A memorial service will be held in the spring.

V. STAR MITCHELL

Notes from the Island

Monday, January 5, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.9 Water Temperature: 40

Yesterday at sunset the temperature was a balmy 56 degrees. Today at sunset, with the wind-chill, the temperature was a crushing 26 degrees, and it might snow tonight. What a difference a day makes!

There was a huge group of kayakers on the river on New Year's Day. It was pretty cold but apparently it's a new tradition to paddle to Sycamore Island from Angler's Inn on the first day of the year. Seems to be very popular, judging by the number of boaters climbing the hill.

Thursday, January 8, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.9 Water Temperature: 40

Ice on the river this morning. Usually it only takes a quick two minutes to pull the ferry across the channel; today it took 55 minutes.

Thankfully I was able to break the ice, free up the ferry, and get it safely back to the Island. My main concern was protecting the property of the club of course, but I also wanted to make it home. It looks like I may pack up and close the ferry until this cold snap passes.

Monday, January 12, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 32

Sometimes river-life in January can get very interesting. Frozen rivers and ferries really don't mix very well. This past Thursday, there was a thin sheet of ice on the river. Luckily, it was thin enough for me to break my way across with the ferry. After securing the ferry, I was able to paddle a canoe off the Island later that day before the channel refroze. On Friday, the channel was too frozen for paddling but sadly it was not thick enough to support the weight of the canoe. I wasn't able to get



JOE HAGE



7th Annual Winter Bird Walk

Saturday, February 21, 2015

- o Popular tradition for members
- o Begin at 7:30 AM with bagels and coffee at the clubhouse
- o Walk the Island and the towpath 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m
- o Winter waterfowl and migratory songbirds
- o For beginners and experienced birders
- o Compare notes over coffee around the wood stove

*Please contact our trip leader Paul Hagen at
phagen@bdlaw.com or 202-789-6022 by February 18.
Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather.*

home on Thursday night or Friday. Thankfully, I have a comfortable place on the mainland where I can stay.

On Saturday, I found myself wishing for colder temperatures just so the river would freeze solid and I could go home. If the weather stayed frigid, I could cross on top of the ice with the canoe. But if it warms up and starts to rain, as forecasted, coming and going to Sycamore Island would get a lot more complicated.

We made it over to the Island on Saturday afternoon. It's always nerve wracking, getting ready to put the canoe on top of the ice and testing it. You can never be too positive about whether you'll make it all the way to the Island before the ice breaks. The cool thing was that once we got going, the canoe slid us right across .

On Sunday I spent some time on the mainland and stocked up on provisions. Judging by the forecast of warmer temperatures, I figured I'd be trapped on the Island until the ice on the river melted and the ferry was free again. There is nothing worse than breaking through the ice in the canoe and getting stuck out there in the middle of a frozen river. Actually there are worse things but we're not going to mention them.

So, I'm stuck out here watching the rain and the birds at the feeder. It's like a caretakers snow day. I finally have some time to write in the log!

It's kind of funny in this world of apps, that there isn't a website where you can find out how thick the ice is in your neck of the woods. River ice is the kind of



JOE HAGE

thing where you need firsthand knowledge. You can't read about it; you have to go and see it for yourself.

Tuesday, January 13, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 32

What's the river ice going to do today? It's anybody's guess but there is a lot more open water today than there was yesterday.

The ice on the river allowed a red fox to come over to the Island and her little tracks were everywhere in the shallow snow. She even left some yellow snow. There were also squirrel tracks and mouse tracks in the fresh snow. There were no beaver tracks however, one of the good things about the ice. It keeps the beaver out.

We lost a tree. It was a medium-sized silver maple that fell into the river just downstream from the swimming dock. I think it blew down in the strong winds, plus it looks pretty rotted inside.

Winter ducks are back; scaups and mergansers this morning.

Thursday, January 15, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 32

I was able to chop my way off of the Island yesterday. That was some back breaking work. I had to take a few breaks but I'm confident that the river is not going to refreeze, at least not right away. It seems that most of the ice is disappearing from the river.

The C&O Canal National Historic Park is considering charging user fees for people that use the towpath and other facilities. Right now they are asking for the public's opinion and comments on how best to implement this plan. I encourage everyone to support the proposal of user fees for the park. Our park is seriously underfunded and the user fees could go a long way to help maintain the valuable and historic structures along the canal. As an aside, wouldn't it be funny if you had to pay a user fee to cross the park to get to the Island? That would be a win/win, either the park makes lots of money or the caretaker has fewer visitors to pull across the river!

Thursday, January 22, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 36

I'm happy to report that the eagles have been spotted in the nest and seem to be on schedule for yet another successful breeding season. We were especially worried that they might not return this year since their nest was so damaged last year. What a joy it is to know that they have decided to come back and nest for the thirteenth year in a row.

I have to take back some of the nice things I said about the new towpath surface. Right now the towpath is thick mud, and this new, light-colored slim seems to be getting on everything.

There are still some remnants of ice around the Island but for the most part the river is clear.

Sunday, January 25, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.3 Water Temperature: 36

I gave the clubhouse floors their annual linseed oil treatment. Back in the eighties when the floor was installed, the method to treat the floors was to apply used motor oil. The method was unorthodox, but it was certainly economical and there was also the theory that the old oil would help to keep the termites away. What the old-timers may not have realized was that the fumes from the engine oil were probably carcinogenic. The linseed oil that I use now gives the floors a nice sheen and provides some protection from wear and tear, but I would really like to see the floors of the clubhouse refinished in the proper way. A properly sanded and polyurethaned floor looks better, is better protected, and is infinitely easier to maintain.

Wednesday, January 28, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.3 Water Temperature: 36

I had a bit of trouble getting home in the icy cold the other night. First, it was the ice on the road that was tricky. Then, the walk down the ice-covered trail to the ferry landing was quite challenging as well. Little did I know that my challenges were just beginning.

The first problem I encountered was that the padlock on the ferry was frozen shut and it would not open. I spent a few minutes warming it up and thankfully the stupid thing popped open. I then had to coax the carabiner that was clipped to the ferry rope to open despite being covered in ice. I thought then that I was home free, but what I did not count on was that the pulleys connected to the ferry would not move on the

ice covered cable. I don't remember ever having this problem before but the ferry would not go. I had to back track a few times and do some tugging on the chains but after a bunch of cursing and pulling I managed to get the ferry over to the Island.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

Recommendation for Honorary Membership for George and Marcia Loeb

The Loeb's have been club members for 53 years. At their request the club leadership is proposing them for Honorary Membership at the February meeting of the club. At age 83 and 81, they are infirm and not able to easily access the Island. George Loeb has served a number of years as President and as Captain. Below are excerpts from Marcia's note about their club experiences.

"George and I also revived the Labor Day Regatta and designed the pre-race land games as well as the river races. These are still being used by the present Regatta organizers. Marcia was the grounds chair for a year and planted a small bamboo tree at the front of the island, for which she was roundly criticized. For the last 8 years of our active membership we were joint entertainment and general grill managers for various club activities. We also participated in most work fests. Our two sons liked to be stand-in caretaker when the regular caretaker went on vacation, and did this many times in addition to being just Saturday caretaker before leaving home to attend universities."

"We spent many happy days at Sycamore Island with family and guests, just canoeing, swimming, picnicking or sailing our sail canoe (which we recently sold to Joe). We regret that we are getting infirm and not able to participate in Sycamore's pleasures as we did in the past. But we remember the refrain. . . getting old is not for sissies. And we have our wonderful memories."

JOHN NOBLE
Membership Secretary

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL



To volunteer as a substitute caretaker, please email your choice of day and shift to Jody Benjamin, benjafamily@gmail.com.


Saturday Relief Caretakers February / March 2015				
FEBRUARY	11 A.M.–DUSK	MARCH	10 A.M.–2 P.M.	2 P.M.–DUSK
FEBRUARY 7	David and Sharon Gustafson	MARCH 7	Meredith Griggs	Mary Ann Stein
FEBRUARY 14	Meredith Griggs	MARCH 14	Kevin Haley	Please Volunteer
FEBRUARY 21	Vicki Judson	MARCH 21	Please Volunteer	Please Volunteer
FEBRUARY 28	Joe Kildea	MARCH 28	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 March issue is February 27.



Masthead photo by Joe Hage

Large Parties Scheduled



Sunday, February 21, Paul E. Hagen, winter bird walk, 7:30–11 a.m.