



The Sycamore Islander

MARCH 2015 | VOLUME 94 NUMBER 3

Minutes for the February 11th Meeting

Attendees: Richard Bertaut, Jody Benjamin, Star Mitchell, Meredith Griggs, Jeff Komarow, Jane Winer, Renee Butler, John Butler, Dave Winer, Marianne Ross, Jim Drew, Karen Possner, John Noble, Tryon Wells, Vicky Judson, Sherry Fizdale, Drew Walsh, Ned Goddard, and Ann Marie Cunningham.

Call to Order and Minutes: The meeting was called to order by President Wells at the home of our gracious hosts Vicky Judson and Michael Esch. The minutes of the January meeting were approved after being amended to say that John Noble projects that 10 members will move to senior membership, which allows 10 waitlisters to join.

Membership: This year the dues were due on February 15, rather than March 31, as in the past. Tryon Wells sent an email to the approximately 50 members with dues outstanding. There will be follow-up calls to prevent members from overlooking the due date. Vicky related how it is important that your email address be current so that they can contact you so that you don't lose your membership.

John Noble nominated John and Ann Marie Cunningham, Patricia Hartge and Alan Strasser, Lisa and Christopher Kliefoth, Wayne and Susan Limberg, John and Susanna Membrino, Patricia and Richard Roth, Jack and Brenda Sanders, Richard and Carol Schleicher, and Peter Winkler and Barbara Kraft for senior membership.

John also nominated George and Marcia Loeb for Honorary Membership. They had resigned after 53 years of membership because they are unable to participate in club activities due to age and health. George and Marcia organized the Labor Day Regatta for many years and devised games and races that are still being used. They supervised the entertainment committee and manned the grill at many events over eight years. The nomination passed unanimously.

Tryon Wells began a discussion about changing the rules concerning eligibility for honorary and senior membership. Currently, to be an honorary member, one must resign from the club and then be nominated in writing by a current member, and have been a member for 25 years or more, or have performed outstanding or unusual service to the club. To be a senior member, one must have been a member for 20 years or more, and apply in writing to the Membership

Secretary. An exception is for caretakers who have served long and well. Tryon is considering lengthening the time to be eligible for senior membership and honorary membership.

Captain's Report: Drew Walsh is currently working on reviewing, planning, and designing spring projects that fit within the budget. Tove Elfstrom is going to rebuild the canoe dock. One under consideration is to declutter the screened porch, and to build benches with backrests that flip so that you can look into or out of the porch.

Drew also requested approval to host a large party of more than 35 persons on March 21, which was approved.

The spring workday will be held on April 12th with the 19th as the rain date. The Flower Walk will be May 4th.

Drew also thanked Jody Benjamin for the article in last month's *Islander* and her work recruiting substitute caretakers for Saturdays—Joe's day off—and his vacations during the year. Jody has also built a list of Islanders who have volunteered to lend a hand on small ad hoc projects around the Island, as the need may arise throughout the year.

Relief Caretakers Report: Jody Benjamin thanked the caretakers who volunteered during the last month: Meredith Griggs, Penelope Mitchell, Wayne Limberg, and David and Sharon Gustafson. She particularly wanted to recognize Meredith and Penelope who have been regularly volunteering each month.

Treasurers Report: Ned Goddard has completed all of the federal and state filings that are required at this time for Employee Insurance, payroll and Sycamore Notes. The club's 2014 Federal Tax Filing will be completed in April for the May deadline. He also reported that the county tax refund due to the club as a result of the solid waste assessment appeal is still outstanding. Due to a database irregularity on paying interest, rather than collecting it, he will continue to work with County Finance Director to resolve and get the refund. Ned commended Lisa Kleifoth for the admirable and honorable work she does at this time of year to collect and deposit the dues payments. Lisa reports that there are 50 member families who have not yet paid their dues, which is much better than at this point in previous years. This year's earlier deadline so far appears to benefit the club to bring in revenue more quickly, and enables new members to join earlier in the year.

New Business: The Downriver Race will be held on May 16 and ends at Sycamore Island. A volunteer is needed to staff and coordinate the safety boat volunteers who primary responsibility is to ensure that the racers stop at Sycamore Island rather than paddling past it. Volunteers receive a T-shirt and lunch provided by the Canoe Cruisers Association. Jim will submit an article to *The Islander* requesting volunteers. Vicky Judson can provide pictures and Star Mitchell will write an article after the race.

Sherry Fizdale reported that She, David Winer, Marianne Ross, and Tryon Wells attended a presentation by the C&O Park Superintendent about the proposal to raise entrance fees. While initially opposed to the proposal, she was swayed by the reasonableness of it, and the dire financial straits the park is in. The budget has been cut repeatedly over the years, so there is fewer staff and less funding for maintenance. She explained the the proposed fees were similar to those charged at parks nationwide and that they would only be charged at the current parking lots plus at Fletcher's. Only a portion of the fees would go directly to the C&O Park. The rest would go to the Park Service where all parks could compete for the funds. A few days later, she heard that the proposal has been shelved.

Star Mitchell was thanked for the wonderful memories she shared of John Lentz, who we will miss greatly.

We all appreciated the generous spread of refreshments that Vicky provided for us. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-Recording Secretary

Volunteers Needed For Safety Boats

The 2015 Downriver Race sponsored by the Canoe Cruisers Association is May 16th this year. Sycamore Islanders have a long history of participating in this race—both as racers and in helping on race day. In addition to other tasks (time keepers, logistics, etc.), every year four or five Islanders volunteer to be safety boaters.

Being a safety boater requires paddling, solo or with a partner, a few hundred yards up from Sycamore Island with the other Sycamore safety boaters. We then spread out across the river to welcome racers as they emerge

into our part of the river. The key task is to make sure all racers move towards the Maryland side so they are headed towards the finish line—which is the ferry pull rope—and not towards the dam below the Island.

Safety boaters meet and coordinate on the Island at around 10:00. Safety vests will be provided. We put our canoes in the water at about 10:30. The last racers usually finish shortly after noon. All safety boaters then head back to the Island to receive a commemorative T-shirt and join with the racers and other volunteers to enjoy a fine lunch provided.

Being a safety boater helps make a successful and safe downriver race. It is also a wonderful morning on the water early in the season. To volunteer or with questions please call Star Mitchell at 301.530.3252 or email her: starmitchell@verizon.net.

JIM DREW



JOHN NOBLE

A River Ice Fantasy

When continued 32 degrees-and-below weather dominated our area, the Potomac River froze at Sycamore Island. We easily walked to the Island on Saturday, February 21st, and I schemed to walk to Virginia. For safety, I would create a canoe sled by lashing 2 x 4s to the thwarts of two canoes and tow my sled, walking between them. My wife asked “Why?” I said, “Because this is a once-in-a-decade opportunity to walk across the frozen Potomac to Virginia.” Earlier, I had asked Joe. He said “too risky, good luck. I think I will go skiing instead.” Well, Joe’s assessment and my wife’s opposition have prevailed so far. However, there will be another big freeze and I am redesigning my canoe sled and recruiting a team of adventurers.

JOHN NOBLE



JIM THRESHER

John Lentz paddling on the Potomac.

Memories of John Lentz

We are terribly saddened to learn that John Lentz, one of CCA’s longest senior members passed away January 16. John joined the CCA in 1962, 53 years ago! John was most famous for his 21 Northern Canadian and two Siberian canoe expeditions that spanned over six decades. John was also an active member of the Explorers Club since 1963 where he was a recognized as one of the “contemporary pioneers of wilderness canoeing.” His river trips include perhaps the first full descents of the Kazan, Caniapiscaw, Bailie, and Dubawnt River, as well as the first complete recorded descent of the Back River since the 1850’s.

Many CCA members joined him on his explorations including Ed Gertler, Joe Lederle, Wick Walker, Mark Rubin, and Gordon Bare. In 2013, he wrote a wonderful summary of his adventures, *Tales from the Paddle*. If it’s any solace to his wife Judy and sons Michael and Christopher, the wilderness is a smaller place without him.

Back in 1963, John and I had our own misadventures. Paddling tandem in my brand new 17-foot aluminum Grumman (weighing 75 pounds), we entered what is now Dimples Rapid on the lower Youghiogheny River in Pennsylvania, deaf to the appeals of our trip leaders to scout. We both made that epic swim from the rock to below the surfing hole, with John perched on the inverted Grumman. Next day we switched ends, and successfully tackled the Cheat Canyon. Needless to say, my boat had lost that shining and scratchless exterior and for a brief while the rapid was known as “Barb’s Booboo.”

BARBARA BROWN

Notes from the Island

Monday, February 9, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 36

Beautiful weather yesterday, especially for February! We got close to sixty degrees but still no one visited the Island all day?! I should have stayed out in WV and skied at White Grass all day.

Well, we had no people visitors but the winter water-fowl were here in force. We had ring-necked ducks, common mergansers, lesser scaups, and many gulls, all very close to the Island. We also saw an eagle, and the word is that they are on the nest. I got a call from my fellow eagle-watcher up the hill; he has a much better vantage point than we do down here and he says that the eagles are sitting on eggs, and in the same nest as last year. There was some concern that the eagles would not return to the nest they used last year because one of its supporting branches broke off.

It was warm yesterday but it looks like there is a chance that the river will freeze again later this week. I guess winter isn't over just yet.

Saturday, February 14, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 32

I thought for sure that the river would freeze last night. I was so sure that I even went out at midnight to break up the thin layer of ice that had formed, just to minimize the chopping that I thought I was going to have to

do. It made me think of old caretaker, Frank Davis, who used to chop the ice every hour to keep the channel open. Of course, I told the relief caretaker to stay home; I was that sure.

But this morning at six a.m. (I set the alarm so I would get up before the ice got too thick), I looked out to see that the river was flowing free, with only a little ice formed around the banks. I guess the wind shifted over night and brought some warmer air. So the ferry is running today after all. There is no relief caretaker but no worries. Mary and I have been here all day and no one has rung the bell.

Tonight, however, is going to be a different story. With lows expected to be around three degrees, ice is sure to form on the river. My plan is to leave the ferry on the Island and depart via canoe. That way, the ferry will be safely stored away and I'll be safely off Island.

Wednesday, February 18, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 32

I was able to canoe-sled back to the Island on Monday before the snow started to fly. The river was frozen solid so it was no problem.

The problem was trying to get off the Island on Tuesday after four inches of snow fell on the frozen river. There is no canoe-sledding when the snow is that deep. The snow acts like a brake pad against the canoe, and there is no gliding.

The good news was that it had been so cold that the

 **NEW DATE**

Sycamore Island Annual Winter Bird Walk

SATURDAY MARCH 14, 2015

A frozen Potomac River made the Island inaccessible for people and inhospitable for birds in February so we have rescheduled the Sycamore Island Annual Winter Bird Walk to Saturday, March 14, 2015. The day will begin with coffee and bagels at the clubhouse starting at 7:30 a.m., followed by a bird walk from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. We will compare notes about the day's sightings around the wood stove over coffee following the walk.

Please rsvp to Paul Hagen at phagen@bdlaw.com. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather. We hope to see you there!



JOE HAGE

river ice was now 2–4 inches thick and strong enough to walk on. I wasn't, however, eager to stroll across the river without protection. Falling through the ice would be a really dumb way to die.

I wanted to use the canoe for safety, so I needed to shovel a path across the river and through the snow. I put on my climbing harness and clipped myself to the ferry rope, and with the canoe very close by, I started pushing the snow out of the way. It was slow and stressful work by I'm sure it was worth the trouble. Now I can cross the river in the canoe, confident that I'm safe. The cold is supposed to be with us for a while, so simply walking across the river may soon be an option for some. I guess I'd better start locking my front door.

There was a water main break at the top of the hill on Walhonding yesterday. The muddy water was cascading into the canal at an alarming rate and the snow covered ice was soon muddy brown. The rising waters forced a group of ice skaters to quit their hockey game

and make a hasty exit. We hope all the water refreezes into a nice, smooth, ice-skating surface

Thursday, February 19, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 32
Ice, Ice, Baby!

It's pretty quiet down here. All of the resident geese had to go find open water somewhere. Likewise, there are no wintering waterfowl within miles. Some song birds are here and they are ravenously emptying the bird feeders. The fox visited the Island on Tuesday night but I think even a hungry fox may stay indoors today.

My floors are freezing. Not literally but they are very cold. I put a thermometer on the floor under my bed and it read 50 degrees, while the thermostat, at eye level, was 68 degrees. BRRRR.

The Island has lost its island-ness and it is no longer surrounded by water. It is now just part of a great, big, chunk of ice. I put a lock on the shed, so nobody gets any ideas.



JANE WINNER



SEAN ROSE

Friday, February 20, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 32

This is a special day. 24 years ago I became a father.

If you haven't figured it out already, the bird walk that was scheduled for tomorrow has been postponed. Hopefully, the river ice will be gone by then, but I'm afraid we may have to postpone again.

Monday, February 23, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 32

I've never witnessed this before, but I guess it makes sense when you think about it. I was just so surprised when I opened the refrigerator in the clubhouse kitchen and realized that everything inside of it was frozen solid. I suppose that record-setting low temperatures will do that.

Right now the river surface is solid ice but on top of that ice are huge puddles of standing water and slush. The ice around the Island must be about eight inches thick (I drilled a test hole) but the white snow that laid on top has melted, and now the river is mostly the color of grey slush.

I realize that the river ice must be rather strong, considering that it's holding up thousands of pounds of water right now, but I'm afraid there may be some thin spots near the mainland. The sun and the current are

more powerful over there and I really don't want to risk walking around over there. Especially since to get there, I would have to walk through a river-wide, six-inch-deep, puddle of melted snow.

Make sure you look for me in the new *Bethesda Magazine*. There is an ad for the Bethesda Film Festival, featuring *Towpath Joe*, the documentary. Also, check this link for the world premier showing of the new film, <https://www.dcenvironmentalfilmfest.org/film/towpath-joe>

Thursday, February 26, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 32

This weather reminds me of that Metallica song, *Trapped Under Ice*. "What is this I've been stricken by fate, no release from my cryonic state. . . Trapped under ice!"

Luckily, I'm not trapped under the ice, just completely surrounded by it. The most difficult part is walking on that ice-covered towpath and the trail up the hill. Very slippery.

Thankfully, this month is almost over and we can start to look forward to Spring.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker



Spring Wildflower Walk

John Parrish and RG Steinman will again lead this Spring's Sycamore Island wildflower walk on Saturday, April 4th, from 10:00 to 2:00. RAIN or SHINE! Bring a lunch or snack, water, and dress for the weather. Meet at 10:00 at the Mac Arthur Blvd. parking lot (across from the Sycamore Store).

We will explore our own Sycamore Island. Weather and conditions permitting, we will take the canoes out and also explore Ruppert Island, which is sure to harbor some surprises.

We hope to encounter a variety of Spring Wildflowers such as Spring Beauty, Toothworts, Dutchman's Breeches, Trout Lily, BlueBells, Trilliums, Golden Ragwort, and others. Given the wintry weather, no telling what else we might see in bloom.

Hot chocolate in the clubhouse will await the intrepid wildflower walkers.

Questions: Call 301-565-2025 or e-mail lifeonurth@gmail.com

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 March/April 2015					
MARCH	10 A.M.–2 P.M.	2 P.M.–DUSK	APRIL	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
MARCH 7	Meredith Griggs	Mary Ann Stein	APRIL 4	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
MARCH 14	Kevin Haley	David Lyles	APRIL 11	Lauren Bauer	Please volunteer!
MARCH 21	Penny Mitchell	Please volunteer!	APRIL 18	Meredith Griggs	Barry Lynn and Anya Schoolman
MARCH 28	Story and Josiah Jones	Jonathan Rose	APRIL 25	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 April issue is March 27.

Wow!

8 members didn't pay their dues this year, which opens up many slots for persons on the waiting list this year. A large incoming class of freshmen. Not sure if you paid your dues this year? Check your records before you lose your membership!