

The Sycamore Islander

MAY 2015 | VOLUME 94 NUMBER 5



Minutes for the April 8th Meeting

Attendees: Barr Weiner, Bill Marmon, Jim Drew, Chris Stern, Marianne Ross, John Noble, Tryon Wells, Joe Kildea, Drew Walsh, Fred Pinkney, Richard Bertaut, Joe Hage, Dave Winer, and Ann Marie Cunningham

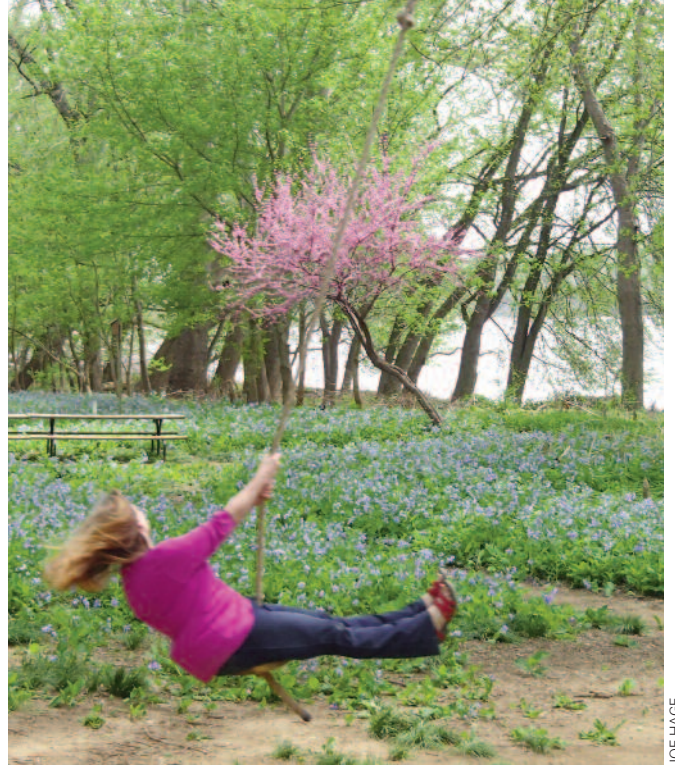
Call to Order and Minutes: The meeting was called to order by President Tryon Wells on the Island. The minutes of the March meeting were approved after being amended to show that Ned Goddard reported that the club received a tax refund (rather than credit) for the solid waste charge, and corrected the names of two new members—Barr Weiner and Joe Kildea.

Captain's Report: As members were gathering for the meeting, Drew Walsh and a crew of volunteers—Chris Stern, David Holdridge, Fred Pinkney, David Winer, Joe Kildea, and Joe Hage carried lumber onto the Island. The following day, the new canoe dock was delivered, with assistance from Steve Newman, John Cunningham, Stan Wiggins, Richard Bertaut, Rodolfo Castro, Jody Benjamin, and Joe Hage. At the workfest on Sunday, April 12th, the lumber will be used to resurface some of the docks, and the new canoe dock will be assembled and launched with far more ease than previous ones. The new dock will be so much lighter and have a longer life span as it is made from a new composite material. If time permits, the dock that washed ashore will be repaired.

Membership: John Noble introduced Barr Weiner, Joe Kildea, and Chris Stern who were attending their first meeting as new members. He then nominated and the members present unanimously accepted Terry Topaz and Melanie Clark and Rachel Moshman and Zach Mason into membership.

John presented a list of organizations that receive a print edition of *The Islander* each month, which was pared to those that were felt to be important for historical or community purposes, such as the Washington Historical Society and the Glen Echo Fire Department.

Relief Caretakers Report: Jody Benjamin reported via email that due to high water, from February to mid-March, only Meredith Griggs actually served as caretaker, but we are very grateful to the willingness of volunteers Vicky Judson, Joe Kildea, May Ann Stern, Meredith Griggs (twice in one month!), Kevin Haley,



JOE HAGE

and David Lyles. Once the ferry went back into service, Story and Josiah Jones, Jonathan Rose, and David Holdridge served, and we thank them for their efforts.

Caretaker's Report: Joe Hage reported that we may need a new grill and the HVAC system needs service.

Old Business: The Flower walk was held on Saturday, April 4th, on Rupperts Island. Paddling in the wind and through the whitecaps was a bit of a challenge, but the reward of finding the emerging spring ephemerals in the near pristine environment on Rupperts was amazing.

New Business: Dave Winer presented the design for the new Sycamore Island mugs. Dave eloquently described how the inward curve is especially advantageous in that it prevents one from burning lips when drinking hot coffee in bed. Rodolfo Castro donated his graphic design skills in the creation of the mug. The mugs will be available for less than \$10 at club events.

There was some discussion about creating patches, stickers, or other merchandise. Joe Kildea will provide a merchandising report that shows what types of merchandise are most popular.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-recording Secretary

Passionate about the Park: C&O Canal
Past and Present
Guest Speaker at May 13th Meeting

In a talk about the C&O Canal National Historical Park and the C&O Canal Trust, Judith Welles, a Canal Trust Board member and local history author, will provide historic highlights and photographs of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, including the canal's role in the Civil War. She will describe current-day challenges facing the C&O Canal National Historical Park in the wake of budget cuts and the recent failed park fee proposal and activities of the C&O Canal Trust, the official non-profit partner of the national park. The Canal Trust works to raise funds to preserve the Park for future generations and to broaden support through programs that highlight the Park's historical, natural and cultural heritage and recreational opportunities.

Judith will speak from 7:00 to 8:00 before our regular meeting. We hope many members will turn out to learn more about the current state of the Canal we love.

MEREDITH GRIGGS



FOR SALE • WEE LASSIE

The original Wee Lassie was a single-person canoe used by William West Durant (1850–1934) on Raquette Lake in the Adirondacks. The original was built in 1883 by J. Henry Rushton (1843–1906) in his boatbuilder's shop in Canton, New York. The wooden model offered for sale here was hand-crafted by P. Mahla of northern Virginia and is three years old. It has been paddled in the Adirondacks and no where else. It is in nice shape and sound. Specs: 38 pounds, length 11.75' and 30" across the beam. Comes with a seat cushion. \$500, cash-only, no returns, sold as is. Contact Carol Beehler, cbeehler@comcast.net

Canal by Canoe Returns!

Cumberland MD to Williamsport MD

May 11-24, 2015

Follow the adventures of Joe Hage and Mary Kearney as they explore and report on the "towpath less traveled" - the upper half of the C&O Canal - by canoe from the Potomac River!



<http://canalbycanoe.com>

<http://facebook.com/canalbycanoe>



*A benefit for the C&O Canal Trust.
Love the Canal? Support the Trust!*

Wildflower Adventure

One normally expects a wildflower walk to be a sedate affair. Not this one. Our goal was to explore Rupperts, the club's other island, in hopes of discovering unusual wildflowers. We essentially leave this island to nature, and relatively few of us actually set foot on it, much less perform a methodical walk over the entire acreage.

The first complication was dealing with the ferry since there was no guest caretaker that Saturday—we had to arrange with a group of members who were birding on the Island to leave the ferry at its canal-side landing where we could pick it up by canoe on our return from Rupperts. The next problem foreshadowed this day of difficulties. There were no docks this early in the season, leaving us to launch canoes from an exceedingly soft, muddy bank. Yuk. And then the first confrontation: the northwest wind was exceptionally strong, blowing straight against our course. It repeatedly gusted our canoes off course, forcing desperate sweep strokes to get back on course, while struggling mightily just to make headway. We were greatly relieved to find a beaching spot in quiet conditions on the lee shore. This time we welcomed a muddy bank!

This early in the season, following an unusually cold winter, there were no brushy-viney impediments to walking from the lush growth that would soon appear. We found this also afforded excellent visibility across the interior sweep of the island. Of course the situation also applied to our quarry—wildflowers. Searching about, we found several varieties of early bloomers,



DAVID WINER



Dutchman's Breeches
Rupperts Island
4Apr15

DAVID WINER

including Bluebells, Trillium, Dutchman's Breeches, and Yellow Trout Lily. We also enjoyed some delicious Ramps.

While our illustrious naturalist leaders, John Parrish and R.G. Steinman, discovered plants and flowers and pointed out interesting characteristics, they also related early history of Sycamore and Rupperts Islands. John had researched early U.S. Geologic Survey maps and found that in 1882 Rupperts was known as Larkspur Island and Sycamore was named Box Elder Island.

About fifty paces toward the center of Rupperts we discovered an upright sapling circled with bright shiny red tape—a marker for some mysterious purpose. And then we spotted more of these red tape markers leading upstream along mid-island. This was puzzling, and indicating trespass, for these blazes were not part of a club project. We also discovered a distinct shoe print that must have been made after the previous day's heavy rain. Creepy. In consensus, we removed the offending red markers. Other signs of trespass were many cut saplings that bore straight-across saw marks, unlike those made by beavers, although plenty of other downed saplings had been gnawed across.

All this while, we pursued wild flowers as we worked our way to the upstream end of the island. Now approaching more open territory, that blustery wind became prominent once more. Those blasts, and rocks, boulders, mud, and loose sand had us picking our way cautiously to remain upright. One of us was actually knocked down by a gust of wind while balancing among underfoot obstacles!

We encountered a strange geological item at the upstream tip. A jagged outcrop of glistening white quartz



Trout Lily
Rupperts Island
4Apr15

about the size of a bathtub stands there completely out of place. It's distinctly apart from the usual river-bottom rocks and cobbles in this part of the Potomac. More mystery, this time not associated with man.

Thoughts of promised hot cocoa back at the clubhouse spurred us on as we boarded the canoes to return. And now the wind was at our backs for a coast to Sycamore Island. Later, sitting on the deck, we noted how the wind churned the river with whitecaps and avenues of spindrift. How cozy to be above it rather than in it.

DAVID WINER

Notes from the Island

Monday, April 6, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 55

Today is opening day for baseball and it is such a nice day that I think we should call it opening day for Spring on the Island too!

The Island is really starting to turn green now and all the wildflowers are on the verge of opening. The Wildflower Walk was this past Saturday but sadly a lot of the flowers are not yet blooming. I guess the harsh and extended winter has put the flowers behind schedule a bit.

The Workfest is on Sunday and it looks like we are getting a new dock delivered sometime this week as well. There are also plans to gut the screen porch, so if you want to keep the futon or anything else in there, you better speak up at the club meeting this week.

Apparently, the relief caretaker had trouble operat-



White Bluebell
Rupperts Island
4Apr15

ing the padlock on Saturday. Please remember to push in and pull out when unlocking the padlock.

Goose update, so far only one nest started on the Island. There are a couple other pairs of geese around so I expect the number of nests to go up. I have a very busy Phoebe nesting just outside my living room window too.

Mary and I went hiking at Soldiers Delight on Saturday. It's a rare grassland eco-system just northwest of Baltimore, near Liberty Reservoir. It's known as a serpentine barren because the oceanic bedrock is at the surface and nothing can grow there but grasses and stunted oak trees. It's an unusual eco-system that contains some very rare plants that aren't normally found in Maryland. Check it out!

Thursday, April 9, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.9 Water Temperature: 55

I had to replace one of the steps at the mainland landing. I guess somebody needs to lose some weight, how do you break a 2 x 12 board?

I went up and cleaned the parking lot on MacArthur Boulevard. It was very grungy and I shoveled up all of the decomposing leaves and sand. It's important to keep it clean so that the rain drains off and doesn't pool up.

While I was up there I raked the big, ankle-breaking rocks from the trail between the lot and the trestle.

Monday, April 13, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.9 Water Temperature: 58

We had another very successful Workfest yesterday. It was an ambitious list of chores but thanks to Captain



Drew and an army of volunteers we got most of them done. Of course the swim dock and the swim float still need to be launched.

The Workfest started way back on Wednesday when \$1,000 worth of lumber was delivered, and then on Thursday The new \$7,000 dock was delivered and hauled over to the Island.

So far the new dock is getting good reviews and so far the geese don't seem too attracted to it. Which is good because the irregular surface of the new dock looks hard to clean.

There are now four goose nests on the Island. One nest is directly below the tree house so we were not able to work on that project. I sense a change in the geese nesting season. Years ago there would be over a dozen goose nests on the Island, with some geese nesting right on the trail or on top of the canoe shed. I think our resident geese are starting to show their age.

Wednesday, April 22, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 7.3 Water Temperature: 58

Happy Earth Day! The bluebells are blooming!

I also planted some tulip bulbs this year and their bright red and orange colors are a nice contrast to the bluebells.

It's a little surprising but the river shot up and the ferry had to close. I guess there was a lot of rain in the watershed earlier this week.

It's not going to be a big flood but I did have to jump into action and secure all the things that we just brought out at the workfest. I had to tie off the docks that didn't get launched and I'm watching to see how the new dock fares in the high water.

It looks like the new dock has a design flaw. The dock

itself is great but the ramp to get to the dock does not have any flotation. The dock went up with the flood, but the ramp did not, forcing the ramp into a vertical position. not good. I pulled the ramp onto high ground but we'll have to address this before we get any big floods.

I watched as a beaver swam across the river with a bunch of bluebells in it's mouth. It was funny to see this bouquet traveling through the water, made me think of a child bringing flowers home to her mother.

Wednesday, April 29, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 56

Make sure that you all come early to the meeting on Wednesday, May 13th. We will have a guest speaker here to talk about the great work of the C&O Canal Trust. Judy Welles, resident of Bethesda and author of *The History of Cabin John*, will be presenting a comprehensive look at the canal history and the natural history of the C&O Canal National Historic Park.

I won't be at the May meeting but I'm so glad that Judy is coming to talk about the Trust.

Coincidentally, Mary and I will be gone that night, doing our second annual Canal By Canoe, a canoe trip to support the Canal Trust. Last year we paddled for two weeks, from Cumberland, Maryland all the way down to Great Falls, as a way to bring attention to this great park, right next to the Potomac River!

This year we'll start in Cumberland again but we will end our trip just 85 miles downstream, at Williamsport. It's a shorter distance but we plan to be out there for two weeks just the same. Please follow our adventure at canalbycanoe.com and on facebook.

Also, be sure to come to the Island on Saturday, May



16th, to cheer on the canoe racers! The 60th annual Down River Race will be here from 9–3!

I found these river stats and thought that they might be helpful for our paddlers:

3.5 feet: The river reaches caution level for boaters, as defined by the State of Maryland. Fast moving water and changing currents will be experienced.

4.5 feet: The river reaches danger level for boaters, as defined by the State of Maryland. Conditions for boating will be extremely hazardous.

5 feet: Portions of the Potomac Heritage Trail begin to flood.

5.5 feet: Water begins to affect portions of the Billy Goat Trail between Great Falls and Carderock. These trails may be closed.

7 feet: Upper portions of the River Trail at Great Falls National Park begin to flood and will be closed.

Wednesday, April 30, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.4 Water Temperature: 56

Mary and I went up and painted lines in the parking lot last night. This is not the first time of course. It was over five years ago that Tryon and I first rented a traffic-line sprayer and plotted out the parking spots.

I haven't seen them yet but I've heard both the Northern Parula and the Prothonotary Warblers.

Two of the four goose nests are empty but so far no signs of goslings. Could be bad news.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker



RENEE DUNHAM



RENEE DUNHAM



ELIZABETH THOMAS

Top: 10-year-old Clea Bergsman tirelessly managed the ferry most of the day! She ran at the bell to take charge, was skilled at positioning herself at the fore, correcting for the river current, manipulating the caribeaners and the hook, and instructing others who attempted to help.

Above: One of the tasks at last Sunday's work fest was to remove a large tree trunk that floated downstream and became lodged near the site of the about-to-be-installed new canoe dock. Fearing that it could break free and damage the new dock, the decision was made to return the log to the river.

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Saturday Relief Caretakers **May/June 2015** To volunteer for a shift, please contact Jody Benjamin, benjafamily@gmail.com.

MAY	9 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK	JUNE	9 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
MAY 2	Richard and Allison Burns	John Cunningham	JUNE 6	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
MAY 9	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!	JUNE 13	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
MAY 16	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!	JUNE 20	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
MAY 23	Lynda and Gary Slayen	Please volunteer!	JUNE 27	Please volunteer!	Vicki Judson
MAY 30	Sue and Greg Super	Avi Garbow (Anderson)			

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 June issue is May 30.

Masthead photo of Bluebells on Sycamore Island by Joe Hage

Large Parties Scheduled



May 9, Ann Marie Cunningham, 2–8 p.m., 22 guests
May 25, Joe Hage, 4–9 p.m., 25 guests