



The Sycamore Islander

JANUARY 2016 | VOLUME 95 NUMBER 1

Minutes for the December 9th Meeting

Attendees: Lynda Slayen, Gary Slayen, Karen B. Possner, Bill Eichbaum, Renee Butler, John Butler, Vicki Judson, Penelope Mitchell, Cora Shaw, Bernard Neuthey, Meredith Griggs, Jody Benjamin, David Winer, Sandi Komarow, Jeff Komarow, Joe Hage, Star Mithcell, John Membrino, Susanna Membrino, Renee Dunham, Gerry Barton, Jim Drew, Phill Ross, Marianne Ross, William Marmon, Kathy Carroll, Lucky Marmon, Ann Marie Cunningham, Rodolfo Castro, and Lisa Catalone Castro.

President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order just after 8:00 pm at the lovely home of Lynda and Gary Slayen.

Minutes: The November Minutes were unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report: Ned Goddard reported that the operating budget for 2015 was \$89,409. The club funded numerous projects including the new canoe float, a new canoe carrier, wireless router and network, clubhouse painting, well, septic, lighting, and general facilities maintenance. In the last months of the year, unexpected expenditures arose, including earlier payments to the IRS, making it necessary to expend \$5,500 from the reserve. The members thanked Ned for his efforts in securing a \$3,400 refund from the county for waste management.

The budget proposal for 2016 addresses the Cost of Living CPI of just 0.2% and balances it against the usual pressures of maintenance of our facilities, increased tax withholding for our caretaker, health care and casualty insurance. The proposed budget of \$89,655 is "flat" with no increase compared to last year, and does not include a dues increase. The new member

lottery is expected to generate additional income, which may be used for compelling requests for new expenditures or to rebuild the reserve fund.

The final payments will be made to retire the clubhouse renovation debt in 2017, two years earlier than originally planned.

The budget passed unanimously

Nominating Committee Report: The nominating committee reported the slate of officers for 2017. Most of the officers and supervisors have consented to serve for another year. They include:

OFFICERS

President	Tryon Wells
Vice President	Richard Bertaut
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	Vacant

SUPERVISORS

Finance	Ellen Kennedy
Law	Parker Moore
Clubhouse	Marianne Ross
Grounds	Alice Bullard
Painting/Carpentry	Karl Kosok
Website	Tryon Wells
Entertainment	George & Shelley Malusky
Camping/Parties	Jonathan Zimmerman
Canoeing	Joe Cecil
Swimming	Roger Herst
Relief Caretaker Scheduling	Vacant

The position of Relief Caretaker Scheduler is vacant as Jody Benjamin has retired, but she encouraged all to consider volunteering for the role. She was very appreciative of the many volunteers, but especially to those who volunteered frequently, including Vicky Judson and Meredith Griggs. In the most recent month, the volunteer caretakers were Meg Beuchert, Jones Sherry

Pettie Fizdale, Jody and Bobby Benjamin, Cora Shaw and Bernard Veuthey, Sarah Fraidin, and Stephen Roggie.

The position of Deputy Captain is also vacant as Steve Newman had to resign this fall due to other commitments.

If you are interested in becoming more involved in the life of Sycamore Island, please contact Tryon Wells at tryonwells@verizon.net or 301 576 6339 to volunteer to serve in one of these positions.

Those in attendance expressed gratitude to all who have served the club this year, including those who held office as well as those who just showed up when needed.

The slate of officers was elected by acclamation.

Membership: The membership lottery will be held in 2016. Encourage folks you know who may be interested to get the application from the website and submit it between January 1 and March 31.

New Business: Gerry Barton asked for volunteers to cut wood for the woodstove. Ned Goddard cut some during the workfest, but more is needed to get us through the winter.

The January Meeting of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club will be held at 8:00 p.m. at the home of Madeleine Carter and Alec Graham at 7106 Radcliffe Lane in Glen Echo. All members and club applicants are invited to attend.

Directions: From Glen Echo circle (MacArthur and Goldsboro) head towards the single lane bridge. Take a left on Cornell (the last left before the single lane bridge), then an immediate right on Wellesley. Park on Wellesley. Walk down Radcliffe Lane (parallel to MacArthur just off Wellesley). House is at the end of the lane with a fishpond in front.

The meeting was adjourned to enjoy the gracious hospitality of our hosts, Lynda and Gary Slayen, the colorful artwork, and the savory and sweet goodies that were provided by the members.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-Recording Secretary

Paddling Dragon Run

Want to have a truly unique paddling experience within an easy drive from Washington? How about kayaking through a cypress swamp, past a giant eagle's nest, on the Dragon Run?

Dragon Run meanders for nearly forty miles through remote portions of four eastern Virginia counties on the "Middle Peninsula." Part of the time, it forms the border between King and Queen County and Gloucester County. The area was first settled in the 1600s and descendants of some of the original families still live there.

The Dragon is of great ecological significance. Its brackish water is fed by underground springs, surface runoff, and numerous feeding swamps. It is crossed by several highway bridges, but most access points are reached only by way of nearly a mile trek over rugged back country. As a result, Dragon Run is considered to be Virginia's most pristine blackwater stream. Its bald cypress swamp is rare at this latitude, and is an important habitat for bald eagles, ospreys, and prothonotary warblers. In its lower stretches, the Dragon widens to

form the Piankatank River, a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. This is an important spring spawning ground for shad, herring, and striped bass.

In a study of 232 rivers and streams in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the Nature Conservancy and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation found Dragon Run to rank second in terms of environmental importance. The Conservancy has helped to conserve nearly 9,000 acres in the forests surrounding the Dragon and works closely with private land owners to promote and preserve traditional land uses. Friends of Dragon Run (FODR), a group of local citizens, has purchased some large parcels of land in the swamp to protect its natural beauty.

Every spring, FODR offers paddling trips on the Dragon. The trips are usually over by the end of April; after that, the water level gets too low and streambank vegetation has grown over the main channel. The trips are free, though donations to FODR are encouraged. Boats, paddles, PFDs, and shuttle service are provided. The boats are small solo kayaks; the Dragon is so narrow and twisty that larger boats are simply not possible. I'm a member of FODR and have done the spring paddle several times. I'm a canoeist, not a kayaker, and

8TH ANNUAL WINTER BIRD WALK

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH



Pied-billed Grebe

Please join us for the club's Eighth Annual Sycamore Island Winter Bird Walk scheduled for Saturday, February 20, 2016. Our outing will begin at 8:00 a.m. with bagels and coffee at the clubhouse.

Our plan is 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 resident and migratory songbirds. 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.

In past years, participants have been rewarded with good looks at numerous resident and migratory birds, including: Wood Duck, Ring-neck Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser,

Common Merganser, Horned and Pied-billed grebes, Blue Birds, and

most of our local woodpeckers. Our resident Bald Eagles usually start to nest this time of year just down river in a Sycamore tree that is also easily seen from the Island. If you would like to attend this year's walk, 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.



The put-in



Dragon Run

I'm always a bit wobbly when I start off. But then I get used to it, and everything's fine. This is a flatwater trip; there are no rapids whatsoever, and the big challenge is negotiating the constant turns. It used to be that beaver dams were a problem: FODR would remove them where necessary, but the industrious mammals would rebuild overnight. More recently, members of FODR have built wooden gates in prime beaver areas that keep enough of a channel open (the gates are removed once paddling season is over).

I highly recommend this trip. If you're looking at a



The author with a beaver gate between him and the other two kayakers



Lady slipper

map, the meet-up is in Saluda. The trip takes about half a day all told. No paddling experience is necessary, though children are not permitted. The trips are led and guided by FODR members. You need only bring your lunch and water (lunch is eaten in the boats, because climbing out of a kayak in the middle of a swamp would be very tricky!). Dragon Run is beautiful—calm, peaceful, shaded by huge trees, filled with birdsong and spring flowers. I hope to see you there.

JOHN CUNNINGHAM

Notes from the Island

Monday, December 7, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.1 Water Temperature: 46

The river got real close to five feet on Saturday but it's slowly dropping back to a more reasonable level.

I'm glad I was here when the relief caretakers showed up on Saturday. I haven't had a chance to meet a lot of the waitlisters, so it was fun getting to know Sarah Fraidin and her kids. I'm also glad I was here to show them how to run the ferry in high water.

It's a nice warm day today and the sun is out and the birds are singing. The gold finches are busy at the thistle feeder. We're not sure how much longer they will stay here before they fly south but we'll keep feeding them and hope that they stay all winter.

We had the pleasure of watching a flock of cedar waxwings yesterday. The birds were busy eating the ripe berries from the hackberry tree that grows next to the old metal bridge. The bridge is high up in the canopy, making it perfect for birdwatching. We got so close to the waxwings that we could almost touch them!

Tuesday, December 8, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.1 Water Temperature: 46

I just got this thank-you note from Jeff Kveck of the USGS:

"Hi Joe, Just wanted to thank you again for letting us launch from the Island yesterday. It was a big help to us."

Always happy to help our friends at the USGS. They wanted to do a river survey while the river was at 14000 cfs. They had already done a reading earlier in the summer when the river was only 4000 cfs. Their next target is when the river is around 20000, or 5 feet at the little falls gage.

I asked Pepco to come down this morning and check on a power line that's sagging. The guy seemed reluctant to hike down the hill but he eventually came down to take a look at the problem. He determined that it was not a serious problem and that there was nothing that could be done to tighten the wire at this time. OK, works for me.

Sunday, December 13, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 46

Pretty warm for this time of year but I really don't expect the Island to get over-run with visitors.

Boy Scout Troop 1441 camped here last night. They



JOE HAGE

were hoping to do some winter camping but I don't think they were disappointed about the weather. They came to camp but they also came to do a community service project. The project that I chose for the kids was to clean up our upper and lower parking lots, and they really did a bang-up job. We trimmed the tree branches, bushes and vines, we raked and shoveled the leaves and we picked up all of the beer cans and other trash.

I was really proud of what we got done and I'm sure that the visitors of the club will appreciate having a nice, clean parking lot that is so much more inviting. Thanks Scouts!

I saw another bunny. Maybe it was the same one I saw last week, it's still cool.

I'm happy to report that so far this Fall, there hasn't been the usual Autumn beaver rampage. Historically, this is the time of year when the beaver get busy cutting down our trees to stock-pile food for the winter, let's hope they stay away.

Wednesday, December 16, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 46

All of this warm weather has warmed up the river but it's still too cold to use the club canoes and Kayaks.

The air is warm today but there is a strong wind to contend with. I got hit with a big gust just after dropping Gerry. I could see that a big gust was coming by the way that the river suddenly became wavy and agitated upstream. Then the bell rope went horizontal and then, POW, the power of the gust hit me and the ferry. All I could do was crouch down low and hold on with

all my might while the ferry fish-tailed behind me.

I forgot to mention that waitlister Rodolfo Castro came down on Sunday to stain the swim float and swim dock. We put new plywood on the docks back in the Spring so it was time to put a protective coating on them. We owe him a debt of gratitude for doing a great job putting on the first couple of coats. I hope the stain helps preserve the plywood, I must say that I'm disappointed about how the new plywood is holding up. It seems a few of the new boards are already splitting and coming apart.

Wednesday, December 23, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 48

There is lots of rain predicted but they don't expect any serious flooding. The river may rise above five feet (ferry closes at five feet) on Saturday, but we'll wait and see.

It's been a quiet week. I had one party visit on Sunday but since Gerry left on Saturday last, no one has been around to ring the bell.

I did notice a couple of squirrels coming and going along the over-the-river power line, but that's about it as far as visitors.

I did some work on my mailbox up on MacArthur Blvd. Last year someone plowed their car into the shrubs and mailboxes along the boulevard there. My neighbors talked of redoing the boxes in some kind of fancy combined brick mailbox but since I never heard any more about it, I went ahead and sturdied up my existing box.

The woodpeckers have been busy digging into the wood trim of the work shed. I didn't understand it until I looked and found what they were after, the larvae of the carpenter bees. Every summer, the carpenter bees drill perfect 1/2 inch holes into our wood trim. (usually on a south-facing surface, out of the wind) They burrow into the wood and lay their eggs to be hatched the following year. Somehow the woodpeckers know this and dig into the wood to find the bugs inside. This, of course, is not good as the wood trim gets drilled by bees and then splintered by woodpeckers. The solution? Paint. Bees do not like to chew through paint to get to the wood and without the bees and their eggs, there will be no woodpeckers either. I patched all of the holes and I put a primer coat on the south-facing wood trim of the tool shed. I'll paint it as weather allows.

The woodpeckers were also pecking near one of my

windows and made me realize that we have a spot of rotted window trim that needs replacing. Always something.

Saturday, December 26, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.9 Water Temperature: 48
Sorry folks, but we decided to close the ferry for today. The river is so close to five feet that we decided to play it safe and close the ferry. The good news is that it looks like I will be able to run the ferry again tomorrow.

Merry Christmas!!

Sunday, December 27, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.4 Water Temperature: 54

The ferry is open!

I'm sort of expecting a busy day on the Island since it's supposed to be our last warm day for a while and it might be the only day this week that the ferry will be operating. 5.2 feet predicted tomorrow.

The beaver have claimed their first victims of the year. One victim was the spice bush that was growing right next to the stairs to the clubhouse! Mary and I walked down to the bottom of the Island last night after dark and watched the carefree beaver swimming around and slapping their tails on the water. I counted four.

Monday, December 28, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.9 Water Temperature: 52

Wow, seventy degrees in late December and not one member or waitlister showed up all day yesterday.

Mary and I wanted to make sure that the nice Sunday weather did not go to waste, so we took her tandem canoe out for a spin. We sort of feel like it's our unspoken duty to get out and enjoy the river for all those members that couldn't make it down. The current was a little strong but the high water can be a good thing. When the river reaches this height, about four feet, there is a little surfing wave that forms up by lock seven, near the Maryland shore. It's a tiny wave but perfect for some class II action and it makes for a nice destination. We paddled up, surfed a while and then paddled back against the wind. The whole trip only took forty minutes, but it felt like so much more.

I'm currently reading a book about Daniel Boone and the settling of Kentucky. Apparently, when the settlers first arrived at the banks of the Kentucky river in the 1770s, they found sycamore trees that were thirty-three feet in circumference! That is just incredible! The biggest sycamore tree that I found here on the Island



was only a mere sixteen feet in circumference, and I thought that was big.

Tuesday, December 29, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 50

The river is over five feet and the ferry is closed.

It's unclear right now as to when the river will go down again. It's rare when our gauge is at five feet and rising and the gauge in Paw Paw WV. is also rising. Usually if the river is going up down here, it means that it's going down up there. The old up-down, down-up.

We can't really complain about the river this year though. There have been very few days when the ferry was closed because of high water. We've only had five incidents when the river went above five feet! All year!

Happily, I finished my anti-carpenter bees project and did all caulking and painting on Sunday before the

cold set in. I decided to paint the trim black, looks pretty good.

Thursday, December 31, 2015

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.5 Water Temperature: 50

Happy End of 2015!

It looks like the ferry will be closed until the morning of Sunday, January 3rd. Luckily, I didn't plan any big New Years Eve Party.

And no need for a relief caretaker on Saturday.

Why is it so hard to start a chainsaw? I'm done trying, I'm bringing my electric chainsaw back down here on Sunday. I wasn't able to cut any wood but I did restock the firewood inside. I heard that it's going to get cold.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Happy New Year

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

Saturday Relief Caretakers January/February 2015			
JANUARY	11 A.M.–SUNSET	FEBRUARY	11 A.M.–SUNSET
JANUARY 2	Eric and Amy Aaserud	FEBRUARY 6	Joe and Tammy Belden
JANUARY 9	Mary Ann Stein	FEBRUARY 13	Ned Goddard
JANUARY 16	Stan and Virginia Fowler	FEBRUARY 20	Lisa Hemmer
JANUARY 23	Penelope Mitchell	FEBRUARY 27	Eric Simpson
JANUARY 30	Robert Braunohler		

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 30.