

The Sycamore Islander

MAY 2016 | VOLUME 95 NUMBER 5



Minutes for the April 13th Meeting

Attendees: Bill Marmon, Sherry Fizdale, Sandra Purohit, Geoff Holdridge, Rodolfo Castro, Robin Richter, Tryon Wells, Chris White, Richard Bertaut, Karen Possner, Lenore Ostrowsky, Stan Fowler, Dan Smith, Kathy Carroll, Marianne Ross, Jim Drew, Ann Marie Cunningham, Ned Goddard, Drew Walsh

President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order

Minutes: The April minutes were amended by Sherry Fizdale to say that, in the incident reported last month where adolescents were standing in club canoes without life vests, the water temperature was below 55°, thus creating a very dangerous risk of hypothermia. The minutes were unanimously approved with the amendment.

Membership Report: John Noble had two wonderful events for us. The first was voting into membership seven new families, who applied in 2012. The new members are:

- Peter and Charlotte Dean and their three children Julian, Clara and Jack, who were sponsored and recommended by Kermit Roosevelt, Stan Fowler, and Peter Fuchs
- Nicole Fraser and Harley Feldbaum and their two children Nora and Maddox, who were sponsored and recommended by Andy Malmgren, Gerry Barton, and Bill Marmon
- Sandra and Raj Purohit, who were sponsored and recommended by Alan and Caroline Gelb, Robert Gelb, Linda Greer, and Mike Tilchin
- Gary and Linda Slaven, who were sponsored and recommended by Barbara Matthews, Jody and Bobby Benjamin, Tamara Zemlo and Chris White, and John Butler
- Drew Schaumber, who was sponsored and recommended by Patricia Roth, Lauren Bauer, and Jennifer and Davey Hearn
- Jamie and Daniel Smith and their three children Claire, Benjamin and Sarah, who were sponsored and recommended by Jim Drew, Rachael Moshman, and John Noble
- Clayton and Ellen Teague, who were sponsored and recommended by Geoff Holdridge, Martha Holdridge, and Tryon Wells

The next event was the new member lottery. 134 applicants had applied by the deadline, 38 are younger than 40, and 96 have passed their 40th birthday. Numbered poker chips were drawn, alternating between the two age groups. Each group gets 15 slots and 5 alternate slots in case some do not pay the application fee. A concern was voiced that some applicants had not met their sponsor; instead the sponsor had had a telephone interview with them. The response was that this does not get them admitted to the club; they have time to meet folks who will provide recommendations.

Potomac Watershed Clean-up: Ned Goddard reported that since only one person volunteered in advance, the Clean-up will be done on Sunday, April 17. A man and his son will help clean Ruppert's Island.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Ned Goddard reported that he received word from the IRS that the club's Form 990 needed some revisions, which he has made and submitted. There were no fines or penalties. Ned reported that Lisa Kliefoth will present an update next month on the status of the dues payments. Despite the unbudgeted expense for filling the old well, the finances still appear sound.

Captain's Report: Captain Drew Walsh reported that there are no major projects planned at this time. He thanked Joe Hage and Stan Fowler for the electrical work performed to repair the sconces. The sinkhole that was reported last month actually is an old well that was probably abandoned when the current clubhouse was built. It has been filled, and the appropriate papers will be filed with the county and state to show that the work has been done according to code. Other work that is planned or underway is to replace the windows in the quarters, complete painting the exterior, replace the screen door, repair and rewire the lighting system on the trail (possibly with solar power), and put a bumper and shelf on the canoe dock for kayakers. Rodolfo Castro and Dave Winer have developed a prototype bench with storage space where the back can be switched to either side.

The Island now receives power from Green Energy sources (wind, solar), as well as enrolled in PEPCO's green energy program. Jared Farber's company, Ethical Energy, provides the power as well as subsidizing the cost by providing green energy credits. The thermostats



NED GODDARD

have been replaced and can be remotely controlled by the Caretaker and PEPCO during periods of high usage. The club can opt out of the program if it doesn't meet with our approval.

Archivist's Report: Jerry Barton has given Karen Possner every *Islander* since 1997, as well as other documents. She also noted reports on Island usage over the years and guest notes. She has enjoyed reading them, and selections of articles may appear in *The Islander* in the future.

New Business: Chris White reported that firefighters will come to familiarize themselves with the Island, in case there ever should be an emergency. Drew asked him if they might be able to teach water safety or CPR.

The meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting is Wednesday, May 11th, on the Island at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-recording Secretary

Archivist's Note

As club archivist, I find myself perusing ours and related websites during spare minutes and sometimes come upon interesting tidbits. Often, they put current issues into perspective but, at other times, they simply strike me as interesting enough to warrant sharing.

Regardless of weather, I suspect many of us have spent hours relaxing on our clubhouse deck, enjoying the solitude, the view of the river and the Virginia shore across the way. Turns out that former member John Loehler, our clubhouse architect (and one of the designers of the National Cathedral), did not include a deck when he designed the new clubhouse following the loss of the previous one in the flood of 1936. In fact, it wasn't until 1991 that members seriously considered the idea of adding one to the Virginia side of the building. Those who regularly attend our monthly meetings know that members welcome enthusiastic debate, so won't be surprised to learn that despite having approved the addition of a deck at two separate meetings, the wisdom of the addition was nevertheless debated again at a subsequent meeting. At the December 1991 monthly meeting, several members argued that the proposed deck would "detract from the architectural integrity of the clubhouse building, would probably not be used very much by members, and was not worth the cost." They were reminded of the previous votes to approve and the rest, as they say, is history. I love the deck.

K.B. POSSNER

Thank You

I wanted to thank all those who turned out to the club's Spring Workfest especially those on the waiting list! The extra hands made for easy work. A special thanks to Rodolfo Castro, Steve Newman, and Joe Hage for helping to organize and lead the Workfest!

DREW WALSH
Club Captain

Interested in a Summer Solstice Family Campout?

Years ago, Islanders would come with their families to celebrate the summer solstice with fun on the Island. If one or two people with young children are willing to help, we can hold this event from Saturday afternoon, June 18 to Sunday, morning June 19, 2016.

Ideas for activities include: canoeing or kayaking les-

son; face painting; nature collages; paper bag skits; make an edible (candy) campfire, then gather wood and adults and teens will build a real fire for cooking dinner; make s'mores; sing; and tell stories around the campfire.

After a night sleeping in tents, make your own French toast on buddy burners (cooking right on the bottom of a coffee can made into a chimney).

Vicki Judson, whose kids are grown, is willing to help organize and run the event as long as one or two parents of younger children can pitch in. Fine if you are a waitlist family. If you are interested in helping, please e-mail Vicki at vajudson@gmail.com. If we get one or two volunteer helpers, we will list the event in the *June Islander*. If not, we'll see if we can line up helpers for 2017.

Notes from the Island

Monday, April 4, 2016

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 56

It happens every year but it never disappoints. Every year the wildflowers emerge and the trees fill with leaves, but it is always a spectacular show.

The bluebells and redbuds are wonderful of course, but I'm also enjoying this sudden abundance of bird life! I just spotted my first warbler, a yellow rump, and we heard the phoebe making its distinctive call as well. I lost count of the number of cormorants that flew by last night. They flew by in big "V"s of about twenty birds each, silently cruising upstream. Last Wednesday morning I saw a bird that I've never seen on the Island. In fact I don't think anyone alive today has ever seen this bird on Sycamore Island.

What I saw when I walked out early Wednesday morning was a pair of wild turkeys! They were on the ground, walking near the shore on the far bank. They scattered when they saw me, and one turkey flew upstream towards me at eye-level, right by the the rope swing!

I ran down to get another look but they were gone and I went up the hill to meet the Pepco technician. When we returned to the Island, we saw a turkey on the shore, right where I had seen them before! I haven't seen any turkeys since, but keep your eyes peeled; you might see a turkey on the Island.

The eagle's nest has been active and we believe that the chicks have hatch by now. Sadly I haven't gotten any

reports from my eagle-watching neighbor up the hill. I hope Jack didn't move away. Speaking of nests, the official total on goose nests is three. We found the last nest at the top of the Island near the stranded dock.

Thursday, April 7, 2016

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 56

It's pouring rain right now but the weather story this week is the fierce wind. The wind was so strong that it pushed my canoe right out of the river and onto the shore! The wind also blew the roof off of the tree house and broke one of our trees in half. Looking downstream I noticed that the wind damaged the "dam ahead" sign. The bottom half is gone and it no longer says "get to shore." More vicious wind is predicted on Saturday so we've already decided to close the ferry for that day.

Good news, I ran into Jack, our eagle watcher! He was biking on the canal and gave me the update on the eagles and their chicks. Turns out that there is only one chick this year and it hatched about three weeks ago.

Tuesday, April 19, 2016

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 66

We had a great turn out for the workfest on Sunday. I think there were over 70 people here! Some of those that showed up had just gotten on the waitlist three days before and it was fun meeting all the new people. We got all the docks out, (except for the swim float) and managed to get a lot of cleaning a fixing done as well. Vice president Bertaut even brought down a new hammock!

The baby geese hatched on the morning of the workfest, so we all got to see the tiny puff balls swimming around the Island. Speaking of babies, it turns



JOE HAGE

out that there are now two young eagles in that nest across the river. We also have a pair of chickadees nesting in the bluebird box.

Easterday Well is here today to fill in the abandoned well that I discovered after the last flood. We just carried over 14 wheel barrels of gravel and a ton of concrete. After they seal the well they will cover it with topsoil and you'll never even know it was there. I put a ladder down in the hole yesterday so that I could retrieve some of the old bricks before they got buried forever. I was hoping that the bricks could give us an idea of when that well was dug. I did find out that there was no mortar used to make the well, just bricks stacked on bricks.

I attached my mini dock to the canoe dock and installed the G-bar to make it easier for members to get in and out of their kayaks. Some people were having a lot of trouble with the high deck of the plastic dock.

Wednesday, April 27, 2016

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 68

The river got over 70 degrees yesterday but with the clouds moving in today I suspect it will be much cooler tomorrow.

The fishing season has begun. The shad have been running for over a month and it looks like you can still catch some shad and other migrants down by Fletcher's cove. The shad don't seem to make it all the way up here in large numbers so we never catch them here. Someone caught the first smallmouth bass here on Sunday and the catfish are being successfully hunted as well.

I was recently reminded about the rules governing invasive catfish. The DNR asks anglers to remove and kill any blue and flathead catfish they catch. Catch and release of these fish is discouraged, as they are invasive top predators and pose a serious long-term threat to our native species. There is a lot of good information on the DNR website <http://dnr2.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/catfish.aspx>

The problem is, as I learned from our young fishermen, is that killing a 25-pound blue catfish isn't that easy. I suppose you could paddle it to shore and leave it on the bank and hope that it doesn't wiggle back into the river. The guys leaving here the other day carried with them a small hatchet for doing the dirty deed.

The second pair of nesting geese are done incubating their eggs. Sadly most of the young hatchlings did not survive and they have only one chick. The third nesting

pair down at the bottom of the Island is still waiting and sitting on the nest.

I think we can say that the bluebells are now gone. That was pretty good run of three weeks with the bluebells covering the Island. We'll let the plants fade out by themselves before we mow the fields, and then we'll just wait to see them again next year!

I stained the picnic tables this week. Alan and Sandra bleached them at the workfest so they were nice and clean and dry and I wanted to get them coated before it rained again. I used Dave Winer's "Australian Timber Oil" and they turned out looking great. I was actually surprised at how good they looked.

I installed the old rotary phone in the club kitchen, just for the fun of it. It was the phone that we used to use in the old kitchen before the renovation. It's wall-mounted and is at least 40 years old.

This is the year of the red-winged blackbird. Never before have we had those birds here at our feeder and now they have been here so long that I believe that they are nesting nearby. I usually associate the blackbirds with wetlands and marshes but this year they seem to have found a home on Sycamore Island. Maybe it's an indicator of how much the canal bed is turning into a swamp.

Saturday, April 30, 2016

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 60

Wow, the river was 72 degrees last week and now it's back down to sixty, brrrr.

The warm weather of last week has brought out the snakes, and suddenly they seem to be everywhere. You can always count on the snakes being very active during those first days when the temperatures are above 70 degrees. So far I've seen a few black rat snakes and two garter snakes. The black snakes seem to like being around the buildings and one was climbing the stairs to the clubhouse. Another was high up in a small tree.

My two encounters with the garter snakes were much more interesting. I had noticed a two foot-long garter snake by the shed and it was strangely burrowing it's head into the hard dirt and it didn't seem to notice me. Once it finally got spooked off I tried to investigate what it was doing in the dirt. I peeked into the shallow hole that it had made and I saw something that I thought must be some kind of small prey, like a buried grub or something. I grabbed a stick to dig it out with and once I got it out, I was astonished at what I found. It was a big clump of hard dirt with a large frog



JOE HAGE

encrusted inside! I guess that the crafty snake was hoping to catch the frog before the poor thing had a chance to come out of hibernation.

Then on Sunday I came upon another unusual scene. This time the garter snake, (maybe the same one), had a large frog (same frog?) by the leg and it was slowly trying to swallow the frog. The frog was trying to jump away but by then the snake had already swallowed the frog's leg. The tug-of-war continued for a couple of hours until we lost track of them in the tall weeds. I think I would have wagered on the snake.

I bought two new kayak paddles for the club's use. They are nice and long and they have the drip guards that so many of you club members have been asking for.

Some of the member volunteers dismantled the tree-house during the workfest. It was sad to see it go but it had become unfit for use.

The last goose nest has finished hatching but I have yet to see how many young chicks our last breeders had. We also saw a clutch of mallard chicks swimming by this week—so cute.

The other exciting bird news is that now we can hear the songs of the returning orioles, northern parulas, and prothonotary warblers. These migratory birds are all here to breed and nest and will be gone before the summer's end.

There seems to be a lot of beaver activity right now so if you want to see a beaver come down an hour before dark.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

workfest



Photography and page layout by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

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RENEE DUNHAM



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 27.

Large Parties Scheduled



May 21, Richard Bertaut,
10 a.m.-5 p.m., 16 guests

Masthead photo of Bluebells on
Sycamore Island by Joe Hage