

# The Sycamore Islander

January 2017 | Volume 96 Number 1



## President's Message

Welcome to 2017!! A new year, a new season, a new page on the calendar. As for many of you, I would guess that 2016 had its share of challenges, ups and downs, and nerve-wracking moments. So I am happy and grateful for the promise of a fresh start.

This is my first year as President, and I would like to start off by thanking outgoing President Tryon Wells for his many years of service, and wonderful stewardship of the Island and our beloved club. Since he has now served twice (thrice?) as our leader, I have big shoes indeed to fill. [Read More.](#)



Find out what happens when the

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bell freezes over in Joe Hage's

## Caretaker Log



## Member Reflections

Longtime club member Mardy Burgess reflects on decades of Sycamore experiences, including the mud fight pictured above. See her story [here](#).

Please share your island reflections with acting editor Rebecca Carroll [rrcarroll@gmail.com](mailto:rrcarroll@gmail.com)

## Newsletter Editor

We would like to report the club's **success** in finding a worthy replacement for Carole Beehler, our wonderful newsletter editor of many year's tenure!! Carole's fine eye and careful editing have kept us entertained and informed in style. An exhaustive search has fortunately led us to Rebecca Carroll, an experienced journalist and online news editor, who will be taking us further into the digital age, with a Web-based newsletter (also available in PDF format), complete with active links, more varied content, and even the option for posting videos!! We will be introducing Rebecca as a service

[New Officer List](#)

[Next Meeting](#)



History

## Native Americans on Ruppert's Island

Betty Burchell, a Sycamore Island Club member from 1957 until her death in 2003, convinced American University to do an archeology study of Ruppert's Island, Sycamore's neighbor. Read [her story](#)

## Meeting and Officials

December meeting/party attendees talked club finances and leadership comings and goings. Catch up with the [Meeting Minutes](#). See who exactly is doing what in the [2017 Club Officer List](#).

## Next Meeting

January 11, 8:00 p.m.

At the home of  
Susanna and John Membrino  
5305 Tuscarawas Road  
Bethesda, Maryland  
(Directions [here](#))

They're Changing the  
**Camping Rules!**

member at the January club meeting.

Get the [details here](#).  
Chime in at the January meeting.

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## Relief Caretakers' Schedule

Contact Madeleine Carter at [madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com](mailto:madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com) to volunteer

### **Saturdays - 11 a.m. - Sunset**

January 7 - Jonathan Zimmerman

### **January 14 - John and Susanna Membrino**

January 21 - Peter Gillon

### **January 28 - Meredith Griggs**

February 4 - Steve Newman

### **February 11 - Eric Aaserud**

February 18 - **NEED VOLUNTEER**

February 26 - **NEED VOLUNTEER**

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## A Printer's Farewell

As the Sycamore Islander goes entirely digital and Carol Beehler takes a rest from newsletter duties, island printer Morris Cobern also sees his moment. His letter below can also be found in Joe Hage's [Caretaker Log](#).

"I'm reluctantly going to take Carol's retirement to do the same. There are only 4 subscribers to the paper version and I am living on borrowed time. At the beginning of this year I had no expectation of still being around now and had made arrangements to continue printing the Islander. If you want to continue with a paper version I will help with the transition to the new printer.

"I appreciate the opportunity to have printed the Islander for about 20 years and consider it as more than simply a commercial relationship. If you can, please add me to your email list to receive the Islander for the next few months."

Morris Cobern

## President's Message

Welcome to 2017!! A new year, a new season, a new page on the calendar. As for many of you, I would guess that 2016 had its share of challenges, ups and downs, and nerve-wracking moments. So I am happy and grateful for the promise of a fresh start. This is my first year as President, and I would like to start off by thanking outgoing President Tryon Wells for his many years of service, and wonderful stewardship of the Island and our beloved club. Since he has now served twice (thrice?) as our leader, I have big shoes indeed to fill. He and his crew steered us through the exciting waters of discovering and filling an abandoned well, installing new weathertight windows, many roof, electrical & HVAC repairs, two waiting list lotteries, numerous workfests, and the repair of general wear and tear of weather upon the island. Thank you to Tryon and his team of officers for entrusting me with such a successful organization.

As I look out the window at the first snow of the season, I am reminded that for me at least, Winter is a pleasant time on the island, with peaceful waters, quiet and meditative days, beautiful vistas, and always the promise of a cozy fire in the clubhouse stove to warm one's feet while sitting back and enjoying a great book. Winter also seems to be the shortest season, perhaps because of the peace and solitude. If you get a chance, do come down to enjoy it. There will certainly be some warmer days, even in the midst of January and February. And a day of volunteer caretaking is just the thing to take the edge off a hectic life's schedule!!

I am grateful for a fabulous crew of seasoned professionals around me, to help me get my toes wet in the waters of club responsibility. We have gained many new members over the last several years, and we hope to have more parties and club gatherings as the year progresses. I look forward to seeing you at our meetings and out on the island, and continuing our wonderful tradition of

camaraderie, stewardship and enjoyment of our precious island resource!

Best,  
Richard Bertaut



## Sycamore Reflections

By Mardy Burgess

Al Brown and I have probably been members of Sycamore for 30 some years. We could walk to this bucolic spot so near the city from our home on Wissioming Road. Now we are in Annapolis as “retired” (can’t think of the right term) members and just reflect on so many varied and delightful times at Sycamore.

There is a rock in the river to which we often canoed for a swim (sometimes “skinny”) and a picnic. We used the island for special events: We brought a Quaker Junior High group for overnights yearly for a while – bringing tents, food and stories. One evening we had a “Coming of Age” celebration for five 12-year old girls and their mothers. We brought friends to this special place to show it existed, climb on downed trees and pick paw paws from another island tree.

At one point there was a rope swing hanging from a tree on the river opposite the Island. What fun to climb the tree, catch the rope and swing down with a splash before the National Park Service removed it.

Another time after a big rain we brought a son and grandson down and were disappointed to find one end of the island all mud. Not the boys! They had a mud fight and covered each other with black stuff. After washing it off, grandson Bryce grinned and said, "let's do it again!" and they did! What memories!

And, of course, all the member barbecues, pot lucks and clean-up days. And we mustn't forget to mention our unique caretakers who didn't mind spending their lives on the island during all kinds of weather – getting iced in and flooded out. First of all, I remember Ken who initially had a trailer there, and then we worked out a few rooms in the clubhouse for a couple, Doc and Phyllis, and finally a real apartment for Joe, who had two children coming and going and and has been here for 13 years. The apartment sometimes leaked and had rodents enjoying it.

We liked being guest caretakers for a Saturday or Sunday, bringing over members on the raft and finding time to sketch and write haiku ourselves.

And we recall with delight "Bluebell Time," when the island in April is a fairyland, emanating blue flowers.

Sycamore and its memories renew the spirit when one is tired.

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*Mardy mentions the Sycamore rope swing. See Joe Hage's remembrance [here](#).*



## CARETAKER'S LOG

**Wednesday -- December 14, 2016**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.2    Water Temperature: 41**

They say that it is supposed to get a lot colder tomorrow so I'm getting everything on the Island ready for the cold snap. I installed the temporary insulating walls in the men's bathroom. I turned off the water to the Club house and to the ladies bathroom. I drained all of the pipes and added the special anti-freeze to all of the toilets and drains. There is still a working toilet and running water in the men's room so if you need water you can get it there.

I locked up all of the Club canoes and kayaks so that no one will be tempted to go out on the river when the water is so dangerously cold.

I did some more caulking and I'm installing the wall insulation under my living room.

I also took down the hammock, with this cold weather coming I didn't think that it would be missed. Plus, it was taking a beating flapping in the wind all day. If the Island was a ship, that hammock would have sailed us all the way to Georgetown by now.

We received a letter from our long-time printer, Morris Cobern. I cut and pasted his letter below. It seems that he has decided to retire after being the printer of the Sycamore Islander for over twenty years. We are so deeply grateful to Morris for all of his years of service to the Club and we wish him all the best as he struggles with his illness.

"I'm reluctantly going to take Carol's retirement to do the same. There are only 4 subscribers to the paper version and I am living on borrowed time. At the beginning of this year I had no expectation of still being around now and had made arrangements to continue printing the Islander. If you want to continue with a paper version I will help with the transition to the new printer."

"I appreciate the opportunity to have printed the Islander for about 20 years and consider it as more than simply a commercial relationship. If you can, please add me to your email list to receive the Islander for the next few months."

Morris Cobern

We'll be sure to include you on the list Morris. Thanks!!

**Saturday -- December 17, 2016**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.0    Water Temperature: 33**

Yesterday morning, as you can probably imagine, I had to break up some ice that had formed around the ferry and across the river, but this morning we had a completely new

winter problem. This morning, for the first time that I can remember, the ferry bell was so covered with ice that it would not ring.

When Eric, the Saturday caretaker, arrived I did not hear him ring the bell and I did not realize that he was here until I stepped out and saw him standing on the landing. I immediately went to pick him up on the ferry but that's when I ran into another little problem. There was so much ice on the cables that the pulleys would not budge and the ferry would not move. I tried to get the pulleys free but it was hopeless. I guess I could have disconnected the safety chains and made it across but it certainly didn't seem like it was worth the risk.

Since I could not make it across the river on the ferry and since the weather was so poor, we decided that it would be best if Eric just volunteered to run the ferry on another day.

By 2:00 the ice had melted enough and I was able to pull the ferry across no problem.

**Saturday -- December 31, 2016**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.0    Water Temperature: 33**

Happy New Year Everyone!

I predict another amazing year at Sycamore Island!

-- Joe Hage





## Proposed Changes to Camping Rules

At the November meeting, the proposed changes to the camping rules generated discussion that was postponed until January. The changes were proposed in order to define a balance between a caretaker's right to privacy during off-hours and the members' right to use the Island by clarifying the existing rules so that members will understand when their requests will be granted, and which Large Party rules are applicable.

The existing rules are:

### **4. Camping Rules**

The following rules shall be observed regarding camping on the Islands:

- a. Overnight camping shall be coordinated in advance with the supervisor of camping (or in his absence, another officer) and the caretaker.
  - b. Large Parties that involve overnight camping are subject to the provisions in Standing Rule 3, Large Parties and Guests.
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The proposed text is:

### **4. Camping Rules**

The following rules shall be observed regarding camping on the Islands:

- a. Overnight camping shall be coordinated in advance with the Supervisor of Camping **and Parties** (or in his absence, another officer) and the caretaker.
  - b. **The caretaker will approve requests for overnight camping, provided:**
    1. **The request is made at least three days in advance,**
    2. **There is no other event scheduled for that evening,**
    3. **The host will operate the ferry,**
    4. **The host understands that the caretaker is unavailable except in case of an emergency.**
  - c. **Large parties that involved overnight camping are subject to the provisions of standing rule 2, paragraph b (quiet hours) and d (stowing camping gear), and standing rule 3, paragraphs c (odd-numbered days and approval of supervisor), f (vacate by 11:00), h (indemnification form) and i (sanctions for non-compliance.)**
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Dave Winer proposed this alternate text:

#### **4. Camping Rules**

Members may camp on the Island at any time, subject to the following provisions:

a. After normal hours of the caretaker's duty:

1. The caretaker shall not be involved. Campers shall not act in any way that disturbs the caretaker's private hours or quarters.
2. Camping members and their guests must operate the ferry independently of the caretaker.

b. Camping members with number of guests meeting large party limits shall conform to all requirements for holding large parties.

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Here are comments from previous Supervisors of Camping and Large Parties:

1. Would be good if there were a service component to camping—say, one day as substitute caretaker within past year to camp. Pretty minimal, since helping out is a member expectation.
2. Perhaps camping when the caretaker is not there (i.e., Saturday night) could be earned by having been substitute caretaker 3 times within the past year -- surely by stint 3, the person has learned enough to take care of most emergencies.
3. Perhaps camping when the caretaker is not there (i.e., Saturday night) could be earned by having been substitute caretaker 3 times within the past year -- surely by stint 3, the person has learned enough to take care of most emergencies.
4. I do think people should be required to give at least a weeks notice if they want to camp. Too often people call me at the last minute.
5. On the parties, if we want to generate more revenue I would change the rule to permit people to have parties as long as they have completed two services for the club as opposed to the current three.

A concern that was expressed during the discussion at the November meeting is that if the campers are using the ferry to come and go from the Island, it must always be left where it is available for the caretaker to use.

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The discussion will be continued at the January 11 meeting, and a decision will be reached.



## Beneath the Surface

By Betty Burchell

*Betty Burchell, who was a member of the Sycamore Island Club from 1957 until her death in 2003, convinced American University to do an archeology study of Ruppert's Island. The study showed that American Indians had lived there at various times over thousands of years, much longer than anyone had imagined. Here's the story she wrote in 1985 for the centennial edition of the Sycamore Islander.*

It was all John Thomson's fault. He asked me to ask my husband, Bob, in preparation for an encampment of Boy Scouts, to spray the area around the mounds on Ruppert Island for poison ivy. Nobody had ever called them mounds to my knowledge. It turned out they were not man-made mounds, but they looked pretty unusual to me and when the right time came along they started my imagination to work. This was 1964.

My family can take some credit too. One summer afternoon Bob was fishing in a rowboat near Ruppert, Kenny and I had dropped off on the shore nearby and proceeded to explore the center of the unspoiled isle. We sat down near the mounds, which were long, low humps. Arrowheads had often been found on Ruppert, so I felt fairly confident in telling Kenny that Indians once lived here. He was five years old at the time. It was mostly a question of amusing him. But there were the humps! In went my fingers, hand, and arm through the loose river sand.

Ooops! I felt sharp edges and started hauling out little pieces of thin rock, most unlike the water-worn stuff usually found in river beds.

In the weeks that followed I interested my friend Joan Thal-Larsen, who had two little boys. We took our little ones on many occasions, found more sharp rocks and even bits of crude pottery. It was most exciting and time-consuming. We brought the stuff home to save it.

But I realized this would never do. If it were important we were destroying it. We didn't know anything about archaeology. So one day we took our artifacts and our children to the Smithsonian. It wasn't all that easy to get an interview. Dr. Carl Miller helped us with advice. We got started measuring and recording. Due to illness he could not come to the site until much later. But through him we enlisted members of the Maryland Archaeological Society. They came, worked, and taught us quite a bit. They got us a site number, 18 MO 26.

Read the rest of the story on the Sycamore Island Club website [here](#).



### **Minutes for December 14, 2016 Meeting**

The members gathered at the home of Meredith Griggs for the Annual meeting/holiday party. Tryon Wells then called the meeting to order. The first order of business was to thank our hostess for sharing her home with us on this festive occasion.

**Attendees:** David Winer, Diane Noble, Jim Drew, Jane Winer, Lucky Marmon, Star Mitchell, Steve Newman, Richard Bertaut, Larry Heilman, Ned Goddard, Gerry Barton, Sandi Komarow, Jeff Komarow, Cindy Bertaut, Penelope Mitchell, Drew Walsh, Molly Newberry, Anne Heilman, Kathy Carroll, Stan Fowler, Bill Marmon, Bruce Gaber, Susanna Membrino, John Membrino, Judy Lentz, John Cunningham, and Ann Marie Cunningham.

**Membership Report:** John Noble provided a summary of membership activity for the year. The Club currently has the maximum of 160 regular members with 13 of them becoming members in 2016. There are also 71 senior members, 6 of whom became eligible this year after 20 years of regular membership; 22 inactive members who are living outside the area; and 15 honorary members. There are 59 Waiting List Applications (maximum 60).

**Nominating Committee:** John Noble and Bill Marmon assembled an august team of volunteers who will serve as officers and supervisors in 2017. But first, John recognized those who have served us well and are now retiring from their current positions, particularly those who have served for many years, Financial Secretary Lisa Kliefoth (~20 years), Editor Carol Beehler (6 years), Captain Drew Walsh (4 years), Law Supervisor Parker Moore, our President Tryon Wells, Supervisor of Large Parties Jonathan Zimmerman, and Supervisor of Swimming Roger Herst.

Then John introduced those officers who are leaving the current position to take on new responsibilities - Richard Bertaut takes up the gavel as he moves from Vice President to President, John Noble will cease conducting new member orientations and takes on the Vice Presidency, Sharon (Sherry) Fizdale leaves her position as Supervisor of Finance and becomes Financial Secretary, and Ann Marie Cunningham sets down her notepad and becomes Supervisor of Finance.

Officers who are remaining in their current roles include Ned Goddard as Treasurer, Lucky Marmon as Co-Recording Secretary, Karen Possner as Archivist, Rodolfo Castro as Deputy Captain, Marianne Ross as Supervisor of the Clubhouse, Alice Bullard as Supervisor of Grounds, Karl Kosok as Supervisor of Painting/Carpentry, Tryon Wells as Supervisor of the Website, George and Shelley Malusky as Supervisor of Entertainment, Joe Cecil as Supervisor of Canoeing, and Madeleine Carter as Supervisor of Relief Caretaking Scheduling.

Those who are new to Island leadership were warmly welcomed - Stan Fowler as Captain, Rebecca Beynon as Supervisor of Law, Molly Newberry as

Supervisor of Camping and Large Parties, Larry Heilman as Supervisor of Swimming.

All the nominees were elected by acclamation.

John also reported that there are still a few opportunities available to those who wish to become more involved with the Island. Please contact John if you are interested in becoming the Membership Secretary, Editor, or Co-Recording Secretary.

**Treasurer's Report:** Ned Goddard reported that the Club has been spending more each year, primarily because of rising insurance costs and unexpected repairs. There will be an increase in dues and fees of approximately 5% in 2017. The number of members is specified in the Bylaws. Contact Ned if you are interested in details on expenditures and income. The budget passed.

**Relief Caretaker Scheduler's Report:** Madeleine Carter reported via email that she is very grateful to those members and wait list applicants who operated the ferry for us in November. Greg Hitz, Meghan Mullan (TWICE!), John Beck, Sherry Fizdale, Edward Tilghman, Eric Simpson, and Renee Dunham enjoyed a lovely day on the Island with occasional ferrying responsibilities.

**Next Meeting and Adjournment:** The next meeting will be held on January 11 at 8:00 at the home of Susanna and John Membrino, 5305 Tuscarawas Road, Bethesda. The meeting was adjourned so we could enjoy a delicious repast and the lovely home of Meredith Griggs.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann Marie Cunningham

Co-Recording Secretary

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**MONTGOMERY SYCAMORE ISLAND CLUB**  
**OFFICERS AND SUPERVISORS**  
**2017**

**OFFICERS**

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**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Richard Doolittle	David Lyles	David Winer
Jim Drew	George Malusky	
Bill Eichbaum	Bill Marmon	

**STANDING COMMITTEES**

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\* = Safety Committee                      \*\* = Personnel Committee