

# The Sycamore Islander

February 2020 | Volume 99 Number 2



Photo by Mark Friedrichs

## Newsletter Contents

[Report from the President](#)  
[Honorary Membership for Tryon Wells](#)  
[2020 Calendar of Events \(tentative\)](#)  
[Bluebell Bash in April](#)  
[Open Houses, Open Minds in January](#)  
[Caretaker's Log](#)  
[December Meeting Minutes](#)  
[Financial Secretary Report](#)

**February 12: Monthly Club Meeting, 8 pm**, at home of Lynda and Gary Slayen, 6605 Rivercrest Court. **Please RSVP, [lyndaslayen123@gmail.com](mailto:lyndaslayen123@gmail.com) – and, if possible, bring a folding chair.**

**March 8 (SUNDAY): Monthly Club Meeting, 5 pm, on the Island [this is the first day of daylight savings], with a speaker from the C&O Canal Trust.**

During the recent Club Leadership Dinner, the officers agreed to try a 2020 experiment to boost monthly meeting attendance:

- When monthly meetings are held on the Island (March through October), they will be on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month at 5:00 pm. There will be a hot grill beginning at 4:00 pm, so feel free to come early and bring your favorite food, for the grill or not. Whenever possible, meetings will start with an interesting speaker for the first half hour.
- Off-Island meetings during the winter months (November through February) will continue to be held at members' homes on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month at 8 pm (except for the Annual December meeting and holiday party, which will start earlier).

We will begin this experiment in March, when the meeting will be held on March 8 at 5 pm on the island, and will feature a presentation by the C&O Canal Trust. **We are continuing to look for engaging speakers on almost any topic – or performers (musicians, magicians, etc.) – for future meetings.** Please contact our new Meeting Entertainment Coordinator: [lyndaslayen123@gmail.com](mailto:lyndaslayen123@gmail.com), or 301-229-6605.

## Relief Caretakers' Schedule and Online Sign-Up System

To sign-up to be a Relief Caretaker (any Saturday), go to the "[Sign-Up Genius](#)" app. There are simple instructions. [You can also sign-up by contacting our **new** Relief Caretaker Coordinators, Sarah Fraidin Roggie & Charles Pill at [sarahfraidin@gmail.com](mailto:sarahfraidin@gmail.com) & [seapill@gmail.com](mailto:seapill@gmail.com)]. The app provides a calendar that indicates the Relief Caretaker openings and those that have signed up through the end of March. **[All the slots in March are still open]** The app also provides reminders. Relief Caretakers signed up for the coming month are:

### February 1

11:00 am to dark: Lynda Slayen

### February 8

11:00 am to dark: Joseph McBride

### February 15

11:00 am to dark: Eric Aaserud

### February 22

11:00 am to dark: Barbara Fisher

### February 29

11:00 am to dark: Sara Deshler

**Thank You to the many volunteers that served as Relief Caretakers during January!!**

## Report from the President, John Noble

The Sycamore Island Club's Officers and Supervisors met for dinner on January 28 at the Irish in Glen Echo. Seventeen of our Club's leadership attended and discussed their plans for their area of responsibility for 2020. We reflected on the 14 "accomplishments" of 2019. Some of the major ones continuing are:

- Improving our Club Express new home for our data base and web site;
- Improving access to and content of monthly Club meetings;
- Increasing Island entertainment;
- Upgrading Island and Club House furniture.

With regard to Club meetings, the survey showed that the most popular time for meetings was Sundays at 5pm on the Island. Thus, subject to ongoing review, we are scheduling this time for island meetings during 2020.

All of us are looking forward to enjoying the Island throughout the year.

## Tryon Wells Granted Honorary Membership

*Richard Bertaut, Past President, Webmaster; John Noble, President; Sherrie Fizdale, Financial Secretary; Anne Waidmann, Membership Secretary; and multiple others supported life-long honorary membership for Tryon (under section 19 of the Club By-Laws), which was unanimously approved at the January Club Meeting.*

Tryon has been a member of the Sycamore Island Club since August 1, 1983, 37 years. His first elective offices were Vice President, 1990-1991, and President, 1992-1993. He created our outstanding website and data base at the beginning of the public web century in 2000 and has maintained it for 20 years. He last served as President in 2016. In addition, he served 9 years as Captain, 7 years as President, 4 years as Vice President, and 1 year as Archivist (some overlapping).

This amazing record of unusual and outstanding service has been accompanied by a persistent positive attitude, unstinting effort, and a willingness to host dues mailing work parties and club meetings, as needed.

## 2020 Calendar of Events (tentative)

### February

- 9<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday): **Club Meeting** at home of Lynda and Gary Slayen, 6605 Rivercrest Court, 8 pm
- 15<sup>th</sup>: Annual dues and fees are due [pay online or contact Sherry Fizdale]

### March

- 8<sup>th</sup> (Sunday): **Club Meeting** on the Island, 5 pm (C&O Canal Trust Guest Speaker)

### April

- 4<sup>th</sup> (tentative): **Wildflower Walk** [John Parrish, rg Steinman]
- 12<sup>th</sup> (Sunday): **Club Meeting** on the Island, 5 pm
- 19<sup>th</sup>: **Bluebell Bash** (performance) [John Butler]
- 26<sup>th</sup>: **Spring Work-fest** [Caretaker Joe Hage, Captain Alec Graham] [Rain date: May 3<sup>rd</sup>]

### May

- 9<sup>th</sup>: **Potomac Downriver Race** [Star Mitchell and Howard Morland]
- 10<sup>th</sup> (Sunday): **Club Meeting** on the Island, 5 pm
- **Orientation for New Members/Wait-Listers** – Membership Secretary [Anne Waidmann]

### June

- 14<sup>th</sup> (Sunday): **Club Meeting** on the Island, 5 pm
- 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>: **Summer Solstice Campout** – especially for families and children [Angela Hirsch]

### July

- 12<sup>th</sup> (Sunday): **Club Meeting** on the Island, 5 pm

### August

- 9<sup>th</sup> (Sunday): **Club Meeting** on the Island, 5 pm
- 22<sup>nd</sup>: **Fishing Derby** [previous organizer: George and Michelle Malusky]

### September

- 7<sup>th</sup>: **Labor Day Sycamore Island Regatta** [previous organizer: Mia Holland]
- 13<sup>th</sup> (Sunday): **Club Meeting** on the Island, 5 pm

### October

- 11<sup>th</sup> (Sunday): **Club Meeting** on the Island, 5 pm
- Date TBD: **Fall Frolic** [previous organizers: Caroline Gelb, Robin Richter]

### November

- 11<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday): **Club Meeting** on the Island, 8 pm
- 15<sup>th</sup>: **Fall Work-fest** [Caretaker Joe Hage, Captain Alec Graham]

### December

- 6<sup>th</sup>: **Winter Warmer** [performance]
- 9<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday): **Annual Meeting and Holiday Party**, 7:15 pm [at a host home]

# Bluebell Bash Island Performance\*\* Event



Sunday April 19<sup>th</sup>\*  
1 - 5 PM

\*\*Any island member or wait-lister bands or performance artists (including poetry and spoken word readers) contact [John-Butler@msn.com](mailto:John-Butler@msn.com) by April 1<sup>st</sup> to sign up to perform at our second Island Performance Event.

\*Flood dependent

## Open Houses, Open Minds in January

by Karen Possner & Richard Bertaut

It turns out that the Sycamore Island sign high on a tree by the ferry steps is not just an identifier. For some who walk the towpath, it can be a totem of hope & longing. For long-time islanders, however, it's likely invisible & we may even consider our mode of transport & arrival routine, old hat. When we board the ferry, sign in & then step off, the familiar sights may not even register for us anymore.

This was brought home to us during both January Sundays when we hosted open houses for prospective applicants. Although the days were pretty cold, our on-line offer of an island tour & club orientation was enough to attract a healthy group of hopefuls each afternoon.

From the moment we met them at the ferry steps, it was clear our visitors were excited to board the ferry & eager to tour the island. We walked everyone from the top of Sycamore to its tip, side-stepping significant mud & exposed roots & answering a zillion questions about the club, its history, members, activities, water sports, safety practices, parties, work-fests, etc. For the kids, the swing was in full service — the undisputed highlight of both afternoons. It was pretty terrific to see our club through the eyes of these 2020 applicants & a welcome reminder of the gifts the island provides. But, it also was sad to realize that some of these motivated families may not have success in our lottery.

Initially, we scheduled these afternoons as an administrative chore in support of our biennial lottery, presuming they would provide useful information to prospective applicants. Unsurprisingly, we wound up enjoying ourselves as much as, if not more than, these families. We all know Sycamore Island is special but being reminded of that by those who hope to join our ranks was unexpected & gratifying. Tip to the 2022 hosts: let's offer hot chocolate.

Good luck to all who enter our 2020 lottery!

## CARETAKER's LOG

**Wednesday -- January 8, 2020**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 39**

Club meeting tonight at the home of Hans and Amber. Hope to see you there.

I had to remove and refurbish the metal box that houses the sign-in sheet on the ferry. Over the years I have had to fix it up a few times, I've had to fix the hinges, mend the box after a tree fell on it, replace the clip board and I've had to repaint it at least four times. This time I had to replace the rotted wood beneath the clip board. I also replaced the active-member list with new Velcro to hold it inside the top of the lid, I added new cordage and refastened the platform that it sits on.

Then I repainted it, forest green this time, and finished with the gold stenciled lettering. Next time you're on the ferry, take a minute to admire this simple piece of craft work. This box has been here longer than I know but it represents a different time. This box wasn't made of plastic in some far-away place. My guess is that this box was custom-made by a local tinsmith. Someone with the skills to bend and fabricate galvanized metal into a durable box that has lasted us for decades. Incredible.



Photo by Joe Hage

While I was in the refurbishing mode I decided to clean and repaint one of the trophies that we have here. This trophy is from a race that was won by our Club at the regatta that took place here way back on September 3, 1928. It's a silver-plated cup, about 7 inches tall, that's cut in half and mounted on a coat-of-arms shaped wooden plaque. The inscription reads

"MONTGOMERY Sycamore Island Club, WINNER, Sycamore Broadwater Regatta"

I polished the silver plating, though it's corroded now, and I glued and repainted the black plaque. I'll have to devise a new way to reattach the cup to the plaque since the old wires are mostly broken. Otherwise, I just need to find a place to hang it.

I also stripped and refinished a small table that I found in someone's trash. It looks great and fits perfectly in my little foyer.



Photo by Joe Hage

**Wednesday -- January 10, 2020**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 38**

I picked up some fancy, Martha Stewart stencils for our sign-in box. Going upscale!

We had the meeting on Wednesday night. The funny thing was, Amber and Hans had no idea that we were gathering at their house until we started showing up. Amber wasn't even there, but Hans and the kids scrambled and it all worked out. Thanks Hans, for being so flexible and accommodating.

The most important part of the meeting was that Tryon Wells was named an honorary member! He's been a member for 37 years and has filled many of the officer's positions over the years. Plus, he built and managed our website for over twenty years! Tryon has been such a huge part of this Club that it is hard to overstate all that he has done. Thanks Tryon!

BTW, I am now posting this log on the new website for the Club. Go to [sycamoreisland.clubexpress.com](http://sycamoreisland.clubexpress.com) to follow me there. It's hard to change but the new website allows me to add pictures to my posts. Right now it's only visible to logged-in members but we hope to make the log/blog public in the future.

### **Monday -- January 13, 2020**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.0 Water Temperature: 50**

This brief shot of warm weather is nice but now all the winter ducks are gone. Who knows where they go but last Thursday and Friday there were scores of ducks all around the Island and now there are none. So sad. My favorites, the hooded mergansers were here for weeks and were joined recently by other diving ducks, scaups, grebes and buffleheads. I love to watch and listen to them take off from the river. Their little feet are moving so fast for take-off, that those little guys sound like they are playing a super-fast drum roll on top of the water.

### **Sunday -- January 19, 2020**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.9 Water Temperature: 40**

There is going to be an open house/open Island here today. It will be interesting to see who shows up. I suppose the weather could be worse considering that it's the middle of January but I wish that it wasn't so windy. I'll have to make sure that I time the ferry trips to avoid the 30 MPH gusts that they are predicting. The wind was blowing so hard the other night that the bell started ringing.

I had to carry the 24' ladder over to the mainland. The old copper phone lines were dangling low to the ground from the utility pole. The copper lines were disconnected weeks ago, but I didn't want anybody fooling around with them, so I put up the ladder, coiled them up, and tied them high up on the pole. While I was up there I noticed that the junction box for our new FIOS cable was upside down and full of rain water. I used some zip-ties to secure it better and I let all of the rain water drain out. The fiber optic cable is so tiny, (less than the width of a hair) that I feel like we need to be extra careful with it.

### **Tuesday -- January 21, 2020**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 36**

Winter is here! Brrrrr. I had to winterize the Club kitchen and Bathrooms yesterday. That means I had to shut off the water to the sinks and toilets. You can still use the toilet in the Men's room and you can get potable water from the tap in there too. I hope it doesn't get so cold that the river freezes but we'll have to wait and see I guess.

The good news is that the cold snap has brought the ducks back. We are so lucky. Back before I lived on the river I would have to make a special trip out to Seneca Lake or Black Hill Regional Park to see the over-winter waterfowl but now the ducks are just a few yards away from my front door.

### **Sunday -- January 26, 2020**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.3 Water Temperature: 36**

THE FERRY IS CLOSED! Lots of rain in the watershed equals high water on our river. Sorry folks.

**Tuesday -- January 28, 2020**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 6.0 Water Temperature: 36**

The ferry is closed again today and will not reopen until Thursday, January 30.

**Thursday -- January 30, 2020**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.88 Water Temperature: 41**

As promised, the ferry is now open.

I'm posting this onto the original caretaker's log but that website, sycamoreisland.org does not seem to be working right now. I'll cut and paste this to the new site, sycamoreisland.clubexpress.com.

**Friday -- January 31, 2020**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.6 Water Temperature: 41**

Last day of January, hard to believe. Overall, it was probably the mildest January that I've ever experienced while living here on Sycamore Island, and it looks like February might be mild as well. They are predicting temperatures in the 60's this weekend, so I guess the X-country skis can stay in the closet, bummer.

I did make a quick run up to Ski Liberty this past Wednesday since the ferry was closed, good fun! The high water kept the ferry shut down for four full days in January. Not a good trend to start the year, closed for four out of 31 days.

I refinished the stairs in my quarters, something that I've been meaning to do for years. There are four stairs that lead from my lower level up to my living room level, and they were in desperate need of sanding and refinishing.

The living room addition was constructed in the mid 90's, so it's been 25 years since the steps were installed, and 25 years of wear and tear have taken their toll. The glossy finish was worn off years ago and the wood underneath, a soft pine, was starting to wear away as well. The look of these steps has been bugging me for a while. I didn't want the steps to wear right through, or get deep wear marks in them like the stairs at the old lock houses. Plus, the uneven wear made the steps an unsightly two-tone color of dark, varnished wood, and contrasting lighter, raw wood.

I don't consider myself a big procrastinator but if you refinish the only steps to your living room, you can't use your living room until the next day. So that has been my obstacle and my excuse thus far. Until I devised a mini scaffold that is, with a stout board and a step ladder, I made it possible to climb over the freshly finished steps.

These poor steps are nothing beautiful to look at. They have been submerged twice from flooding and they have been rather abused. Someone even drove some 6 penny common nails right into the middle of one of them. Yes, they are rough, but now they have a nice new, shiny coat of varnish, three coats actually. But the most important thing is that I can now walk by them and not think about how I should refinish those steps someday! What a relief!

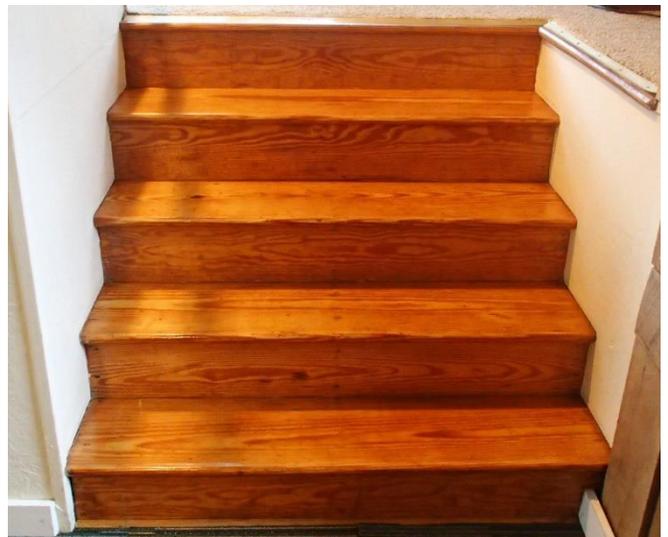


Photo by Joe Hage

## Minutes from January 8, 2020, Meeting of the Sycamore Island Club

**Present:** *Marianne Ross, Adele Seifried, Tryon Wells, Sarah Fraidin Roggie, Hans Rickhoff, Madeleine Carter, Alec Graham, John Membrino, Mark Friedrichs, Gary Slayen, Lynda Slayen, John Noble, Gerry Barton, Sherrie Fizdale, Bill Marmon, Joe Hage, Richard Bertaut, Meredith Griggs*

At 8:00 pm, President John Noble opened the meeting with thanks to Hans and Amber Rickhoff for hosting.

The December minutes were approved, as was the election of co-supervisors for caretaking (Sarah Fraidin Roggie and Chuck Pill) and coordinator of monthly meeting speakers (Lynda Slayen).

**Financial secretary's report:** Sherry Fizdale said the new Club Express platform is working. A total of 324 members are in the new database, and 59% of members have logged in, which all members are expected to do. Dues payments to date are \$43,699. All dues must be paid by February 15.

**Captain's report:** Alec Graham has reviewed caretaker Joe Hage's employment agreement, and Joe has signed off on it. Alec will discuss projects with Joe over the next few months and find ways for members to contact him or Joe about projects.

**Caretaker's report:** Joe has posted his log and a picture on the new website blog. Sherry will look into how members can get emails when new logs are posted. Joe also reported general quiet on the island, no ice, and just a few visitors on New Year's Day.

**Membership report:** In the absence of Membership Secretary Anne Waidmann, John Noble urged members to tell their friends to turn in applications for the 2020 lottery soon. Anne has received seven applications so far. Joe added that an open house was held on the island for 20 people January 5, with help from Richard Bertaut and Karen Possner. The next will be January 19.

**Honorary membership:** The meeting unanimously approved an honorary membership for Tryon Wells owing to his 37 years of service to the club as vice president, president, website creator and webmaster, captain, and archivist—as well as meeting and mailing party host. The honorary status, outlined in the bylaws, allows dues-free membership and continued voting rights. Tryon graciously thanked the members.

**Website supervisor report:** Richard Bertaut explained that

- All members have received the initial email to log in to the Club Express platform;
- 30-40% of old website is now on the new site, including the calendar;
- Old Islanders will not be taken down from old website until all is transferred;
- Joe has authority to post on new site; and
- Only members who log in will be able to read Joe's log on the new site—though for now his log will still appear on old site.

**Treasurer's report:** In lieu of Florian Kogelnick, John Noble said funds were left over from the 2019 budget because new chairs were not purchased.

**Islander editor report:** Mark Friedrichs is looking for contributions and would like to know about upcoming calendar events.

**New business:**

- A projector is needed for speakers at club meetings. Adele Siegfried may be able to donate one and will arrange with Madeleine Carter, who is also working with wait-lister Lucas on specifications for a projector.

- The December survey on meeting times indicated that the highest number of people would attend on Sundays at 5:00. The leadership will propose a variety of days and times for the whole year, keeping winter meetings at members' homes in the evening. Joe would like to see mini work sessions added before Sunday afternoon meetings.
- Gerry Barton brought up the issue of compensation for the removal of his canoe, which he was not apprised of. President John Noble regretted the incident and promised due compensation.

The next meeting will be February 12 at the home of Lynda and Gary Slayen, 6605 Rivercrest Court, Bethesda.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Meredith Griggs  
Co-recording secretary

## [Report from the Financial Secretary: Zeno's Paradox](#)

By Sherry Fizdale

The Greek philosopher Zeno formulated the concept that Achilles will never catch the turtle in a race because no matter how fast he moves to close in, the distance keeps changing as the turtle ambles forward. This came to mind as I thought about what to report on the annual dues payment process.

Most of you have logged in to your account and paid your dues on our new website/data system at [www.sycamoreisland.clubexpress.com](http://www.sycamoreisland.clubexpress.com). This is a great success! I congratulate you for navigating the new system. It wasn't easy for some, and I thank you all.

But attempting to contact the remaining non-responders by email, letter and phone feels like Zeno's elusive objective: it always remains just out of reach. This is the time-consuming work of the financial secretary. As Congressman Hakeem Jeffries put it recently, "If you don't know, now you know"

We all do know that it's not easy to become a member of our dear Club, and all the members are important to us. If you are reading this, and haven't logged in to the new site to pay, please contact me at [sherry@fizdale.net](mailto:sherry@fizdale.net) or 202-460-8833.



Islander Editor: Mark Friedrichs; suggestions or contributions of content or photos welcome to [mark.d.friedrichs@gmail.com](mailto:mark.d.friedrichs@gmail.com)

---