

## ACHS SUMMARY FORM

M:35-28  
(date entered: 5-4-80)

1. Name: Sycamore Island Club
2. Planning Area/Site Number: 35/28 3. M-NCPPC Atlas Reference: Map 20  
Coordinate J-16
4. Address: Sycamore Island  
Potomac River, Maryland
5. Classification Summary
- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Category <u>building</u>          | Previous Survey Recording <u>MNCPPC</u>                              |
| Ownership <u>private</u>          | Title and Date: <u>Historic Sites Inventory</u><br>1976              |
| Public Acquisition <u>N/A</u>     |  |
| Status <u>occupied</u>            |  |
| Accessible <u>yes; restricted</u> | Federal <u>    </u> State <u>x</u> County <u>x</u> Local <u>    </u> |
| Present use <u>recreation</u>     |  |
6. Date: 1936-7 7. Original Owner: Montgomery Sycamore Island Club
8. Apparent Condition
- a. excellent b. altered c. original site
9. Description: This three bay by three bay, canoe club sits on a low rise on an island in the middle of the Potomac River facing south. It has green novelty siding. The south wing has a screened porch at the first level and an enclosed club room at the second level. On the east elevation of the south wing an open string single-run wooden stairway ascends from south to north. Another similar wooden stairway ascends from south to north along the west elevation of the north section. Variety of windows; south wing has twenty-light windows with six-light center panel that moves, six-over-six double-hung and six-light casement windows. The canoe club has gable, shed, and flat roofs covered by asbestos shingles.
10. Significance: The private club that at present occupies Sycamore Island was organized on April 3, 1885 as the Sycamore Island Pleasure Club by a small group of Washingtonians, several of German extraction, who used the island for fishing and "ferried kegs of beer over to the island for weekend stag parties".
- In 1888, the club bought the island and an adjacent island which it named Ruppert's Island after Matthew Ruppert, the club treasurer, from the state of Maryland. The organization was legally incorporated as the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club on April 27, 1889.
- The present building replaces an earlier clubhouse that had been built originally about 1885. This building was washed off its foundation by a flood in 1889 but restored. It was expanded from time to time after that but was totally destroyed and washed away by the Potomac flood of March 1936.
- The club remained an all-male canoeing and fishing club until it was reorganized, in an internal "revolution," in 1914. At that time, liquor was banned from the island, women were admitted to membership, and the number of members was expanded to 100 or more. Since then, it has remained essentially a family social organization, with a membership at present of about 130 families.
11. Researcher and date researched: David M. Kiefer August 1979  
Candy Reed - Arch. Desc.
12. Compiler: Eileen McGuckian 13. Date Compiled: Sept. 1979 14. Designation Approval
15. Acreage: approx. 5 acres

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Montgomery Sycamore Island Club

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Sycamore Island

CITY, TOWN

Potomac River

VICINITY OF Glen Echo

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

8

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Montgomery

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER: Recreation

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Montgomery Sycamore Island Club

Telephone #: 229-4921

STREET & NUMBER

Sycamore Island

CITY, TOWN

Glen Echo

VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

Maryland 20768

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Montgomery County Courthouse

Liber #: JA 13

Folio #: 380

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Rockville

STATE

Maryland

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

MNCPPC Inventory of Historical Sites

DATE

1976

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Park Historian's Office

CITY, TOWN

Derwood

STATE

Maryland 20855

**7 DESCRIPTION**

M:35-28

<b>CONDITION</b>		<b>CHECK ONE</b>	<b>CHECK ONE</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

**DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

The Montgomery Sycamore Island Club, a private recreational organization, owns two adjacent islands in the Potomac River near the Maryland shore about one and a half miles above the District line and three quarters of a mile below Glen Echo, Md. The larger of the two, Sycamore Island (originally named by the club Barry's Island), is about 5 acres in area and is used for recreational purposes (canoeing, picnicking, fishing, and other social activities and sports) by the club. The Ruppert's Island, upstream, is set aside as a nature preserve; Indian artifacts have been found on it but not on Sycamore Island.

The only major building on the islands is the clubhouse on Sycamore Island. It was built during 1936-37 of wood siding on a steel frame and is designed to withstand severe flooding. This three bay by three bay, building sits on a low rise facing south.

Built on brick foundations which have been reinforced by poured concrete, this building has green novelty siding. The south screened porch projects from the main north four bay section. The first level of this porch is screened and the second level is enclosed. It has a gable roof. On the east elevation of the south wing an open string, single run, wooden stairway ascends from south to north, flanked by a balustraded railing, to a small wooden platform. There is a second, on string, single run, wooden stairway that ascends from south to north along the west elevation of the north section. The west and east doors are both glass paneled. On the east elevation, north section, there is a one story caretaker's room. A wooden paneled door opens on the south elevation into the caretaker's room. There is a wooden paneled north door.

There is a considerable variety of windows in this building. There are 20-light windows with a six-light center panel that opens out on the south wing, second level. There are six-over-six double-hung windows and six-light casement windows and some 12-light windows with a six light center panel that opens out.

This building also has a variety of roofs: gable, shed, and flat covered by asbestos shingles.

The building has a three-room caretaker's apartment on its first floor, as well as a men's locker room and a screened porch; the second floor consists of a club room, kitchen, and women's locker room.

The present building replaces an earlier clubhouse that had been built originally about 1885. This building was washed off its foundation by a flood in 1889 but restored. It was expanded from time to time after that but was totally destroyed and washed away by the Potomac flood of March 1936.

The only other building on the island is an open canoe shed that also was built to replace an earlier canoe house destroyed by the 1936 flood.

Sycamore Island is connected to the Maryland shore by a club-operated ferry. Access to the ferry landing across the C&O Canal is by a steel trestle bridge with a wood floor that was built by the club in 1902 for \$900. Two earlier bridges crossing the canal had preceded the present structure.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

M:35-28

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) <b>Recreation</b>	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES **1936-37**

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The private club that at present occupies Sycamore Island was organized on April 3, 1885 as the Sycamore Island Pleasure Club by a small group of Washingtonians, several of German extraction, who used the island for fishing and "ferried kegs of beer over to the island for weekend stag parties". It is the next oldest canoe club in the Washington area after the Potomac Boat Club in Georgetown, which was founded in 1864.

In 1888, the club bought the island and an adjacent island which it named Ruppert's Island after Matthew Ruppert, the club treasurer, from the state of Maryland.<sup>1</sup> (Sycamore Island was for a while known as Barry's Island in honor of J.P. Barry, another early club officer.) The organization was legally incorporated as the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club on April 27, 1889.<sup>2</sup>

The club remained an all-male canoeing and fishing club until it was reorganized, in an internal "revolution," in 1914. At that time, liquor was banned from the island, women were admitted to membership, and the number of members was expanded to 100 or more. Since then, it has remained essentially a family social organization, with a membership at present of about 130 families.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Land Records of Montgomery County, Md., JA 13/380 (May 24, 1889).
2. Montgomery County Corporation Records, EBP 1/110.

See Vertical F-7c

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Land and Corporation Records of Montgomery County, Md.  
The Sycamore Islander (club newsletter).  
 Interview with John Seabury Thomson (newsletter editor).  
Washington Star, March 29, 1936.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately 5 acres

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

COUNTY

STATE

COUNTY

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

David M. Kiefer

Candy Reed

Architectural Description

ORGANIZATION

Sugarloaf Regional Trails

DATE

August 1979

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Box 87

TELEPHONE

926-4510

CITY OR TOWN

Dickerson

STATE

Maryland 20753

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust  
 The Shaw House, 21 State Circle  
 Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
 (301) 267-1438

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

Old Sycamore Island Club

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Sycamore Island in the Potomac River, opposite Glen Echo Heights

CITY, TOWN

Glen Echo

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Montgomery

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

(private canoe club)

NAME

Montgomery Sycamore Island Club, Inc.

Telephone #: 229-4921

STREET & NUMBER

Sycamore Island

CITY, TOWN

Glen Echo

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

Maryland

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

Liber #:

Folio #:

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Montgomery County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Rockville

STATE

Maryland

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**7 DESCRIPTION**

M:35-28

**CONDITION**

**CHECK ONE**

**CHECK ONE**

- EXCELLENT
- GOOD
- FAIR

- DETERIORATED
- RUINS
- UNEXPOSED

- UNALTERED
- ALTERED

- ORIGINAL SITE
- MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

The frame clubhouse is perched atop this small island, located near the Maryland shore in the Potomac River. It is accessible only by water. This is the third clubhouse to be built here—the two previous ones being destroyed by severed floods on the River. The previous club was carried away by high waters during the April 17, 1936 flood.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

M:35-28

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 10-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The club was organized in 1889 as a recreational/social organization-composed of native residents and others attracted by the nearby Glen Echo Chautauqua and Cabin John Hotel developments. It is probably the oldest and best-known organization of its type in the area. It remains a private canoe club today, and a care-taker lives in the clubhouse and sees that members (some of whom commute by canoe daily to the Central Intelligence Agency across the River) are ferried from shore to the Island.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

- 1) Incorporation Records-Mont. Co. Courthouse, Rockville, Md.
- 2) Article in MONT. CO. SENTINEL, ca. 1972 (See Mont. Co. Hist. Soc.)
- 3) Conversation (1975) with clubhouse resident.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE COUNTY

STATE COUNTY

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Michael F. Dwyer, Senior Park Historian

ORGANIZATION

M-NCPPC

DATE

9/11/74

STREET &amp; NUMBER

8787 Georgia Ave.

TELEPHONE

589-1480

CITY OR TOWN

Silver Spring

STATE

Maryland

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