

THE Villager

◦ NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS ◦

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President's Message

Walt Cooper

GREETINGS from your Village president! Ah, fall has arrived. For the Cooper-Barrett extended family this is a time of great excitement. From late September to late December we celebrate no fewer than eighteen birthdays and four wedding anniversaries in addition to the upcoming holidays. And somewhere in the middle of all that Jan will display her artworks at the annual Lake Barcroft Art League Holiday Art Sale, Sunday, December 8, and I will sing in two concerts with the Arlington Chorale on November 16 and December 7. To complement all this excitement, we, like all of you, now have the chance to walk or drive through Lake Barcroft and take in the beauty of our trees and the crisp, fresh air. I hope you'll find the time to enjoy this truly special time of the year in our wonderful neighborhood.

Year-End Charitable Giving!

The end of the year also brings with it the opportunity to give to your favorite charities. I hope you'll include the Village in your end-of-year giving plans. Our membership dues cover about half of our expenses. We try to cover the remainder through fundraising events and donations. Director Lisa DuBois does a fabulous job in setting up our fundraising events, and she has sent letters to more than 60 local businesses asking for support.



Family photo

We're big believers in building a strong support basis here in our local area. The Village is a 501c(3) non-profit organization, and donations are fully tax deductible.

Growing the Village

Our small but mighty Village includes 70 members today. We think we have a lot to offer folks, and we'd like to expand. As you know, we have reduced annual membership dues for social members to \$150 per person, down from \$300 per person and \$450 per household. We hope that this reduction will encourage people to join and remain in the Village. We've also begun to expand our activities (see below for a particularly exciting new program), and we've heightened the priority of our

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President's Message

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Keeping in Touch (KIT) program. In addition, having more members would enable us to staff our committees more fully and enhance the programs and services we provide. I ask you to join me in reaching out to neighbors who you think would be interested in joining the Village. (Note: People in adjacent neighborhoods are welcome to join the Village. Check with Cindy if you have questions about which neighborhoods adjoin Lake Barcroft.)

Our New Music Group

As I mentioned above, we have expanded the range of activities we offer Villagers. One of the most exciting new initiatives is the Village Music Group, led by Marcia Grabowski. The group meets monthly to perform for one another, discuss music topics,



Photo by Jan Barrett

Marcia Grabowski and Cathy Williams entertain the Village Music Group

and sing. Marcia is planning a first-ever holiday show for Villagers at Will O'Neil's home on December 14. Stay tuned for more details. This ought to be a lot of fun for everyone!

Keeping in Touch (KIT)

Our motto is "Neighbors Helping Neighbors." Our KIT program is fundamental to this idea. I met (via Zoom) with most of the KIT coordinators a few months back to become more familiar with the methods the coordinators use to stay in touch with their Villagers. Techniques range from the monthly coffees that Paul Napier and Charlotte Flounders hold to less formal, occasional visits and phone calls. I've asked Director Elizabeth Boris to serve as the liaison between the Board of Directors and the KIT coordinators. Elizabeth will keep the Board

informed on KIT activities at our regular Board meetings.

November Quarterly Meeting

On November 21, at 7 p.m. at the Mason District Government Center, Mark Mitchell, a Lake Barcroft resident who operates the Expedia Cruises office in Barcroft Plaza, will share information and ideas about increasingly popular cruise vacations. Should be an interesting and informative presentation that will help us all in planning our next vacations.

It's an honor and privilege to serve as your president. We're continuously trying to make the Village experience better for everyone, whether it's providing services or opportunities to participate in our many programs. Please let us know if there's anything you need from us.

Walt Cooper, *President*

THE Villager

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New Village Phone Number

Cindy Waters's (and the Village's) new phone number is (703) 424-1299. Please update your contacts and speed dial. The old phone number has been disconnected.

VILLIERS TRAVEL

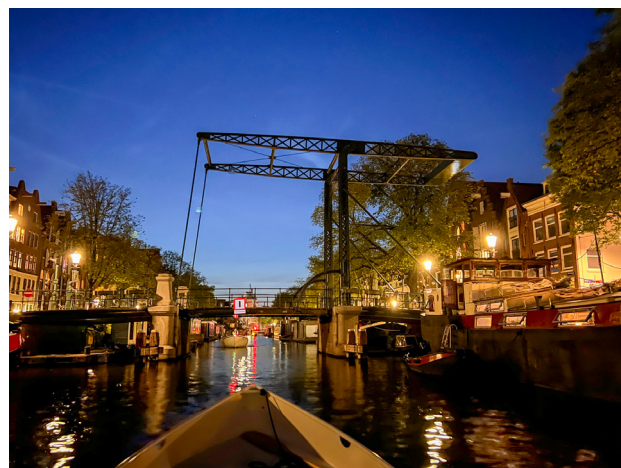
A Different Kind of Vacation

Don Christian

MOST PEOPLE'S IDEA of a vacation is to pack up and travel to an interesting location, run around and see the sights. My vacations consist mainly of sitting still and letting the sights come to me. Annually, I travel to Europe—mostly France—get on a canal boat and drift through the French countryside. My kids spend about a third or more of each year on their canal boat and I visit them for about two weeks late every summer. This year was no exception except, instead of France, I met them in Belgium. France was host to the Summer Olympics and all of France was expected to be crowded.

To be clear, I met them in Amsterdam and we traveled to Belgium. During the brief stay in the Netherlands, we visited the Van Gogh Museum, some castles

and took a personal cruise along the Amsterdam canals—a busman's holiday for canal cruisers? Once getting to the boat, I perch on the upper deck and watch the countryside leisurely pass by while my son, Kent, drives the boat and my daughter-in-law, Heather, acts as deck hand. Normally this would be the case but this year, there was a slight change. Rather than cruising from town to town, we moored in two charming Belgian cities, Ghent and Bruges. How nice it is to have one's own bunk and not have to pack and unpack daily as one moves from city to city. I rise, have a leisurely breakfast on board and then we discuss the



Amsterdam Canals at Night

day's activities. While both Ghent and Bruges are thriving, bustling cities, they also have quaint city centers which harken back to an era several centuries ago. Perhaps we will have a lunch in town at some cozy bistro. We certainly will see some museum, castle or church and finally wend our way back to the boat for Happy Hour.

Happy Hour is big with canal boaters. The boaters are a close-knit group who meet and re-meet each other as they cruise the canals—think of military families re-meeting during postings. If one doesn't know one's neighbor at the marina, one quickly gets acquainted. Net result, a joint Happy Hour. This is a wonderful way to meet foreign nationals and get their views on politics, restaurants and interesting places to see as well as tips on what to expect up ahead. This is also a great way to practice one's language skills, but to be honest, English is the



Kasteel de Haar, Utrecht

All photos by Kent Christian

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Belgium

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common denominator. And oh my, what delicious cheeses, beers and wines complement the gatherings. Next up is dinner. While Heather is a superb cook, the idea of my visit is to treat them to the marvels of local cuisine. We trust Google recommendations and have never been let down. Our meals are in small out-of-the-way restaurants off the tourist track. They are a real treat, very small and personal and very reasonably priced. And, in Europe, one is not expected to tip—the price listed on the menu is the total price you pay. I left a euro on the table after a very attentive waiter served us lunch and he chased after us to say we had left some change on the table. We had a hard time convincing him we left the euro for him in appreciation of his exceptional service.

What can I say about European museums and castles? They are spectacularly well organized. In one castle, the people watching



Ghent

the rooms were volunteers, each with a wealth of information. One such volunteer was a source of almost unlimited anecdotes regarding the castle, its reconstruction and its former inhabitants. A visit which might have taken an hour or two stretched into nearly a day-long visit. He was happy to talk and we were only too happy to hear his explanations and interesting tales. The museums curate their exhibits carefully.

There is the usual information posted beside painting—artist, medium, dates—but also there are large printed cards in all major languages. As you enter each room, you select a card and carry it with you as you view the paintings. The card will have paragraphs of interesting facts about each painting. As you leave the room, you replace the card and get a different one for the next room. You move at your own pace and spend as much time per painting as your interest prompts you. There are also audio guides to lecture you if that is what you prefer. I liked the big cards. I could stand back, admire each painting and learn about it. I didn't have to crowd up close and squint to read the printed material posted beside each painting. However, at one castle in Ghent, they took audio guides to a new level. You enter the room, tap the requisite number and listen to anecdotes—perhaps a bit risqué—about the medieval inhabitants. You certainly will leave chuckling.



Bruges

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Books we liked

September Favorites

Irish authors we like:

Friel, Brian, *Translations* (Jane)

Joyce, James, *Dubliners* (Walt)

Joyce, James, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Walt)

O'Casey, Sean, *The Plays* (Jane)

O'Connor, Frank, several books (Ellen)

Other books we've read this month:

Allende, Isabel, *The Wind Knows My Name* (Priscilla)

Camus, Albert, *The Stranger* (Walt)

Carroll, James, *The Cloister* (Sunny)

Everett, Percival, *Suder* (Walt)

Hughes, Kathryn, *Catland: Louis Wain and the Great Cat Mania* (Jane)

Kent, David J., *Lincoln: The Fire of Genius* (Cathy)

Larson, Erik, *Demon of Unrest* (Priscilla)

Lehane, Dennis, *Small Mercies* (Jane)

Mason, Daniel, *The Winter Soldier* (Ellen)

McCrum, Sharyn, *She Walks These Hills* (Jane)

Munro, Alice, *Dear Life* (Ellen)

Assignment from Ellen: Read a book you previously read (perhaps as a child or young adult) and describe how you think about the book now compared to your previous reading.

Interesting but TMI:

Cozzens, Peter: *A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, the Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South* (Priscilla)

Do you like mysteries? The Village Mystery Book Club will be discussing *The Redbreast* by Jo Nesbo on November 25 at the Culmore Community Library.



Belgium

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What else can I say? Heather, Kent and I all like visiting churches. I like architectural history, having studied art history in university. All three of us find Romanesque and Gothic architecture fascinating.

All good trips come to an end and my last night on board the boat is spent packing my suitcase. I am the designated mule, responsible for hauling as many bottles of wine back to the States as my suitcase will hold—clothing be damned. Oh well, it's a small price to pay for a fortnight of enjoyable travel with my favorite kids. ■

The Arlington Chorale, which was founded in 1966 as the Metropolitan Chorus, performs a diverse repertoire that includes well-known masterpieces by composers such as Haydn, Mozart, and Brahms, along with contemporary works that address pressing societal issues. (In 2024, the Chorale received the Greater Washington D.C. Choral Excellence "Ovation" Award for Exemplary Community Engagement, recognizing its dedication to connecting with the community through music.) I decided to audition this past summer and somehow managed to do well enough to land a spot as a tenor. I'm really excited about this year's program, which includes *Carmina Burana* with the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra and other commissioned works. Coming up soon: Holiday music on Saturday, December 7 at Westover Baptist Church, beginning at 5 pm. To learn more about the Chorale and to get tickets, go to www.arlingtonchorale.org. The event is entitled "Enchant." Tickets are \$25; those age 17 and under are admitted free of charge. I hope to see you there!

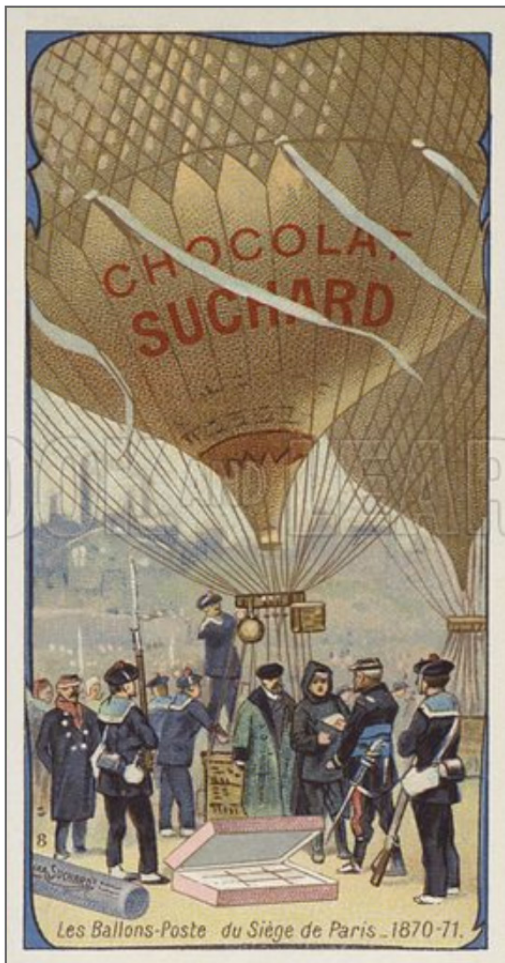
Walt Cooper

The Villagers and Their Hobbies

BALLOON MAIL

First, a bit of history. France was worried about the rising power of Prussia and its allies in the North German Confederation. In July of 1870, France and Prussia declared war on each other. Prussia quickly overpowered France and by September, the French emperor was a Prussian prisoner and the French army routed. By mid-September, 1870, Paris was completely encircled and totally cut off from the rest of France. All means of communication were severed. It was virtually impossible to enter or leave Paris.

A French balloonist, Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, aka Nadar,



A balloon prepares to lift off.



A letter posted by balloon from my collection (actual size)

suggested to the authorities that the tethered hot air or gas balloons being used for observing troop movements could also be used in free flight to float over the Prussian lines and land in unoccupied France. A balloon could carry a significant weight load and be used to transport mail, carrier pigeons and even the occasional person. The experiment worked and Jean Duruof, an experienced balloonist, was able

to pilot his balloon, the Neptune, with a 125 kilo load of mail to a town close to Evreux in unoccupied France. Communication problem solved—or maybe not. Yes, the balloon could soar over the enemy lines at an altitude above the reach of musket fire but balloons couldn't be steered. A balloon is at the mercy of the prevailing winds. And a second problem—having once left Paris,

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Balloon Mail

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it was almost impossible for the pilot to return to the city. Making balloons was not a problem since there were plenty of seamstresses in Paris and the now empty train stations provided ample space for their construction. But, in no time, experienced balloonists were in short supply. There were plenty of thrill seekers who were only too happy to volunteer as pilots. But once one left the immediate environs of the city, the countryside looked very different from the air and the unskilled pilots quickly lost their bearings. The balloon was now sailing over unfamiliar territory. Were those enemy soldiers down below or was that friendly territory? Was the balloon even still in France?

Some 66 balloons were sent aloft during the time Paris was under siege—mid-September 1870 through the end of January 1871 when France capitulated. A few balloons were shot down by enemy fire especially when the Prussians developed a cannon which could reach an overhead balloon—probably the first ever use of an anti-aircraft gun. Some balloons floated out to sea and were ditched in the ocean. Most of the time, the slow moving balloon and cargo could be rescued by boat. One balloon even drifted as far as Norway. That is a story in itself. Nevertheless, the experiment was a success. One hundred sixty-four passengers, 381 homing pigeons, 5 dogs and over 2 million letters and other mail made it out of the city to an unoccupied town where the mail could be forwarded by regular postal means to its ultimate des-

tination.

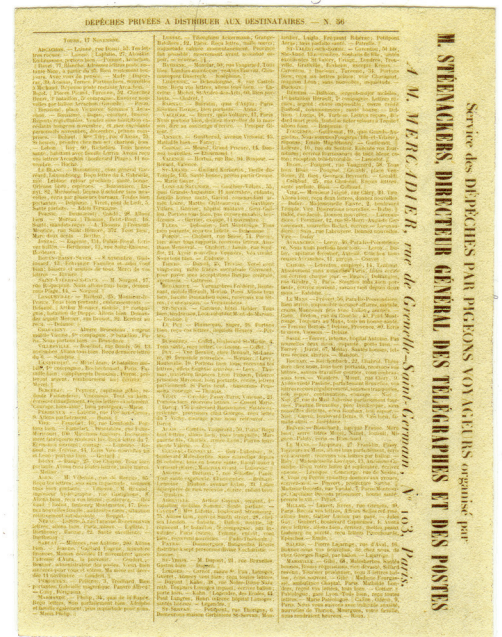
The problem was the reverse direction—how to get mail into the city. Anyone caught trying to enter Paris could be shot as a spy and balloons couldn't be steered into the city. Each sortie from Paris was a one-way trip.

One idea was to seal letters in a hollow zinc ball, and float the ball down the Seine into Paris but attempts to catch the balls, either floating or rolling along the river bed, was a losing proposition. Most of the balls were missed and some were found years later as far away as the sea coast!

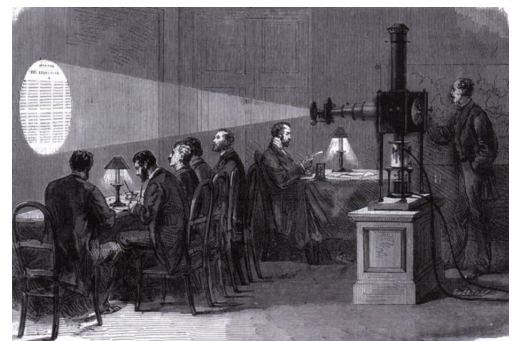


A hollow zinc ball—une boule de Moulins

Homing pigeons could work but how much weight could one pigeon carry and still fly? There was a solution. Letters and information could be transcribed and printed on large sheets of paper. The sheets could be photographed and reduced to tiny piece of film which would fit in a capsule attached to the pigeon's leg. Once in Paris, these films were projected on to a screen, enlarging them. Then, legions of postal clerks manually transcribed the microfilmed letters as full-sized documents and delivered them to the besieged



A series of letters transcribed onto a single sheet of photographic paper. Actual size of film: 1 3/16" x 1 9/16".



Clerks copying the letters from the film carried by the pigeon.

citizens. Since many copies of the microfilms could be made, multiple copies could be sent of each film. Thus, if one pigeon was shot by farmers as food or missed Paris for some reason, enough copies of the film would successfully make it into the city for transcription.

These efforts have proved to be a source of great interest to collectors of French postal history. First, collectors, some successfully, tried to obtain a sample letter carried by each of the balloons which made it to safety, *Ballon monté*. Others have tried to get

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Balloon Mail

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sample letters which were sent via zinc balls, Boules de Moulins. Finally, examples of the miniature films carried by homing pigeons exist but the photographic paper has faded badly over the 100 years plus since they were mailed. See what rabbit holes can happen if one is a collector of French postal history?

Don Christian

Editor's note: the material for this brief summation was gleaned from these articles:

"L'histoire héroïque des ballons montés" Newsletter de la maison Calves #21

"Ballooning Over Bullets, and Other Escapes From the Siege of Paris" <https://www.the-low-countries.com>

"Ballons Montés of the Paris Siege" <https://www.warwickandwarwick.com>

In Memoriam:

Rosalind (Rosie) Barton

Rosie was an original member of the Village. She especially enjoyed attending the anniversary parties and some of the earliest coffees, always with a beaming smile. At the time of her passing in August, she was 100 years old. A private family memorial service was held recently.

MaryJo Wasylyk

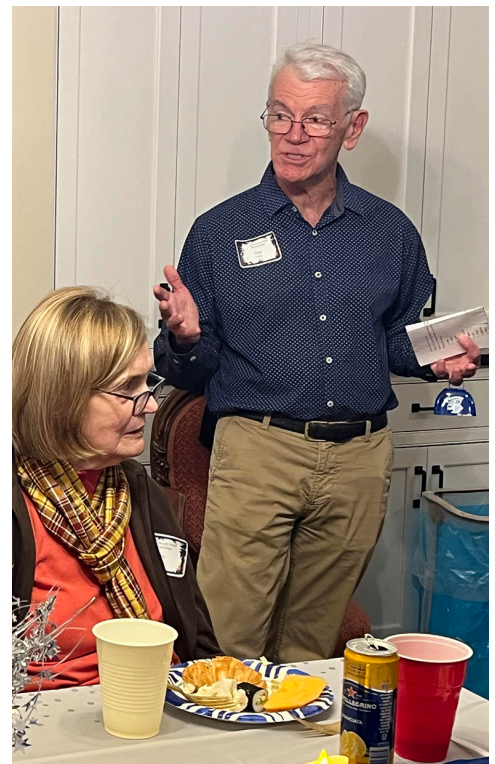
MaryJo and her late husband, Bill, were also very early members of the Village. MaryJo enjoyed listening to opera with some fellow Villagers. She was a regular participant in the Spanish language group. MaryJo was 97 years old.



L to R: Walt Cooper, Will O'Neil, Sam Rothman, Clyde Williams and Mike Gaffen at Hong Kong Pearl Seafood for the Silver Fox Luncheon



Left: Village members and guests enjoy the food and company at the Mix and Mingle event at the home of Board member Lisa DuBois. Right: President Walt Cooper welcomes members and guests.



Both photos by Jan Barrett