



# *The Sycamore Islander*

June, 1999

Volume 78, No. 6

## **June Meeting**

The May monthly meeting voted on a number of proposals for Standing Rules changes as were listed in last month's *Islander*. Guest Cards will now only be issued to those on the waiting list between January and March -- no more this year for new applicants. The proposals banning playing amplified audio equipment on the Island and removing one's own trash were passed. The "Fundraising" proposal lacked the correct wording and was returned to committee for revision.

**The June meeting be held on the Island at 8:00 p.m. on June 9** and will take up the "Fundraising" proposal for more debate. Any members interested in this and other general aspects of the Island's administration are, as always, invited and encouraged to attend.

## **Minutes: May 12 Meeting**

**Attendance:** Tryon Wells, Dave Winer, Jane Winer, Johnna Robinson, Jinny Jones, George Loeb, Marcia Loeb, Tom Richards, Blair Bower, John Matthews, Pat Roth, Doc Taliaferro, Holly Syrrakos

President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order at

8:10 p.m.

The membership approved the Minutes of the previous meeting. However, it was noted that two meetings ago (March), addresses for new members were omitted from the Membership report.

**Communications:** Letters from Blair Bower and Al Brown expressed their opinions in opposition to members using the Island facilities to raise funds for other organizations. [Discussed more generally later in the meeting.] Charles Bookman wrote to resign his membership. Bill Whalen, who is compiling a list of canoe club websites, had great praise for the Sycamore Island site—he had a virtual Sycamore moment. Peggy Thomson sent a message noting the absence of the Spring Flower Walk and suggested perhaps the Island had forgotten to ask Ellen Richards and Joan Heidemann to do one. This was inadvertent and the meeting thought it would be good to have a walk next spring.

**Treasurer's Report:** Johnna Robinson reported that at the end of April, the Club is on track with its spending. There is \$33,000 in the bank and \$40,000 in a self-insurance fund.

**May Minutes (continued)**

*The Sycamore Islander* is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Articles, photographic essays, drawings, announcements, letters to the editors— any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list— are welcome and should be sent to the Editors, Jane and David Winer, 5927 Onondaga Road, Bethesda, MD 20816. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to davidwiner@erols.com in all common formats. The deadline for inclusion in a particular issue is receipt at the Editors' address ten days prior to the second-Wednesday monthly meeting of the club; to aid planning, earlier submissions are

**Masthead: "Coming Across" Computer rendering in 7 levels of paper cutout, from a photo, by David Winer**

**Financial Secretary's Report:** In April, Jinny Jones deposited \$1175. She also transferred \$6000 to the Merrill Lynch savings account, not yet credited in the Treasurer's report.

**The Islander:** David and Jane Winer said that the May Islander weighed more than an ounce and so was a more expensive mailing than usual.

**Canoe Chair's Report:** David Winer had signs made pointing out that canoes with Sycamore Island decals are Club canoes and may be used by members and their guests, while all other boats are privately owned.

**Captain's Report:** John Matthews noted that the electrical line above the path on the hill needs to be raised and is looking for a volunteer to help. He also said there should be another bell attached to the ferry bell line, so that caretakers can be free to walk further from the house and still hear the ringing. He will look for a ship's bell as an auxiliary. There was general discussion about repairing picnic tables and Tryon will work with John on the arrangements. John also noted that the wood floor in the clubhouse needs to be oiled and was given permission to hire someone to do the job.

**Entertainment Committee Report:** George and Marcia Loeb reminded the meeting that it was time to plan the upcoming Regatta. The sense was to hold it in August or September, but no later than Labor Day weekend.

The Canoe Cruiser's Association Down River Race was scheduled for May 23, with the Club traditionally hosting the Finish.

There was some discussion about scheduling an Old Timer's potluck, since the last one was in Oct.

**Old Business: Standing Rules Changes:**

Rule 6. Guest Cards

This change passed 8-2. The discussion reflected a sense that the Island is crowded and this would limit immediate access. The rule now reads:

"Guest cards may only be issued between January

1 and March 31. Upon request of an applicant for membership who is in good standing, the Membership Secretary may issue to such applicant a guest card valid for the year in which issued."

*Anti-Fundraising proposal:* The sense of the meeting was that members should not be able to use their membership to raise funds for other organizations or for themselves. There was some discussion about whether this should be a change to the By-laws or just the Standing Rules. The motion was withdrawn and will be re-drafted.

*Rule 10. Conduct on the Islands--*These changes passed unanimously. The rule now reads:

d. No playing of amplified audio equipment shall be permitted on the Islands unless approved for a large party by the members in meeting assembled.

e. All members are required to remove any trash from club property that was produced from their visit to the Islands.

*Rule 11. Clubhouse Rules--*This change passed 5-4.

b. Persons remaining overnight on the Islands shall not use the kitchen facilities between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., or make any avoidable noise in or near the clubhouse during those hours;

*Rule 3M. Supervisor of Camping and Parties--*The motion failed for lack of a majority on a 4-4 vote. This proposal was to have the Party Chair assign campsites.

**New Business:**

*Standing Rule Change:* Under the Guest Card rule, David Winer proposes the following:

"Guest Card holders who are single, may bring a friend while visiting the Island."

David points out that families holding a Guest Card are entitled to bring their entire family while single people must come to the Island alone because they are not allowed to bring any guests at all. This will be voted on at the June meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be on June 9 at 8:00 p.m. on the Island, water level permitting.

—Holly Syrrakos, Acting Recording Secretary

## A Survey Conducted by Doc

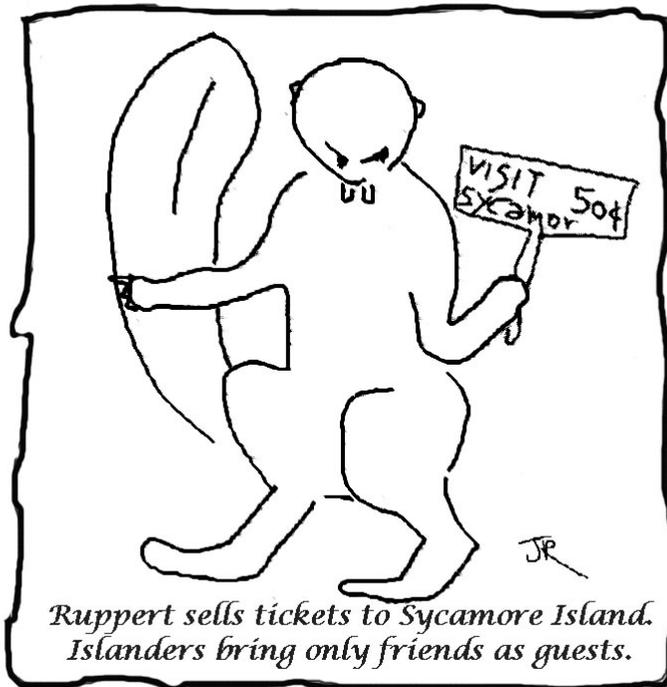
Several Members have requested that the Caretaker survey the records to investigate the premise that there are Members who only use the Island for large parties or other special social events such as camping. Specifically, the question asked was, do many Members use the Island only for these large social activities, and what would be the impact if a rule were introduced limiting large parties and camping to Members who have in the preceding year contributed to the club by participating in one of the following: a) a workfest, b) coming to a meeting, c) serving in an office, or d) serving as a substitute caretaker? Keep in mind that there is a margin of error, and that inexact records would suggest that if anything the number of Members having large parties who made no service contribution may be slightly inflated. Still, the numbers were surprising:

In 1997, of 42 events, 17 were by Members making no service contribution, or 40%.

In 1998, of 38 events, 19 were by Members making no service contribution, or 50%.

In 1999, of 15 events, 7 were by Members making no service contribution, or 46%.

## *Ruppert*



*Editors's note: Johnna Robinson's depictions of the antics of Ruppert, Sycamore Island's nefarious beaver, will continue under this new title, rather than the previous heading of Johnna's Jottings.*

# Bluebells Ringing on Sycamore Island

by Barbara Tufty

The bluebells on the island were so profuse and spectacular that bright morning of April 18, I could clearly see them even as we walked down the steep bank of the opposite shore toward the ferry. And as hostess Pat Roth swung the raft hand over hand along the rope against the stiff cold wind and running current, I could hardly wait until we touched land and I could walk out among them.

The splendid swath of bluebells spread across the island in patches so numerous and thick, I had to step carefully to keep from treading on them. Then I had to be cautious about the hundreds of delicate spring beauties that spread in pale pink and white patches among the bells.

As I edged cautiously around two Canada geese feeding on island tufts of grass in the sea of bluebells, I stopped and easily counted some ten different species of wildflowers within a diameter of 10-15 feet around me. I felt I was standing on a 13<sup>th</sup> century French tapestry in the middle of a thick carpet of wildflowers. Here at my feet were medleys of snow-on-the-mountain, several species of violet, common deep purple and cream, and wild blue phlox. Indian strawberries were just beginning to show their yellow blossoms.

Some plants were not yet in bloom, but the dappled leaves of trout lily were out, as were the finely divided leaves of Dutchman's breeches—or maybe of squirrel corn—both have similar leaves, and it was too early for me to identify them—maybe both grow on the island.

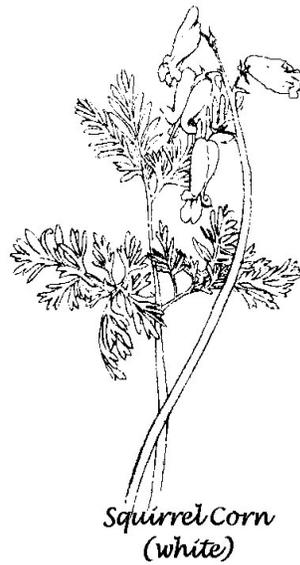


*Trout Lily*  
(yellow)

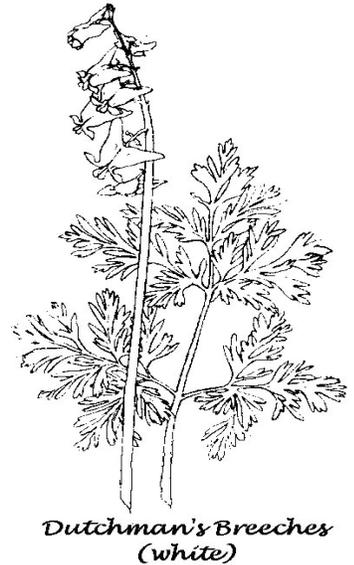
Early meadow rue, Solomon's seal, false Solomon's seal, water hemlock, and Virginia waterleaf also had not yet blossomed, although I could see tiny green buds dangling beneath the stem of the Solomon's seal. Jewelweed was also spreading out its pale green round leaves. Farther along downstream I held my breath at the sight of an uncommon treasure—

three dark maroon erect blossoms of the trillium called toadshade!

I continued to walk on, amazed at the wealth of Sycamore Island's wildflowers, most of which were



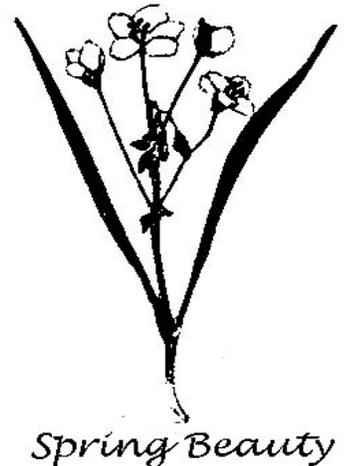
*Squirrel Corn*  
(white)



*Dutchman's Breeches*  
(white)

native species..Tufts of tiny pale yellow corydalis were tucked here and there, and gill-over-the-ground was showing purple.

Of course there were a few rogue villains showing their heads; the delicate white crowns of garlic mustard were springing up everywhere—a member of the mustard family that indeed does taste somewhat like garlic and mustard! But it is an alien, not a native wildflower. Pull it up before it continues aggressively taking over the indigenous wildflowers. The lesser celandine, that yellow buttercup species shining like molten gold, also is an aggressive alien, Enjoy them in small doses, but don't let them spread over your island. They are bad news, and already are causing problems in local areas like along the towpath or in Rock Creek Park where they are pushing out the native wildflowers. Later on in summer, this lesser celandine disappears into the earth---leaves, blossoms and all---but their roots remain flourishing underground to create vigorous plants that pop up next spring, taking



*Spring Beauty*

more space.

Thank you, Pat! Thank you, Sycamore Island!

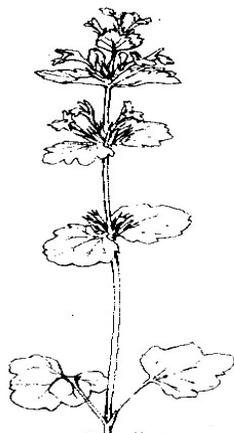
All together, here's what I counted in about half an hour—and I'm sure I may have missed many more.

**Wildflowers:**

- Virginia bluebell— *Mertensia virginica*
- Spring beauty— *Claytonia virginica*
- Snow-on-the-mountain— *Euphorbia marginata*  
(escaped from cultivation)
- Aborted buttercup— *Ranunculus abortivus*
- Yellow corydalis— *Corydalis flavula*
- Wild strawberry— *Fragaria virginiana*
- Solomon's seal— *Polygonatum biflorum*
- Toadflax— *Trillium sessile*
- Gill-over-the-ground; ground ivy—  
*Glechoma hederaceae*
- Henbit— *Lamium amplexicaule* (introduced)



Ground Ivy  
(blue or violet)



Henbit

- Indian strawberry— *Duchesnea indica* (introduced)
- Lesser celandine— *Ranunculus ficaria* (introduced)
- Garlic mustard— *Alliaria petiolata* (introduced)

**Leaves of :**

- Dutchman's breeches— *Dicentra cucullaria*  
and/or
- Squirrel corn— *Dicentra canadensis*
- Early meadow rue— *Thalictrum dioicum*
- Virginia waterleaf— *Hydrophyllum virginianum*  
or perhaps it is
- Appendaged waterleaf— *H. appenediculatum*
- False Solomon's seal— *Smilacina racemosa*

- Perfoliate bellwort— *Uvularia perfoliata*
- Jewelweed, spotted or pale— *Impatiens ssp.*

**Wildflowers: A Sycamore Heritage**

The Sycamore Island Club sponsored Wild Flower Walks in the spring for many years, a tradition initiated by Islander Phil Stone and continued until recently by Ellen Richards and Joan Heideman. Phil was a local authority on trees and flowers, and his walks attracted more than just Sycamore members. People would meet on the towpath at the Island when the bluebells were in bloom and then, rain or shine, the group would walk north until hunger drove them back to the Island for a picnic and a continuation of the flower tour.

A very careful naturalist, very strict, as Joan recalls, Phil required a plant to be in bloom for an identification. So does visitor Barbara Tufty--when the plants under consideration are Squirrel Corn and Dutchman's Breeches!

Barbara Tufty, who is Conservation Editor for the Audubon Naturalist Society, is a co-author of *Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area* (Johns Hopkins University Press). We thank Barbara for her article, which reminds us of a wonderful Sycamore Island tradition started by Phil Stone and continued by Ellen Richards and Joan Heideman, faithful guides to our wildflowers.

— Jane Winer

## Camping on Rupperts Island

A late-afternoon rainshower failed to dampen our enthusiasm as Robert, Chris Hepp and I piled our gear into the rear canoe and set out for Rupperts Island on our camping expedition. The sky was dull gray and the river running fiercely, very high after April rains. Paddling furiously, we made slow headway up the creek and pulled in at an inviting spot. It was nesting season and Rupperts was alive with Canada geese, who clearly had mixed feelings about their new nesting holes.

Our site was excellent but lacked stones to make a fireplace. While I unloaded and erected our tent (being careful to avoid the poison ivy endemic to the island), the more adventurous boys took one canoe for a stone-



**Reward for wilderness masons: a hot supper around the campfire.**

hunting reconnoitre, returning with the news that the ideal rocks were too large to carry. As we ventured out together I was even more impressed with the speed of the river which made it difficult to navigate upstream around Rupperts, but we returned from its upper end with the ideal rocks after a long and muddy struggle to load them. Now we could plan dinner -- steak, spaghetti and tea, with toasted marshmallows to conclude. As the dusk faded into night we sat by our fire, relishing the wildness and silence of Rupperts, and turned in. The silence was briefly broken by ghost noises made by Doc from the upper end of Sycamore, but alas, the boys had dozed off and to me it sounded

like party-noise, rather than ghost-noise. Sorry Doc, you'll have to practice more on your ghouling!

Morning's onset was signalled by a spectacular chorus of bird calls, one on top of the other, all competing and all different. I lay in my sleeping bag, enchanted by the feathered choir while the boys built a fire, made tea (who says 11 year olds can't be trained?) and headed off to explore. Moving with caution, they counted fifteen nesting geese, including one who had settled in an old tire. It was the best time to view Rupperts - the trees were still leafless and the woods were full of bluebells glowing in the slanting rays of early morning sun. Embarking again, we tried once more to circumnavigate the island against the press of the river but without success, and returned to find that an army of geese had invaded our campsite. Putting on a show of determination we advanced deliberately, and thankfully they retreated.

It was now time for brunch and the boys headed downstream to pick up Caroline and Michael and, more importantly, their bag of fresh Sunday morning bagels -- a touch of civilization coming to Rupperts.



**Before packing , one more snapshot for the**

Loading up, we then returned downstream to Sycamore and rearity, bequeathing our hard-won fireplace as a legacy to future campers.

— Alan Gelb

## Notes From The Island

— By Doc Talliaferro

It was such a disturbing sound that I went immediately to investigate. A lone gosling was swimming upstream in the middle of the slough between the Island and the towpath, obviously lost and screaming for its Mother in a most pathetic way. It was heartbreaking to observe, as several times he would come to the Island and walk up a little way before returning to the water. Surely keeping to the water was a survival trait, as he never stopped squealing and soon several crows were attracted. After a while the crows started diving on the gosling, who had learned to duck by diving below the water. The gosling would always surface screaming, and it seemed a sure bet he would tire before the crows, who were taking turns. Fortunately, three mature geese swam by, making for Ruppert's Island, and although the crows then gave up, the gosling was last seen following but falling further and further behind, and mindful of the juvenile eagles seen a little earlier by Johnna Robinson, I was sure I would never see that gosling again.

Later in the day I went with Kim Stanton to feed the goose nesting in the root ball of the fallen sycamore. The geese have now been spoiled by Members following this last busy weekend, because although they usually ignore me, last Monday morning as I came out the door the first time, every goose on the Island started for me!!! But as Kim and I started to edge closer to the nest, the goose became agitated in a way we had never seen, shrieking alarm in such a way that papa goose came belligerently flying in. We backed off confused, as many had fed the nesting goose... until we saw it... a black serpent's head slithering into the nest. It was Blackie, the

Island's own 5 foot black snake. Well of course there was only one thing to do, and by the time we got up and into position by the nest, it was a sight to behold. Mama goose had abandoned the nest, and thus the five eggs could be seen... with Blackie latched on to one. The sight should have been alarming, but was instead comical... for you see... that was one optimistic snake. I mean, do you know how large a goose egg is? Blackie could only get his mouth partially onto, not around, the smallest end, unhinged jaw and all. Any impulse to see what might happen was quickly squelched by the mounting goose ruckus, so Blackie was detached and removed to the end of the Island.

It was dusk of this same day when the sound was heard again... the lost gosling had survived many hours and had returned and was sailing and screaming down the middle of the slough. This time there were families of geese on the Island, and spotting one he quickly came ashore and tried to join other goslings near the ferry. But sad to say, he was driven off by the Mother goose... truly heartrending to watch. I had turned to go to the house for bread when the timbre of his screaming changed and turning I saw him streak across the lawn and through the canoe shed. When I reached the other side of the Island I saw him nestled next to his Mom. So much real life drama you might think... but hey... just another day on your island.

Wild Canada geese usually live five to ten years, although in protected environments they may live 20 to 40 years. They can weigh between six and fifteen pounds, and adults eat about half a pound of food a day. During their mid-summer moulting, they shed their flight feathers and are unable to fly for a month. This is already starting to happen on the

Island.

### Notes from the Island (continued)

Migrant geese begin breeding when they are three or four years old, and if possible will nest in the same spot every year. The female will lay four to eight eggs which will hatch in about 28 days. Weighing three to four ounces when born, the goslings can reach seven pounds after eight weeks. The geese that come to Maryland tend to come from the Ungava peninsula area of Quebec Province of



One of our Caretaker's neighbors and friend— "Rocky."

—Photo By Doc Talliaferro

became understandable, as I now realize that squirrels I have seen entering only half way into north facing holes have probably been drinking from their own tree top ponds. One can imagine entire microcosms hidden away in the tree tops.

Last month's observation that the lack of flooding this last year has caused the Island to re-seed itself has more evidence: poison ivy is popping up everywhere. We are killing it as soon as it is seen, so report any to the Caretaker. This is even more true of kudzu. I have left some kudzu that has sprouted near the wooden walkway, so test yourself to see if you can recognize it when you come, and feel free to pull up any you may see on the Island. Also different this year is the amount of vegetation both in the water and near the water's edge, more examples of the on going recovery from the '96 floods... and a reminder of just how much of an impact such a flood can have and how long the return to normalcy can take.

Canada.

On the fallen sycamore tree can be seen a large hole on the down river side, a hole that must once have been 50 feet up and similar to many that can be seen when the leaves are down, as sycamore trees seem to be a tree of choice for critter housing. Investigating what I took to be an empty "house," I found the cavity to be huge on the inside of the trunk, extending a couple of feet on each side of the opening. I also found it to be full of water, which was a surprise, no doubt because of its new orientation after the tree had fallen. Suddenly certain squirrel behavior

One recently over-heard conversation worth passing along was that of a Member suggesting to children going off to college that they should make the effort to get on the waiting list soon in light of the long wait. Members should be reminded that when your children grow up and leave home they lose their right to come to the Island except as guests. There are of course many instances of different generations of the same family having Membership, but in times gone by it did not require the same amount of pre-planning that is necessary today.

## Sunday Relief

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Name(s)</b>	<b>Telephone</b>
June 6	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Eric Simpson Thorburn Reid	703-821-7556 202-363-8554
June 13	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Lyle Blanchard Dana Boyd	202-364-9579 301-229-3496
June 20	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Judy Hope Susanna & John Membrino	202-232-2445 301-229-1154
June 27	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Fern Ingersoll Liz & Dallas Jones	301-270-5219 301 571-4942

**Call Ann Marie Cunningham (703) 876-9165 or send a note to [annmarie.cunningham@lmco.com](mailto:annmarie.cunningham@lmco.com) to volunteer for caretaking in July.**

## Large

<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>What</b>
Lisa Kliefoth	June 4 from 1 to 2:30	about 14 people for a child's birthday party
Dan Dozier	June 5-6	about 40 cub scouts overnight camping
Patricias Roth	June 8 from noon to 3:00pm	a retirement party with about 12 guests.
Bruce Gaber	June 13 from 9:00 to dusk	about 15 adults in contemplative cooking
Richard Lodish	June 14 from 12:00 to 3:00	about 32 persons for retirement party
Mardy Burgess	June 19-20 (to 2:00 p.m.)	about 20 young people camping



## *The Sycamore Islander*

6607 Marywood Road  
Bethesda, MD, 20817

*http://www.*

**Address Service**

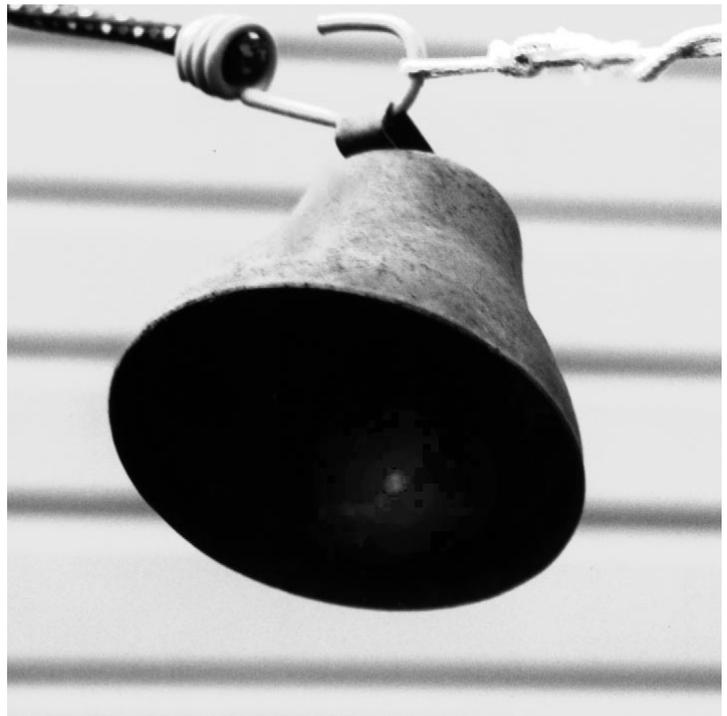
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### **This Issue:**

- A visitor is impressed with the wildflowers growing on Sycamore Island.
- Campers on Rupperts, the club's wild island, ignore ghostly warnings— and survive to tell the tale.
- Guest Cards are not to be issued this year for new applicants. Other concerns about Guest Card are raised (see Minutes of the May meeting).
- Issues of "Fundraising" or similar activities are still in the fore.



Communications Technology : Sycamore Island Style.  
(Soon to be improved, also in Sycamore Island Style—  
see Captain's Report in the Minutes.)