

# THE Waddletown Gazette

*The Voice of our Community, Marsh and Meadow*

## Editor’s Splash

**The truth isn’t always pretty, but as long as there is mud in the pond, we will dig through it!**




## Where to find us

**Pin your comments to The Old Willow and we will collect them!**

**First Storm Puts It to the Test: New 'Grippier' Boardwalk Faces Its Day of Reckoning as Rain Returns to the Marsh"**

**Regatta Reversal: Co-Judges Strip Duke Featherweight of His First Call, Sports Desk 'Devastated but Dignified**

**Numbered and Numb: Mrs. Mallard's New Ticket System Debuts to Its Own Small Riot**

**Duckling Uprising: Schoolhouse Pupils Stage a Sit-In After Term Four Opens With a Ban on the Beloved Mud-Sliding Championship**

**Ink Wars, Round Two: Bitter-Bill and Roxy's Uneasy Truce Collapses Over a Missing Byline**




***Grumblings from the Ruffled Feather***

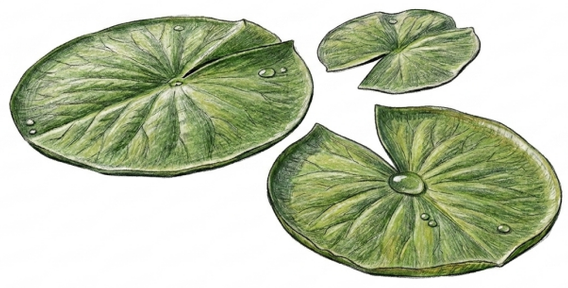
***By Barnaby Bitter-Bill***

The festivities are over, the cobwebs are down, and I am pleased to report that I watched every minute of Saturday night from my window with the curtains drawn, as promised, and counted the casualties. There were **four:** one duckling who tripped over his own turtle shell, one council member who tried to shake hands with the Spooky Sentinel, a tray of candied snails dropped outright in Market Square, and, late in the evening, my own composure. I will not elaborate.

The Sentinel itself was unveiled at dusk to a crowd I can only call far too large. My log stood upright for eleven minutes, by Duke Featherweight's stopwatch, which he insisted on announcing to everyone nearby, and then began a slow, dignified lean toward the water that was greeted by cheering. I want it noted, for the record, that this is the second time in two months that my log has been moved without my consent and the first time anyone has applauded it. The lily pad eyes held. The grin did not read as menacing then either. A fan club, I am told, has since formed. I am not a member.

As for the rest, the ducklings were louder than any creature of their size has a right to be, the candied snails sold out by seven, and Roxy Ripple-Maker came to the parade dressed as "a retiring editor," complete with a gold watch and a cardboard desk, a costume she has apparently been preparing since September. I am told it won second place. I am told, on good authority, that the judges were afraid to give her first. Sort yourselves out, Waddletown, or the next thing you read from this desk will be my resignation letter, delivered to your door in a candied snail shell, which I understand is now the fashion.



## *New “Grippier” Boardwalk Faces its Day*

*By Quillan Swamp-Scribe*

First Storm Puts It to the Test: New ‘Grippier’ Boardwalk Faces Its Day of Reckoning as Rain Returns to the Marsh

The first real rain since the ribbon-cutting arrived on Tuesday just before dawn, and by half past six a crowd had gathered along Lilypad Lane that this desk can only describe as hopeful in the way a crowd is hopeful at a car crash. Council members stood at the head of the walkway in matching raincoats, the same elderly duck couple from every previous unveiling held their usual position at the rail, and this desk, true to its promise of last month, stood close enough to take notes and far enough to leave.

The verdict, delivered within four minutes of the first footfall, was that the boardwalk is no longer slippery. It is, however, a great deal else. The “specialised traction compound” that the council promised would hold webbed feet firmly in place has done precisely that, and then some: three ducklings crossing on their way to school had to be lifted off the planks one foot at a time, a visiting heron was reported to be “still in the middle somewhere,” and a senior resident’s walking cane, planted for balance, came free only after what witnesses called a considerable effort and a sound like a cork leaving a bottle. “It’s certainly not slippery,” offered one councilmember to a reporter, in what this desk notes was the first sentence of the morning delivered entirely standing still.

By eight the council had issued a statement describing the test as “a clear success against the stated objective,” and promised a review “of the grip level” at the next Town Pond summit. Barnaby Bitter-Bill, viewing the scene from the far bank, was heard to remark that last month’s boardwalk had been quicksand with better marketing and that this one was flypaper with a ribbon on it. The Gazette will be back on the next wet morning, wearing our oldest feet.



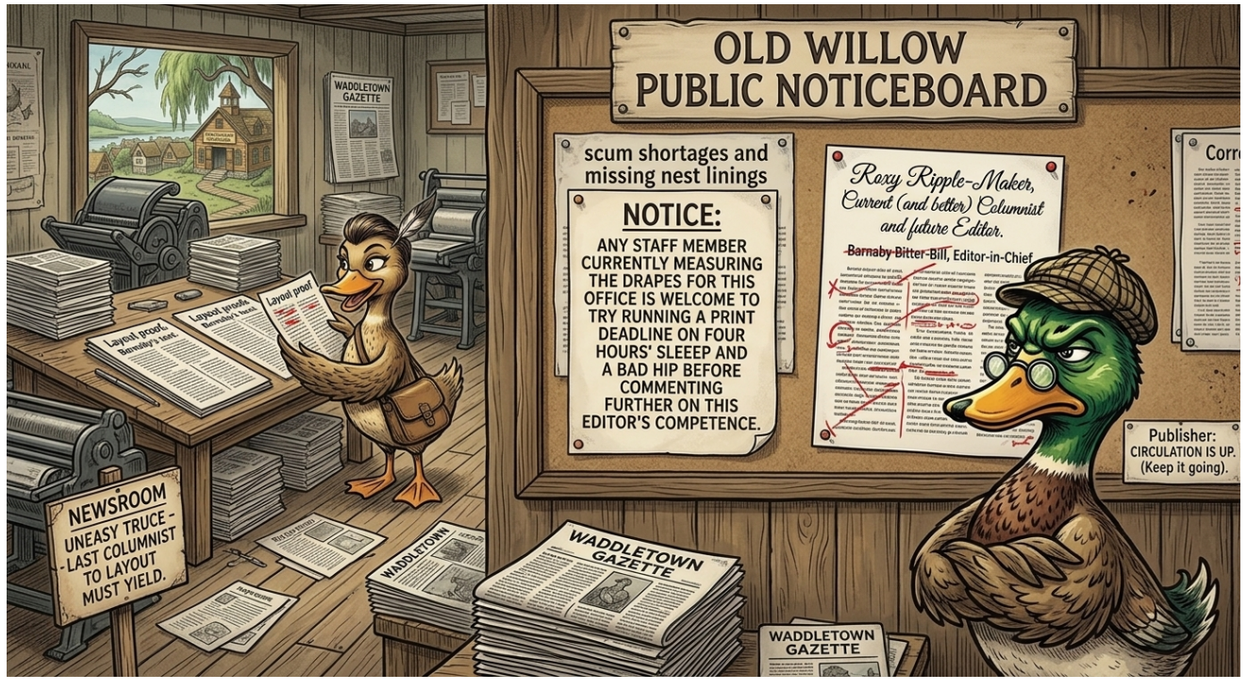
## *Ink Wars: Roxy Ripple-Maker and Bitter-Bill Trade Barbs in Print as Newsroom Rivalry Boils Over*

***By Quillan Swamp-Scribe***

The ceasefire between Editor-in-Chief Barnaby Bitter-Bill and columnist Roxy Ripple-Maker, which this desk described last month as “uneasy,” lasted exactly until Thursday evening, when the proof of this issue’s Spilling the Algae column arrived on the layout table with everything in place but the name. The headline, the text and the small drawing of a wilted lily pad were all there. Beneath them, where “By Roxy Ripple-Maker” has appeared in every issue of this paper, there was a neat, empty strip of paper about the width of a fingernail.

Roxy’s account of events, delivered in the print room at some volume, was that the byline had been “removed with scissors and what I can only describe as personal satisfaction.” Bitter-Bill’s account, delivered in writing and slid under the door of her desk, was that he “does not own scissors, has never owned scissors, and was at the time engaged in a matter of editorial integrity involving a pumpkin.” Neither account has been confirmed. Roxy has since restored her name in a hand-lettered banner pinned above the layout table, and Bitter-Bill has responded by pinning, beneath it, the sign that appeared on the Old Willow last month, now with a cheerful new line at the bottom reading, “Names are earned.”

This desk has been asked by the publisher, who again declined to attend in person, to report that the matter is “under review,” and that a decision will be made “by the year-end edition.” Asked what that might involve, the publisher said only, from behind a door, that circulation was up. Neither combatant has yet claimed victory. Both have been seen, separately and within four minutes of each other, in the print room with a ruler.



Spilling the Algae
Roxy Ripple Maker

## Duckling Uprising: Schoolhouse Pupils Stage a Sit-In After Term Four Opens With a Ban on the Beloved Mud-Sliding Championship

**By Roxy Ripple Maker**

Darlings, I have covered a great many scandals in my time, but none has ever started with a hand-lettered placard reading "NO SLIDE, NO SIT." Term Four opened with the Schoolhouse committee announcing, in a notice pinned to the Old Willow, that the nightly mud-sliding championship, the one glorious thing the September deluge gave this marsh, would "not survive contact with the timetable." By ten past nine on Tuesday morning, forty-one ducklings were seated in a neat, silent, entirely unmoving row across the schoolhouse steps, and the bell had gone unanswered.

The ringleader, a small yellow firebrand named Pip, who is certainly not old enough to have a manifesto and has nonetheless produced one, read the demands aloud from the top step: one supervised slide on Friday afternoons, the return of the championship trophy (a bent twig), and "no more notices pinned to trees without asking." Headmistress Pennywhistle, who has the manner of a duck who has seen worse, offered the strikers lessons. They declined. She offered extra snails at lunch. This desk understands the negotiation lasted rather longer after that, but the placards were put away by noon, and I will say only that nobody has ever settled a labour dispute so quickly over a snack.

I can also report that Bitter-Bill, viewing the whole affair from his window, was heard to say the uprising was "the first sensible display of organisation this marsh has managed all year." This, I should note, is the first time in four decades that our editor has agreed with a protest, which tells you everything about how badly the schoolhouse handled it. The committee has promised a decision by Friday. The ducklings have promised to be back on the steps by Monday if it is the wrong one. Guard your twine, darlings, and mind the slope.

### Other Local Scoops

**Sentinel Down, Fan Club Up:** Bitter-Bill's Leaning Log Draws Record Visitors to Market Square; Heritage Sub-Committee Considers Charging Admission

**Stuck on You:** Visiting Heron Freed From New Boardwalk After Four Hours; Council Proposes Welcome Sign Reading "Please Lift Your Feet"

**Costume Contest Controversy:** Second-Place "Retiring Editor" Requests Recount; Judges Decline, Citing Fear and a Clear Conflict of Interest

**Ticket Trouble:** Mrs. Mallard's Numbered Snail Jam Queue Passes Number 400; Stock Currently Stands at Nine Jars

**Numbered and Numb: Mrs. Mallard's New Ticket System Debuts to Its Own Small Riot**

***By Barnaby Bitter-Bill***




I wrote last month that a numbered ticket system would end the chaos at Mrs. Mallard's snail jam stall, and I endorsed it, in print, "without reservation." I would like that sentence removed from the record. The system was introduced at dawn on Saturday. By nine, the queue had passed number four hundred, the stall held nine jars, and this desk was standing in Market Square holding ticket 412 and a dawning understanding of arithmetic.

What no one had considered is that a ticket gives a duck the right to be disappointed in an orderly way, and that this is worse. At ten past nine, when the stall announced that numbers one to nine would be served and everyone else should "come back next week," the queue did not disperse, as the committee had assumed it would. It examined the tickets. Within minutes a rumour was circulating that ticket 14 had been printed twice, a second that number 3 had been traded for a bag of reeds, and a third, which I can neither confirm nor deny, that a respected elder resident had altered her 387 to read 87. Two wardens, one scarf and a produce cart were involved in the ensuing scuffle. Mrs. Mallard, to her great credit, kept ladling the entire time, and then, for reasons she has declined to explain, sold the last jar to a passing tortoise.

She has now proposed a lottery for next month, a measure this desk expects to be worse. I will say only this. The marsh has endured a collapsed boardwalk, a mud-sliding protest and a candied snail shortage this year, and it remains calm. Put a number in its wing and it becomes a mob. I have number 412. I intend to be buried with it, and I expect to be served by then.





**Photo Finish or Fowl Play? Duke Featherweight's First Scandal as Judges Question a Disputed Regatta Result**

***By Duke Featherweight***

Let me say, first, that I have timed every heat, flap, and finish line this marsh has produced since the day I picked up this stopwatch, and I have never once called a result I did not believe in my bones to be correct. Saturday's Reed Regatta was no different. The Lilypad Lane crew came down that final stretch a wingtip ahead, I saw it happen with my own eyes from my usual post on the log, and I would make the same call again tomorrow.

Now, as to the matter of the "photographic evidence" — yes, it was a sketch, and yes, I drew it quickly, and no, I am not going to pretend it belongs in a gallery. But a quick sketch drawn by a duck who was actually watching the finish line is worth more than any amount of hindsight from a crew that was, at the time in question, still rowing. I stand by every pencil stroke of it. As for the two new co-judges the Committee has seen fit to appoint, I welcome them warmly, I will show them exactly where the good log is, and I look forward to demonstrating, heat after heat, that one committed timekeeper with a steady wing was doing the job perfectly well on his own.

The result stands. I stand by it. And I will be back at the water's edge for the next heat, stopwatch running, sketchbook ready, whether the Committee thinks I need the company or not.





# *From Plot to Pot - The ultimate guide to growing your own marsh greens and turning them into a five-star lakeside feast.*

## Cattail Shoots — A Spring Harvest How-To!

With the rains behind us and the heat now settling in, the marsh edge is the greenest it has been all year, and nothing is more worth the trip than the young cattail. Look for the new shoots standing no taller than your leg in the shallows near the Reed Beds, pale green at the base and tightly furled at the top, and twist each one free below the waterline so the white heart comes away whole. Leave the tall brown ones alone, because they are working. And if you see a heron standing very still in the middle of the boardwalk, do not stop to chat. It is not the shoots you are after.




## Crispy Cattail Shoot & Duckweed Fritters

A golden, crunchy treat for a warm afternoon, best eaten the moment it is cool enough to hold, and best shared with anyone who has been in a queue all morning.

**Ingredients:**

- 8 young cattail shoots (white hearts only, rinsed of silt)
- 2 generous handfuls of fresh duckweed
- 1 bill-full of cattail pollen (for the golden batter)
- A splash of clean pond water
- A pinch of crushed sea-lavender, for flavour

**Instructions:**

**Prep the Shoots:** Peel away the green outer leaves until only the pale heart remains. Snap each heart into thumb-sized pieces with your beak.

**Make the Batter**: In a hollow reed stem, stir the cattail pollen, duckweed, sea-lavender and a splash of pond water into a thick, speckled paste.

**Coat the Pieces:** Roll each shoot piece in the batter with your webbed foot until fully covered.

**Warm and Crisp:** Lay the coated pieces on a flat, sun-warmed stone. After the October heat, the big rock by the old willow is still hot enough. Turn once, when the edges go golden.

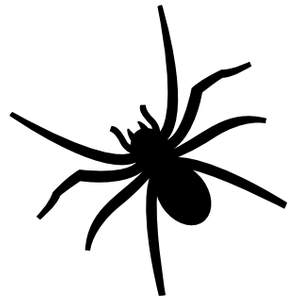
**Chef's Tip:** Serve the fritters on a lily pad with a spoonful of Mrs. Mallard's snail jam, if you were lucky enough to hold a ticket.



*The Daily Preen*

*By Penelope Pinfeathers, Fashion Editor*

*Where High Fashion Meets High Flying*



**Fright Night Fashion: The Best-Dressed Spooks of the Halloween Parade**

Darlings, I have attended every costume parade this marsh has held, and I can report without a single feather of modesty that this was the best-dressed Halloween Waddletown has ever produced. The Regatta Committee's two co-judges, who have recently had a great deal of practice calling close finishes, were asked to name the finalists. They did so with a seriousness this correspondent found deeply moving, if slightly alarming.




**The Halloween Parade Results**

**First Place:** Dot, the Little Lily-Ghost — three white lily petals, one reed pin, and a floating glide that made the judges lower their pencils. A look from this very column, and I will admit with some pride that the stitching held through a full parade and a sprint to the snail table.

**Second Place:** Roxy Ripple-Maker, "The Retiring Editor" — a gold watch, a cardboard office and a rather lovely expression of injured dignity. The judges were, by several accounts, simply afraid to place her first, which is, if one thinks about it, the most flattering thing a costume can earn.

**Third Place:** Duke Featherweight, "The Stopwatch" — a large, round, shining dial worn on the chest, which ticked, which was timing the parade, and which lost to a ghost by a wingtip.

**Special Mention:** The Spooky Sentinel — freshly fitted with new lily pad eyes, and a green I can only call flattering. Tilting, but trying. Heritage & Halloween Sub-Committee · Reclaimed Log, Pond Clay

Until next season: dress for the occasion, and keep your feet dry.

# NEXT MONTH

## GET THE NEWSLETTER MONTHLY

**Subscribe to our monthly newsletter.**

**Download it from our website at waddletownmarsh.co.za**

**“Fifth Time Lucky: Council Replaces Flypaper Boardwalk With ‘Medium Grippy’ Surface, Insists This Is Not a Joke”**

**“Ink Wars, Round Three: Bitter-Bill and Roxy Ordered to Share a Byline for the Year-End Edition”**

**“Sweet Success, Sticky Aftermath: Snail Jam Sells Out With No Riot, Council Demands to Know What Went Wrong?”**

**“Regatta Review Reports: Co-Judges Clear Duke Featherweight of Fowl Play, but Impound His Sketchbook”**

**“Leaning but Loved: Spooky Sentinel Declared a Heritage Site After Fan Club Petition, Bitter-Bill Demands Compensation”**

**Friday Slide Approved: Schoolhouse Grants Ducklings One Supervised Hour of Mud-Sliding a Week, Headmistress Calls It “A Compromise With Mud”**