

The next steering committee meeting will be at Carl & Joyce Bickels on August 7th at 7 P.M. Carl will facilitate. Everyone is welcome.

▶ NEXT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING ◀

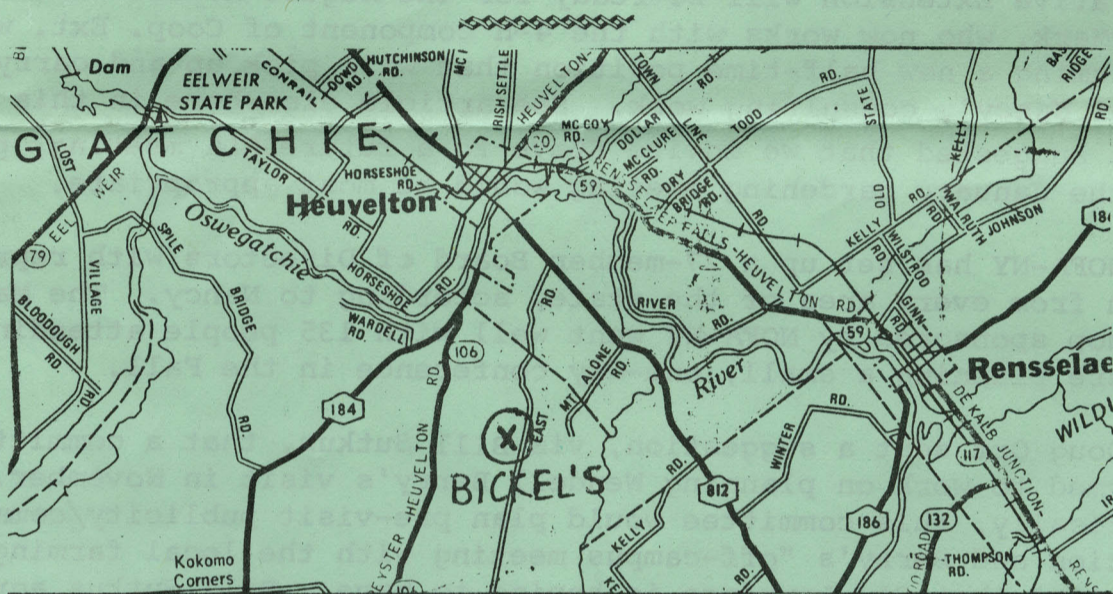
Joyce & Carl Bickel's

August 7, 1983

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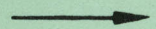


SOME THOUGHTS ON MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

The question of women's participation seems most valid as part of the larger question of involvement by each and everyone of us in the decisions and actions of RLA. The high level of participation at the March meeting weakened Valerie Summer's argument somewhat, as she recognized. In retrospect, that statement might have been strengthened and the stress of sex consciousness in the ensuing discussion, to which Tarik alluded, might have been lessened if the women's issue had been presented as part of the larger question of total membership involvement in the organization (involvement not being restricted to talking).

In answering that larger question, we can point out the historical reasons of confusion between the marketing and the homesteading aspects of NFC, the geographical distances, the lack of time we all have. There have been efforts to increase involvement--e.g., some article to that effect in just about every newsletter (usually by Val I. or me); the homesteading questionnaire of Fall '81. Why haven't these efforts been particularly successful? Some guesses...

- Maybe it's the old community organizing rule that only 20% of any organization's membership will be actively involved. We have had that 20% participation and have accomplished a fair bit, in looking back.



- If we are thinking only of speaking up at meetings, there are a few of us who are overly verbal and we need Valerie's kind of statement to remind us of others' rights and abilities.
- Women are not encouraged to participate. Given our culture and society, this problem is to some extent, conscious or unconscious, a part of all of us, and at least to that extent we need to be aware and sensitive. But I don't think this group has been particularly sexist, and if anyone feels excluded or not encouraged to become involved, I'm guessing that other reasons would be at least as important as those of race, sex, creed or age.
- A party line sense of righteousness. By this I mean the kind of feeling I had some six to eight years ago about the rightness of homesteading that made me obnoxious to my city friends. As people seeking an alternative way of life, we can turn off folks (including other homesteaders) by having them reject us (e.g., back in 1977 I was alienated by the impression that a true homesteader came to one of these meetings smelling of the essence of manure) or by making them feel guilty or apprehensive (because they don't have the right kind of cows or they listen to the wrong radio station or eat the wrong kind of food, etc.).
- A feeling that if one does speak up or show an interest, he or she will end up with total responsibility for the business since there hasn't been a sense of people sharing responsibility, but rather, a sense of letting other people do it.
- The organizational structure, with board, officers, etc. I'm not sure how big a factor this has been or if it could have been different or better. Some thoughts on re-doing it:
 - That there be cooperation rather than any sense of rivalry between formerly involved and newly involved.
 - That we aim to create a structure that fits us and our situation, taking ideas and tactics from others and making them over for us (e.g., consensus for us might be different for a Samoan village where members are constantly interacting and meetings are merely formal rubber stampings of decisions already hashed out). Maybe we're striving for a more general sharing of responsibility (breaking up into groups for important discussions at general meetings, rotating facilitator) along with sufficient individual commitment to do what needs to be done to maintain the group. For a balance of general (four annual meetings, steering committee, newsletter) and specific activities (apprenticeship program, reading group). So we should encourage specific actions and groups like the women's discussion group (although I'm not sure any group should be closed).

-- Bill Sutkus

BIRDSFOOT VIOLET

Viola pedata



* Illustrations in this issue are from Jean Dawson and the New England Rootstock Association catalog. *