



by Kitty Wheeler
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Four miles long and half a mile wide, Swan Island is smack dab off Richmond's town landing in the Kennebec River. The island used to be called by the Abenaki Indians 'Swango' or 'Island of the Eagles'. It separated from the town of Dresden in 1847 and became incorporated as the town of Perkins. By 1860, 95 residents lived on the island. Farming, fishing, lumbering, shipbuilding and ice cutting provided the livelihood for the community. In the 1930's no one was living on the island.

No more than 200 yards from Richmond, the island beckons the kayaker and canoeist to paddle over. The Steve Powell Wildlife Management area, owned and managed by Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) has two islands, a mainland point and several hundred

acres of adjoining freshwater tidal flats. It is at the top of Merrymeeting Bay, one of the largest estuaries on the eastern seaboard. If IFW is called, it will run a ferry from Richmond Landing to the island at nine or eleven a.m., one or three p.m. (547-5422)Registration is needed. From early May to late October, visitors can access the island daily from sunrise to sunset, but the ferry stops running on Labor Day. There is an \$8 fee to visit the island; deposit it in the collection box and self-register. If one opts to camp in the campground, \$14 per person is the charge. Again, reservations are required.

There is a lot of history on the island. The first recorded visit of European-American explorers came in 1607 when members of the Popham Colony stopped at the island. During the next 150 years, a few settlers established homesteads. But the French and Indian Wars in the 1750s affected permanent settlement of the island.



Long-abandoned houses still stand. Dr. Sylvester Gardiner built the 'salt box' house in 1763 for his newly married daughter, Rebecca, and her husband, Philip Dumaresq. The house sits next to the campground. It is known as the first summer vacation home in Maine. Major Samuel Tubbs, a Revolutionary war veteran, built the Tubbs-Reed house in the early 1800's. He later sold the house to the Reed family. The Federal house sits happily on top of a hill near the ferry landing. There are four other houses scattered around the island. An Americorps volunteer lives in one of the houses for the season.

