



The Lighthouse Log

Winter 2020

The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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The View Renewed after a December snowfall



It can be a challenge to get motivated when the back yard is frozen. Especially when the dog walked just two hours ago is throwing me that special look. But it's time to get going and put together the BLMA newsletter. We made it to 2020 and I hope your holidays were enjoyable. If you are in a warmer climate count your blessings.

The past year was one for the books in many ways. Summer events and site work, covered in detail in the previous issue, were nonstop. We had a great 'Sparkles and Spirits' event on Dec. 5 featuring live music and a festive atmosphere. The annual Open House on Dec. 8 was also a success. A special photo section is included for the 'Sparkles' event and other activities. For the time being we can relax, assured the museum will be there when we return on Memorial Day weekend.

In this first issue of a new decade we'll update everyone about projects which hadn't quite begun when the Autumn issue went out. There is also some regrettable news: barring some last minute change in plans, the access road around the museum will soon be closed to vehicles for safety reasons. A separate article is dedicated to this development.

Regarding site work, excavation in the open area north of the station is set to begin in late January. The soil remediation by Renova Environmental will follow soon afterwards. This work had been postponed due to a change in the Coast Guard's contractor. It is an important next-step before any other grounds related work can occur.

A new roof was installed on all buildings (except for the old Fog Signal Building, which has a copper roof.) The storm of October 17/18 was so intense it actually damaged the new roof before completion, but it was repaired again and finished the following week. Fence repairs funded by BankNewport have been made. Activity at the nation's third oldest light station never really ceases, cold weather or not.

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Continued from Page 1

BLMA received some good news from the Jamestown Art Center regarding their art exhibition. Originally proposed for 2019, it was postponed and will take place next summer. Details of the location and type of artwork have yet to be worked out but we will keep everyone informed.

Elsewhere in this issue: An update on a Beavertail scuba diver with a big heart, our ongoing debt to the US Coast Guard and a look at challenges other lighthouses face. One final note on Keepers from a galaxy far, far away.

As mentioned above, activity never really stops at the point. The Board has searched long and hard since formation in 1993, looking for ways to enhance the Beavertail experience. Recent grounds, utilities and building upgrades were critical for our continued success. Despite many hurdles, notably those from the regulatory world, they were completed. Others are in the works.

We also discuss new ideas for the museum itself at monthly board meetings. There is diverse talent and career experience which members bring to the table. I believe the results are evident to first time visitors and regulars alike. But we can't stop thinking about new and better ways of doing business. If you stand still you're losing ground. And when you get too close to something you can miss the forest for the branches (or vice versa.) A fresh perspective is welcome and it would be great to hear from members: let us know your thoughts! Feedback on anything we can add to our programs is welcome. Or just tell us how to do a better job on what's already offered. To steal a line from Frasier Crane "We're listening!"

In closing we anticipate business as usual in 2020, road access issues notwithstanding. Schedules & museum info will be available on the web site updated regularly by Dave Smith.

Warm regards,

Bob Dutson

Winter 2020 Photos

These photos capture some recent events including the Sparkles and Spirits Night (Dec 5th) and site improvements.



Across the East Passage, Newport in background. How can you not love this place?



Beavertail has a near-new but retro appearance: power lines removed, new roof and paint. The View is Renewed!



New roofs being installed



New fence rails installed to replace those which didn't 'cut it' during past winters.



Santa and the band.



Christmas displays by the custom staircase in the Assistant Keeper's building.



The historic fire engine, a common sight on Block Island.)



A window candle in the Lens Room.



Sparkles in the Lens Room.

Lead Story

Some visitors to our little peninsula come here for the fishing. Except on rare occasions they skip a tour of the museum (their loss, given the huge striped bass on display.) Mostly they want only to catch fish for dinner, which does require a lot of effort. Size regulations mean quite a few fish must be released (I estimate two-thirds based on experience.) If they play by the rules, releasing undersized fish, they earn every one they take home.

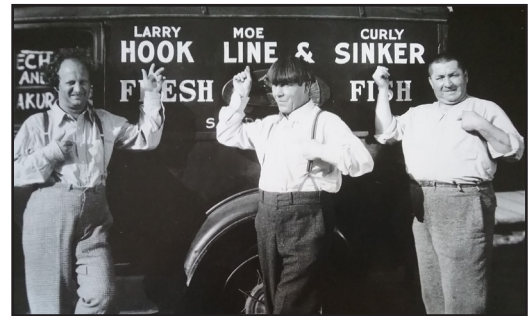
One of the inevitable consequences of casting so many lead sinkers into nearby waters is getting ‘hung up’ on the bottom. There are submerged rocks all around Beavertail providing great cover for game fish and ideal habitat for mussels to grow upon. The fish feed on the mussels, as well as crabs hiding in the rocks and seaweed, so it’s a perfect locale for pescators to practice their skills. But no matter how skillful, all fishermen and fisherwomen lose hook, line and sinker at some point.

Fortunately lead sinkers are not the health problem found in old lead paints and pipes. But they do litter the bottom in such quantities they are worth the time & effort for a certain local diver to retrieve. In a unique philanthropic gesture he gathers up sinkers by the hundreds of pounds and gives them to friends who fish. To appreciate the value of his generosity, check out the current price of lead sinkers at a Big Box store or bait & tackle shop. It’s outrageous.

What is really interesting is the contorted shapes these sinkers assume after all they’ve been through. They are flattened, pitted, twisted and nearly split in two after impacting rocks during underwater surges. Lead is a soft metal and you expect some distortion, but many look as if some tiny underwater gremlins took a disliking to their presence and tortured them for spite.

Nonetheless they are recyclable and our friendly diver deserves some applause. He spends a lot of time and effort to gather sinkers and other tackle, and gives them away to friends for the fun of it. Or sells them and donates the proceeds.

NB: As this article took shape there was no plan to link the Three Stooges to fishing at Beavertail. But I thank whichever entity or heirs hold the rights to their film shorts for the use of the photo I happened upon. It lends a bit of zany humor to this piece, at a time America needs a reason to laugh a little. Or a lot. That concludes this evening’s editorial segment.



BD

Not your typical Hook, Line & Sinker



Soil Mitigation

In 2005 the U.S. Coast Guard conducted a New England Lighthouse Conference in Newport where lighthouse organizations were briefed about the transfer of historic lights from the Coast Guard’s “Excess Property List”. Those on the list could be transferred to eligible municipalities and /or non-profit organizations. There were 56 New England lights including Beavertail on that list. The action never took place since a government requirement stipulating environmental cleanup of lead paint contamination had to be completed first.

In the following years, while federal funding for funding was authorized by legislators, actual funding was never approved other than for soil analysis tests. Pockets of lead contamination were detected and identified with plat locations and density levels. In 2016 new EPA and RIDEM exposure levels regulations required a second survey as the “parts per million” threshold of lead contaminant was raised to 150mg/kg .

In 2018 BLMA and RI DEM were informed by the Coast Guard that funding for the “mitigation” (removal of contaminants) was finally approved for both Watch Hill and Beavertail Light, with work to proceed in late 2019. Contracts were negotiated and then cancelled by the USCG and new contractor Renova Environmental Services of New Jersey was selected. Renova conducted an on-site meeting at Beavertail in Sept 2019. Work will commence in Jan 2020 preceded by work at the Watch Hill light.

The previous soil evaluation and analyses engineering studies cost about \$180,000 and the remediation contract for Beavertail is set at \$161,716 and \$220,636 for Watch Hill Light.

The perimeter road is expected to be closed during the project’s soil removal and restoration.
(Photo depicts a Sept meeting on site with representatives of USCG , RI DEM, Renova and BLMA)

VK

UFO's and Keepers Part II

RECAP

In Part I, fantastic claims were made about the real identities of major world figures. In brief, it asserted various heads of state are in fact not human. They are descendants of aliens who invaded Earth centuries ago. This 'Dorkian' race came via wormholes, lived in lighthouses around the world, gained wealth and acquired positions of political power. It took time but ultimately they headed up the major global economies and a few rogue countries which sponsor terrorism. They fit in perfectly.

In Part II we reveal the proof* for these amazing claims.

Evidence was obtained surreptitiously while employed in New York (during stints at the UN) and in Washington DC. It was compiled over several decades with the aid of several assistants, all now mysteriously vanished. It resides in a hyper-encrypted database with access only by yours truly. Its security is checked daily by examining random files for tampering, fake news, etc. (Mark: R U listening?)

The evidence rotates among various "Clouds" on a random basis with multiple super-strong passwords. But it's time to unveil this vast smoking gun to the glaring light of day. Details, with substantiation, are revealed below.

Fact 1: Genetic samples of the primary Dorkian world leaders were obtained via methods best left to your imagination, and won't be specified for the moment. Dorkian "DNA" is not, in fact, DNA at all. Unlike us their genetic compounds are not based on four primary amino acids forming cross links along the famous double-helix we know so well. It's not even carbon based but is composed of silicon and trace minerals. Their metabolism doesn't even resemble ours, and they use sand and rocks for sustenance. They may not be of this earth, but really love living near our sandy beaches! (Hint: this is a clue to a quiz from our last issue "Did you hear about the Keeper who was allergic to seafood?")

Fact 2: Dorkians reproduce by replicating in huge nutrient filled tanks resembling transparent swimming pools. Both genders do this, splitting into a parent and identical offspring twice each decade. They shapeshift into human form afterwards. This was captured in an amazing high res video stored in Cloud files mentioned above. (Warning: not suitable for anyone less than 18 years of age.) In effect, their numbers increase exponentially every 5 years - do the math!

Fact 3: Eyewitness accounts of rituals which take place on major cruise ship lines. Ironically, Newport RI, vital to colonial growth in the 18th century, has become a major player again thanks to the Dorkians. They embark here disguised as regular customers and conduct cultural rituals at sea. The rituals are truly bizarre, including dances which call to mind the 'Limbo Stick.' They also involve telepathic communication amongst the Dorkians. The significance of such behavior is not clearly understood but I'm working on it. Trust me.

Fact 4: Well, just take a look at the planet we live on. Do you think real humans would have done the sorts of things we saw starting in the early 1900's? That's the good news (in other words, we're really not to blame for genocide, global conquest, rainforest destruction, etc.) The bad news? We are a gigantic lab experiment the Dorkians orchestrate. They want to see if we would make good pets for intergalactic species they trade with. If we survive the upcoming environmental crisis, we can certainly breathe toxic atmospheres on planets near Betelgeuse and Aldebaran. Or serve as domestic help in orbiting mansions the Dorkians use.

Fact 5: Regrettably, the author vanished before finishing this section. He is believed to be traveling at Warp 8 en route to Andromeda, teaching Dorkians how to play guitar using only their tentacles.

** Please recall the disclaimer from Part I: all the 'facts' revealed can be taken lightly. No real world leaders or irresponsible social media gurus are misrepresented or vilified here. Any resemblance to real persons living or dead is purely coincidental, albeit all too familiar.*

Graphic courtesy Dan Bannister



Dorkian Keeper in residence

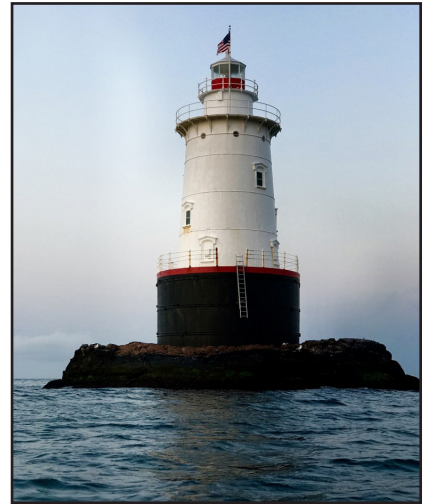
BD

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast Sakonnet Point (Part 3)

This is a continuation of the discussion of the ships which have been wrecked on Sakonnet Point, at the mouth of the Sakonnet River. Previously detailed were 9 of the 17 known total losses here.

By the latter part of the 1870's disasters at Sakonnet Point had raised the attention of politicians who would begin to lobby Congress for relief in the form of the construction of a lighthouse at or near the point. There would be at least one more wreck before that lobbying would be successful.

Often the source of clues needed to track down new shipwrecks comes from local historians who, as often as not, are located not in the area of the loss, but in the area where the lost vessel came from. That was the case with the schooner OCEAN GEM. An ambitious group of researchers in Harwich, MA set sail on a journey through the records of their local newspaper, The Harwich Independent, with a goal of documenting any reference that would reflect on the maritime heritage of the town. Mentioned in their research paper was a reference to this loss. The 68-foot long, 56-ton fishing schooner OCEAN GEM owned by David Low & Company was more than likely on a fishing cruise when, on August 26, 1879, she had the misfortune to run on Seaconnet (sic) Point. The only other reported fact was that she ended up a total loss. A search for details of the incident in newspapers local to the wreck site have not yet uncovered any other information.



In 1882 the federal government approved an appropriation of \$20,000 for a lighthouse on Little Cormorant Rock, 800 yards off Sakonnet Point. Although action was not immediate, the structure was completed in the spring of 1884. Just one more totally lost vessel is reported at this area prior to the first lighting of the new lighthouse.

The three-masted schooner HELEN A. AMES, a 490-ton vessel owned in Providence, was in service a little more than ten-years before her final fateful voyage. Details of the 139-foot long vessel are known along with the basic information about the disaster itself; what is unclear is her port of departure or to where she was bound and what the nature of her cargo was. A gale forced the schooner ashore about 2:00 A.M. on March 30, 1884. The crew was saved and the vessel reportedly full of water, but her master, Captain Thomas D. Endicott, thought the vessel could be saved. The steamer RELIANCE was sent to the scene and made an unsuccessful effort to pull the schooner to safety when an unfortunate accident cost the life of one of the tug's deck hands. William Meuse was reportedly caught under a hawser which resulted in his being pulled overboard where he drowned. Although initial reports seemed to indicate that the vessel could be saved, the wreck's ultimate end was on the auction block where it sold for \$180.

Although most vessels lost at Sakonnet Point were American, a Dutch brig named VREDELUST, met with disaster on rocks of the old breakwater near the point on March 31, 1886. Traveling from Rio Grande do Sul for Boston, the 180-ton vessel ran ashore on a foggy night. Her cargo consisted of 13,200 dry hides, 5,000 horn pits and 22 bales of horse hair with a combined value of \$40,000. The merchant ship was at sea for 44 days and her master, Captain Dejong, reported "rough weather and constant gales were encountered during the entire passage. For the last five days we have not seen the sun, and have been sailing by dead reckoning." On the night of her stranding, a light was spotted which they took to be the south side of Nantucket but was, instead, the light of the Brenton Reef lightship. They shaped their course according to where they thought they were and in short order went ashore. Soon after stranding the 21-year old brig bilged but the crew, consisting of the captain, mate and four seamen gained the shore with much difficulty.

Another foreign (if Canada can be considered a foreign land) vessel came to her end at Seaconnet Point in the Fall of 1894. This one was named ANNA CRAIG. She was a 260-ton schooner that measured 129-feet in length and had been built in Quebec in 1870. Not quite a quarter century after launch, the Canadian schooner stranded on Seaconnet Point on October 6, 1894. According to the Boston Globe "the wind which is on underestimated velocity, has, during the day nearly boxed the compass here. Outside a tremendous sea is running". For those unfamiliar with the term "boxing the compass" it loosely translated means that the wind has shifted to every possible compass point or direction making navigation of a sailing vessel nearly impossible. In this case, and to a stranded vessel, depending on the wind intensity, it almost always spells certain doom for the craft.

In the next edition of the log I will wrap up the discussion of ships lost at Sakonnet Point. Although the lighthouse helped, it did not completely end the chance of shipwreck here.

JFJ

The Future of Lighthouses

Nonfiction is a whole lot easier to write than tomorrow's news. Dealing with the past or present is simple. As long as the facts are straight you're on safe ground, legally anyway. It might be too dull to interest anyone, a cure for insomnia, but you probably won't be sued. The future landscape is only safe for SciFi authors and (maybe) technology gurus.

So when you cover historic sites like ours, it's risky to project the future except in terms of the very near. Ours looks pretty good. Looking at light stations as a group, including those in the US, reveals a mixed bag. In other parts of the world there are many which aren't much more than decaying landmarks.

On a regional basis, the east and west coasts are more fortunate than elsewhere. A lot of stations near both oceans have been adopted by not-for-profit associations like BLMA. They've restored the structures and grounds, and may even have a maritime museum. Of necessity each is a separate cause with supporters like our own valued members and regular visitors. Assisted by qualifying grants and special fundraising efforts, they keep the sites viable.

The Coast Guard repairs light & fog signals and associated control equipment and leaves the rest to us. After all, they are part of the Dept of Homeland Security and have higher priorities. Like protecting our coasts from enemies foreign and domestic, maintaining offshore navigational signals and rescuing boaters in distress. With the explosion of sophisticated electronics (GPS, AIS, radar and sonar) found in even small recreational boats, lighthouses aren't viewed as the crucial aids to navigation they once were. They may not be significant at all to some who allocate federal funding, especially if they don't represent coastal areas.

In a nutshell some stations are not as fortunate as Beavertail. Structures may have been left to the elements and deteriorated. Some are beyond repair or may even collapse where supporting soils or rock & masonry substructures are failing.

Photos published in the USLHS Keeper's Log tell the story all too well. It's sad but true, and no amount of money may suffice to correct the worst cases. A "Lighthouse Preservation Fund" to aid the restoration cause was established in 2015. As of Dec. 3 2019 only \$90,000 in donations were received according to USLHS. That's a drop in the ocean compared to what the essential work will cost.

There is no clear path of funding for some. They might be repairable but lack an association committed to the work. Some start up associations may be in the works and hopefully will be organized & funded in time. Time is getting short in certain instances. Hopefully memorial parks or monuments will be erected as a minimum.

It would be great to hear that the Lighthouse Directory's listing of active lighthouses has stabilized some day not far down the road. Right now it is still shrinking. If nothing else it's nice to think that the most scenic and historic may be saved for and by those who most appreciate what they represent. Hope springs eternal.

BD

More Winter 2020 Photos



One of the 'stained-glass' lighthouses to be found in the museum.



More seasonal display courtesy of the board.



The fireplace in the Richard Sullivan room.



On a less pleasant note, new posts installed by RIDEM. The loop road around the lighthouse is being closed to vehicles.



An adventurous photographer sets up near huge surf conditions on Dec. 10.

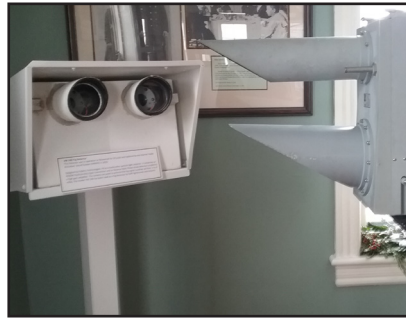


Nora seems more interested in another dog than the sign. But the Open House was a success as usual.

The Coast Guard's Generosity



Lights on display courtesy of the Coast Guard.



Former fog detectors.



Our distinctive Fresnel lens.

Our museum doesn't just go through regular repairs and site upgrades, important as they are. We add new displays each year off season, many designed by board members. As far as physical displays, however, no source has been as prolific as the US Coast Guard.

In the past few months another fog detector was loaned to BLMA by the USCG. We already had an impressive collection of light station equipment used right here at Beavertail. We've also received several individual navigational signals used elsewhere. The Coast Guard continues to help us out by allowing us to display all these items; it's really win-win as their equipment doesn't have to be relocated or stored in distant warehouses.

To get a feel for the scale of these exhibits, start with a visit to the Lens Room. Entering the front (south) door in the Assistant Keeper's building, one immediately notices the Fresnel Lens off to the left. It's a fitting centerpiece for the Lens Room. Two Fresnel Lenses, a 3rd and a 4th Order lens, served as the tower light from 1856 -1972. They used kerosene and electric power as the energy sources. More than any other museum piece the lens is synonymous with Beavertail. An observant visitor will see four other items in the room; they provided visual navigational aid to mariners in other locations. All courtesy of the Coast Guard.

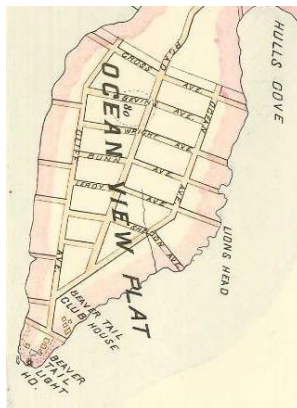
In the adjacent 'Richard Sullivan' room, there are two fog signal detectors. They 'observed' fog conditions off Beavertail by capturing reflected light from an emitter inside the unit. This actuated fog signals automatically when the reflected light intensity was elevated sufficiently. (The white unit was relocated within the station in Autumn 2019, following conversion of the fog signal to manual actuation and solar power. The grey unit preceded it.)

Of course you wouldn't want to miss the rest of the museum's displays and storyboards. But if your mission was to see only bona-fide Coast Guard displays, you could duck out the rear door and head to the detached Oil House.

Inside are the two successors to the Fresnel Lens. They are very similar in appearance and that's not surprising. They are both Drum Beacon lights and were in service in the tower from 1972 until 2019, when the present VRB25 unit was installed.

BD

Closing the Beavertail Perimeter Road



The perimeter road that loops around the lighthouse grounds has existed as a RI State Highway since 1940. Excluding the World War II years and the time when the Navy Transmitter was active during the 1970's, it has provided visitors scenic views unparalleled anywhere. The lighthouse buildings are less than 50 feet away and views of gigantic waves breaking over Newton Rock on a blustery day awe the visitor.

The vista is not going to change, but to appreciate it, you will have to walk down from the parking lots. The road is going to be closed to the public by RIDEM due to washouts of the pedestrian path that borders the perimeter road. This has created slip and fall hazards which force pedestrians onto the one-way road. The washouts were caused by Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and over the past years have continued to erode into steep dangerous cavities and voids. Funds for repair of the washouts have not been unavailable, resulting in the determination by both RIDEM and the Beavertail Advisory Committee to close the road for safety reasons.

VK



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BMLA is dedicated to preserving America's third oldest light, providing educational experiences reflecting the best current thinking for all learners and engaging in fund raising activities necessary for enhancing visitor experiences.

Visit us on the web at
www.beavertailight.org

Our newsletter is published four times per year for members. If you would like to receive each issue immediately after publication please provide us with your updated email address.



Tower Climb Schedule

**The 2020 Schedule is not determined at this time.
It will be made available by Spring 2020
and posted on our web site as soon as possible.**

If you would like to schedule a tour of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum please call (401) 423-3270, or email us at info@BeavertailLight.org.

Group Tours & Events

To arrange Lighthouse tours for school or senior groups please contact Mrs. Linda Warner at:
info@beavertail.org

Weddings and private events on the Lighthouse grounds are not allowed by the U.S. Coast Guard.

For scheduling special events, including weddings at Beavertail State Park contact the RI Dept. of Environmental Management (DEM) at 401.884.2010.