



The Lighthouse Log

Fall 2015

The quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Message From The President

Beavertail Light has enjoyed a great deal of growth over the last three years under the leadership of Stewart Morgan. He has led the way in organizing a museum double the size of its predecessor, without compromising its integrity. This year alone we've had record breaking crowds and more tower openings than ever before. Our new Shipwreck Database, with research done by Jim Jenney, proved to be a wonderful draw. Of course, Stewart would be the first to tell you it couldn't be accomplished without the docents, tech people, committee members, and his hard working Board.

As the new President, I hope that I will have the support of all of these same people. Beavertail has come a long way and can continue to grow. In the coming year we will be working on reassessing the Master Plan, to make sure we stay on track, and looking into retrieving one of the carved granite blocks from the shipwreck Harvey Payton. As with any successful museum, we will continue to do additional research to expand exhibits, and do normal maintenance to our beloved Light.

Success in these goals, of course, depends on our volunteers. We thank all of our volunteers who have worked to make our museum as wonderful as it is today. I would be remiss if I didn't continue to ask for more help. The museum can always benefit from the help of additional volunteers. You can be a docent, an archivist, a researcher, or the very necessary "workforce." We have the best volunteers around, just ask Varoujan Karentz who just received the Preserve Rhode Island Volunteer Award.

I look forward to meeting and working with you all. Come see us at the Light.

SA ■



Columbus weekend—They came to the light!

ANNUAL MEETING A SUCCESS!

The 2015 Annual Meeting is now history. Held on September 16th the business portion of the meeting included the financial report of the most recent fiscal year, highlights of BLMA activities and the election of officers and Directors.

Suzi Andrews is the newly elected President, Stewart Morgan, Vice President, Joan Vesella, Treasurer and Richard Koster, Treasurer. David Smith the newest member of the Board of Directors. David has been responsible for countless hours of software work getting the touch screen and the Shipwreck and Marine Disaster data base in user friendly format.



The speaker was Astrid M. Drew, archivist at the Steamship Historical Society of America. Located in the former New England Institute of Technology property on Post Road, the national organization is the world's leader in recording, preserving and disseminating the history of steam powered vessels.

Founded in 1935, the organization has moved several times before landing in Warwick. Several major gifts and grants have supported the hiring of staff including the Executive Director Matthew Schulte, Astrid and several other professionals who are responsible for many collections of images, periodicals, artwork, official records, memorabilia and ephemera devoted to the history of engine powered vessels, their passengers and crew.

Ms. Drew gave a thumbnail of the collections including ship models and plan. Articulate and energetic, Ms. Drew gave a thumbnail sketch of the collections. Including ship models and plans. The Society is an individual membership organization with an attractive quarterly magazine "PowerShips".

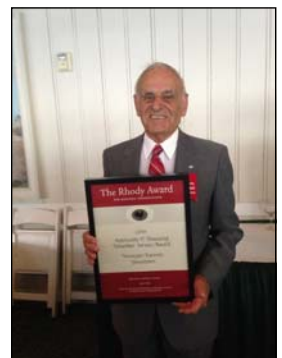
Informal discussions and refreshments followed.

JB ■

AWARD PRESENTED TO VAROUJAN KARENTZ

The Dunes Club was the setting for the seventh annual Preserve R.I. and R.I. Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission's Preservation Celebration. One of two highest honors conferred by the two organizations, **The Antoinette F. Downing Award** was presented to the **Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association's Varoujan Karentz**, tireless advocate for both light station preservation and education.

Some three hundred guests heard descriptions of restoration and preservation work for nine projects around Rhode Island ranging from the modestly sized Rumford Library to the Providence complex known as the Audrain building. The Antoinette F. Downing presentation to Varoujan culminated the seventh annual event.



Regular readers of this newsletter know of Varoujan's many accomplishments at the light station since the publication of the Master Plan in 2006. The award highlighted Varoujan's project management skills, grant writing success, historical text authorship and vision.

Readers interested in reading the 13 page nominating application for the award can contact rsully@cox.net.

RES ■

Rhode Island's Faux Lighthouse

Two visitors to our museum after studying our new RI Lighthouse Story Board inquired about a lighthouse located nearby Gooseberry Island in Pt Judith Pond and asked why it was not listed. After being told there was no lighthouse in the described area and every RI Light was displayed on the storyboard, they both displayed pictures taken with their smart phones. More head scratching and a little research indeed found a replica stone lighthouse.

The private unlighted structure can be seen from Succotash Rd, Jerusalem was constructed for use as an observatory.

VK ■



BEAVERTAIL'S FOG SIGNAL BELL

During the 2008 underground radar imaging project of the 1749 foundation by Soil Sight LLC , a small stone and masonry feature was detected just north of the original lighthouse tower foundation. Hurricane Sandy in 2012 exposed more of the feature and measurements of the base match the 1829 specifications written by Newport's Christopher Ellery, Customs Collector and Superintendent of Lighthouses for the construction and installation of a fog signal bell at Beavertail.

The feature is located between the present fenced-in fog signal and the 1749 foundation. The U.S. Lighthouse Society, the foremost authority on American lighthouse history, was sent a copy of the specification. As a result, they have confirmed **"The earliest known fog-bell in America was at the Beavertail lighthouse in Rhode Island "**. This is a new distinction for our lighthouse and adds to BLMA's continued studies of fog signal development and experimentation at Beavertail during the 19th century.

On a related subject, fog signal propagation anomalies on Rhode Island waters were also recently found documented in an 1898 article titled "The Ghosts of Light and Sound". In addition to voids and missing signals causing the 1880 wreck of the SS Rhode Island at Bonnet Shores , this report describes similar sound propagation "freaks" off Great Gull Island in Rhode Island Sound.

VK ■

Harvey Payton Shipwreck Carved Stones

The retrieval of a carved granite stone from the Harvey Payton schooner wreck of 1859 to use as an exhibit has had a setback. The selected stone lies visible at low tide among a group of about twenty on the shore line east of the 3rd parking lot. It has been jacked up high enough to place a sling or chain under it.

However, the stone weighing 2 tons has challenged contractors to solve a way to retrieve the stone. Most agree a barge at high tide may be able to raise the stone, but have yet to commit to the project.

A crane does not have the reach and skids do not appear practical due to the steep incline and craggy rock formations. With the boating season keeping marine and mooring operators busy hauling boats, the project is on hold until a suitable window opens.

VK 

MUSEUM'S 4TH ORDER FRESNEL LENS

The 4th order Fresnel lens on display has been the museum's central and most important artifact. The lens on loan from the U.S. Coast Guard was located in the tower as a fixed navigation light until 1991 when the present DCB-24 rotating Aero-Beacon was installed. An exhibition pedestal was constructed for the Fresnel lens and has remained in the museum for the past 24 years.

The four panel lens manufactured by MacBeth-Evans exhibits numerous chipped prisms, 2 missing prisms and 1 broken prism. No documentation or estimates exist classifying the damaged prisms or the cost for repairs.

VK 

SEASON ENDS ON A HIGH NOTE



Sunday of Columbus Day weekend was beautiful and breezy. The Park was filled with visitors and many waited patiently for a chance to climb.

The last tower opening took place Sunday October 10th and it was the best of the season in terms of donations and number of visitors. Linda Warner who serves as one of the “tower team” reported that the visitors from California, Texas, Illinois, Wisconsin were joined by visitors from Okinawa in making the climb and enjoying the view.

The “Tower Team” for this season has consisted of Linda and George Warner, Richard Chellis, Richard Koster, Bob Dutson and Tom Rosa.. This group insures the safety of climbers and enjoyment of the climb by making sure the four foot minimum height requirement is met, that both hands are free for climbing and everyone understands that the spiral stairway is followed by a wooden ladder going straight up into the oil room.

VK



THE QR PROJECT

With the popularity of QR (Quick Response **C**odes), used with a smart phone and its scanning ability to immediately link with an informative subject, BLMA is adding a series of small unobtrusive signs around the light station property. Each sign or cluster will provide a link back to BLMA’s web site www.beavertaillight.org and provide the smart phone user with interpretive information on visual overlooks or subjects of interest, which otherwise are unknown to a visitor.

The QR optical label or barcode is the trademark used for two dimensional matrix designs first used by Japanese auto manufacturers.

A team of BLMA enthusiasts, Paula Samos, Richard Sullivan, Ursula Michael, Sean McCormack and Varoujan Karentz are designing the interpretive links. Over 20 subjects have been identified including historic features, natural elements and peculiar anomalies around the state park and the marine environment. Once the project design is completed, and tested on the web site, the small code signs will be installed during the spring and summer of 2016.

VK

RHODE ISLAND'S PERILOUS COAST—BLOCK ISLAND (PART 1)

On the south side of Block Island near the rugged Southwest Point an isolated rock called Black Rock is situated just offshore from a point of land that carries the same name. Over the years this site has claimed a number of vessels including four multi-masted schooners and a large steamship.

On May 15, 1854 the merchant vessel *PRESIDENT* was on a voyage from Cardenas, Cuba with a cargo of molasses bound for Portland, Maine. The 60-foot long, 74-ton schooner had spent more than a quarter of a century in this trade having been built in Somerset, MA in 1828. She struck the rock at about 1 o'clock in the morning and her master, Captain Sawyer, deemed it prudent to remain aboard with his crew until daylight when they took to the boats and rowed 12 miles to the north end of the island (since the island is only 6 miles long they were probably lost in the fog for quite a while).

Just four years later a much larger vessel, this time a steamship, ran on the rock in the same area. The *PALMETTO*, owned by Charles Morgan, was a relatively new vessel when lost. Built in Baltimore, the 750-ton merchant steamer was enroute to Boston from Philadelphia with a cargo of flour, grain and tobacco. The date was March 21, 1858 when Captain Baker ran his 180-foot long ship ashore in fog. She must have slid or been backed off the rock as she quickly sank in 7 fathoms of water. Baker made the decision to leave his ship with the crew and four passengers. They arrived in the harbor safely but the fate of the steamer was sealed. Within two or three days she split in two, fore and aft, spilling out her \$100,000.00 cargo for salvagers to pursue. Eventually her anchors and rigging and about 300 barrels of cargo were saved but the vessel and the remaining portion of the cargo was a total loss.

Almost twenty years passed before the next documented total loss at Black Rock. The victim this time was the three-masted schooner *WILLIAM S. SCULL*. At 409 tons and 125 feet in length the stranded vessel must have been quite a sight for the islanders when she ran ashore on July 16, 1877. With Captain Alpheus Barret in command, the *SCULL* was headed for Weymouth, MA from Charleston, SC with 572 tons of phosphate on board when she too became fogbound on the Block Island shore. Originally built in Camden, NJ, the three-master was just four years old at the time of her loss. Although it is unusual in summer months for fog to linger, reports say that the stranding took place at 1:30 in the afternoon. Six members of the crew left the vessel and went to Newport to be sent home while the captain and mate remained at the scene. The vessel remained intact for some time and a contract was made with the Block Island wreckers to get her off but that was not to be and by mid-August, some four weeks after the stranding, she went to pieces and was lost along with her cargo.

Four years after the loss of the *WILLIAM S. SCULL* a memorable incident occurred at Block Island which would be written about for years to come. The date was August 5, 1881, and a total of nine vessels ran ashore at the same time. Two of these became a total loss at Black Rock. The first was a three-masted schooner, the *ELIZABETH SINNICKSON*, of Philadelphia. A moderately small vessel of only 207 tons, the 116-foot long tern

schooner was enroute from Philadelphia for Lynn, MA under command of a captain Outten. Like many merchant schooners of this era she was carrying a cargo of coal. The *SINNICKSON* had been built in 1867 in Milton, DE and was owned by J.B. Kirby and others. The second was another three-master named *JOHN T. MANSON*, of New Haven, CT. At 530 tons, *MANSON* was almost three times the tonnage as the *SINNICKSON* though at 130' x 32' x 15' she was not much larger in length. She also had sailed from Philadelphia with coal but she was bound for Boston. Captain Phinney and his crew were in no immediate danger but the *MANSON*'s sailing days were over.

In the next edition of the Log, the stories of four other vessels lost at Black Rock will be related.



HELP WANTED

The BLMA scrapbook needs to be updated and maintained.

This important job is well suited to an individual whose mobility is limited and who wishes to contribute to our organization in a tangible way.

Contact Linda Warner at 423-1278 or mailmum@aol.com

Readers residing outside of Newport county who see an article about Beavertail Light Station or Beavertail State park, please clip and send to Scrapbook Box 83 Jamestown, R.I. 02835



A standing room only crowd of enthusiastic folks greeted Jim Jenney August 29th for the Shipwreck Database Celebration. The BLMA Board presented this photo to Jim as a remembrance of the event. Attendees were as one in their praise for Jim's work and the multiple presentation formats.



JUST ANNOUNCED!

Linda and George Warner

have been awarded the

Joan C. Arnold Civic Participation Award

by the **League of Women Voters of Newport County.**

Named in honor of an individual who was active in the League and devoted to community service on Aquidneck Island, the Warners have been very much involved in serving their community for many years. Both George and Linda have held a number of leadership positions with BLMA and have been very much involved in other community organizations and town government. The award recognizes individuals who serve those in need or work to improve the quality of life in Newport County.

Presentation of the award will be made at a fund raiser for the League to be held at the Jamestown Art Center December 3rd. Watch the county press for more details.

RES ■



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MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
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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.beavertaillight.org



MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Museum and Gift Shop Holiday Open House

December 6th, 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

**holiday decore, refreshments,
and conversation**



*NOTE: The museum gift shop will not have a
presence at the Jamestown Craft Show this year.*