



The Lighthouse Log

Summer 2018

The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

President

Suzi Andrews

Vice President

Stewart Morgan

Secretary

Joan Vessella

Membership Secretary

Linda Warner

Treasurer

Sandy Paterson

Board of Directors

Diane Bakley

Nicole Contino

Bob Dutson

Varoujan Karentz

Richard Koster

Steve Meade

Sandy Paterson

David Smith

Linda Warner

Log Editor

Bob Dutson

Marine Historian

Jim Jenney

Published by

Sir Speedy, Cranston

Front Cover PhotoArchives photo
courtesy of Linda Warner**Beavertail Lighthouse
Museum Association**

PO Box 83

Jamestown, RI 02835

401.423.3270

Email:

info@Beavertailight.org

Web site:

www.beavertailight.org

Summer 2108 Editor Message

Its barely mid-summer and we're having another standout season. Every year it seems we could never eclipse the previous record for visitors, but it looks like we'll do it again. We opened Memorial Day weekend, only too aware the weather up to mid-May was horrendous. Thankfully it cooperated on the holiday weekend and, so far, the numbers for 2018 speak for themselves: 19,500 web site visits May-July as of 7/24, totalling 146,987 hits. After all the 2017 festivities it might have been tempting to just coast, but that won't happen here.

On June 16 BLMA held our 25th anniversary event, commemorating a quarter century as a maritime museum. Many new & old friends joined BLMA in celebrating a major milestone. The tower opened for a great day of viewing, art works were available and another memorable day was recorded in the log.

A new flat screen display is installed in the hall near the Gift Shop, providing up to date BLMA event and tower climb info as well as weather & tides. Dave Smith worked many hours doing its programming. It is very impressive and if you haven't stopped by Beavertail yet this year, check it out. Remember: the museum is open 7 days per week until Labor Day, and weekends thereafter. The tower schedule appears on the back cover. Why not relish the best view in the state, and get a selfie your friends will never forget?

We have a new roof cover on the old Fog Signal building! After consulting Coast Guard and DEM staff about cost sharing for a new copper roof required by the RI Historic Commission, we located a contractor on our own. The commission insisted repairs must meet historic guidelines, and could proceed only when the proposed project satisfied their requirements. Until then, the Aquarium remained closed. We sincerely regret the inconvenience to visitors this caused.

The Gift Shop was given a new look with built-in display shelves thanks to Al & Ursula Parenteau. We've expanded the list of available gift items, all of which can now be purchased with credit & debit cards. Sales have been great, and one visit will make the reasons self evident.

Architectural plans for courtyard and other related exterior upgrades were revised following review by the RI Historic Commission and DEM. They approved changes made and we now await input from other agencies involved. The project would give our grounds a more 'historically correct' look and feel. Access for handicapped visitors and staff parking will be upgraded substantially.

*Continued Page 2*

Continued from Page 1

In this issue: a snapshot of the more notorious individuals who sailed around Beavertail, shipwrecks off Sandy Point, Block Island and part two of a history of lenses. The latest in a new series describes the US Coast Guard's association with BLMA, especially their control & upkeep of navigational signals. Their role as a special 'benefactor' is essential, as they loan to us some of the most stunning displays on site. We would be poorer without their support.

In closing, when we reopened Memorial Day weekend we were amazed by the "flood tide" of new and familiar faces. We expect more than 33,000 visitors will stop by season's end. Our crew of docents has worked diligently to show these friends of BLMA our museum, and we hope you agree they're doing a great job.

Warm regards,

Bob Dutton

2018 Season in Pictures

The 2018 season has been a spectacular run so far, particularly after a wet Spring. And there are still plenty of days left until Columbus Day. But in the interim here are some memories of tower climbs, the Volvo Ocean Race, jet ski daredevils, roof repairs, etc.



The Volvo Ocean race in southern Narragansett Bay, a stone's throw away.



Roof repairs for the Aquarium (former Fog Signal building) commence July 16.



Fog Signal Building Roof paint applied August 14.



Jet skis often circle the point, submerged rocks notwithstanding. Shot from tower during a scheduled climb.



Visitors throng to Beavertail this summer. Newport is visible in the background.



Another rock with a message.



And a rock with no explanation needed.



Dice tossed by Mark Plugovoy, a tower climb visitor. They spell out Rhody, as in Little Rhody, the biggest small state in the USA. Photo also courtesy of Mark Plugovoy.

The Coast Guard at Beavertail

This is the second in a four part series. In this article we list the duties of the US Coast Guard. They are probably the best known of those who play a role at Beavertail. The US Lighthouse Service, AKA the Bureau of Lighthouses, was once in charge of all light stations; it was dissolved and incorporated within the USCG in 1939. Now part of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard plays a critical role on site and elsewhere.



Although their activities in maintaining secure waters and rescuing distressed boaters are clearly their highest priorities, the US Coast Guard continues oversight of lightstations. They maintain and operate the fog and light navigational signals, and the electric equipment and controls for equipment here at Beavertail. They also actually own all buildings, and have ultimate authority over any repairs or other work deemed necessary. (However, the RI Historic Commission approves materials, appearance etc. to ensure historic aspects are maintained.) To further complicate matters, BLMA must arrange, fund and monitor all such work even though we only lease the premises we occupy. This is why we must occasionally conduct fundraisers like the recent drive conducted in 2017.) The USCG, as part of Homeland Security, has the ultimate say over who does what, and when it's needed, but the federal government does not budget for any work unless it's signal related.

When light or fog signals malfunction the Coast Guard sends one or more technicians from the Bristol RI Aids to Navigation Team (ANT) to evaluate the situation. For example, if the rotating drum beacon light should lose its illumination, stop rotating or both, this is a high priority repair situation requiring their attention. It may not be possible to effect repairs immediately but the equipment is examined and if replacement parts are required they are ordered.

When light or fog signals malfunction the Coast Guard sends one or more technicians from the Bristol RI Aids to Navigation Team (ANT) to evaluate the situation. For example, if the rotating drum beacon light should lose its illumination, stop rotating or both, this is a high priority repair situation requiring their attention. It may not be possible to effect repairs immediately but the equipment is examined and if replacement parts are required they are ordered.

The Coast Guard also sets down policies which BLMA and other occupants (i.e. RIDEM) and contractors must adhere to. Primarily those guidelines address security, safety and types of permitted building operations on site. For us, that means our museum and tower climb operations must follow their rules and regulations.

In the next issue, we will list activities of the RI DEM. The RI Dept of Environmental Management (DEM) is a state agency. It's most visible and popular activity is operating a marine aquarium in the old Fog Signal Building. Although we maintain the building, which is historic as are all structures, DEM staffs and maintains the various fish tanks within on a seasonal basis; their schedule is approximately the same as ours. The DEM also maintains the detached restroom facilities and conducts the 'landscaping' and hiking path clearing work within Beavertail Park proper. They keep a small powered vehicle in the garage building for park work. Their park upkeep and restroom cleaning is done year round.

BD

Web Site is a Hit

In 2017 there were 42,211 "hits" by visitors to the Site, accessible @ www.beavertailight.org. To date in 2018 we've had 146,987 hits as of 7/24, so the Site's visibility is obviously growing. Board member Dave Smith administers and updates it continuously with upcoming events, newsworthy info, photos and the like. If you want to keep informed about what's happening at the museum and light tower, this is the source.

BD

Pirates of the Bay



Narragansett Bay has a rich history of pirates, rum runners and scofflaws who considered maritime laws inconveniences at most. They sometimes adopted an image of respectability to avoid the consequences of getting caught. (It seems they would fit nicely inside the Beltway.) One of the most famous “explorers” memorialized at our new Jamestown Bridge, as well as an older one in NY, was none other than Giovanni de Verrazano. He was also a pirate. Lacking any grocery stores, butcher shops or banks, pirates devised a different form of commerce. They were not predisposed to the ordinary life, working a traditional line of work and raising a family. It was preferable to plunder and pillage, at least that’s how they viewed life.

For many, life ended suddenly and harshly. On July 19, 1723, a record of sorts was established on the bay: 26 pirates were executed by hanging in Newport RI. The English pirate Edward Low and his associate Charles Harris were notorious, creating mayhem & havoc from the Caribbean north to New England that year. They might have gone on for years, but made a major mistake and attacked the British warship *Greyhound*. The pirate crews spotted her off Long Island, NY and then followed north and east. A battle in coastal waters

ensued. Edward Low was a master at survival & escaped on his ship during the fight, but Harris and his crew were captured and hanged. Crime may have paid for a few, but not for most.

The rumrunners who operated from Newport were legendary if for no other reason there were so many of them in the mid-late 18th century. Newport, and Boston, were the primary ports in the Northeast. New York City was small and inconsequential by comparison at the time. There was high demand for rum among some of the ordinary citizens, respectability notwithstanding, both in pubs and behind closed doors. Not to mention the strong markets amongst those whose livelihood actually depended on port activities - stevedores, shipwrights and of course the seamen themselves. By illegally smuggling rum, duties and import taxes were avoided and prices stayed lower. Everyone involved benefitted except perhaps tax collectors and town planners!

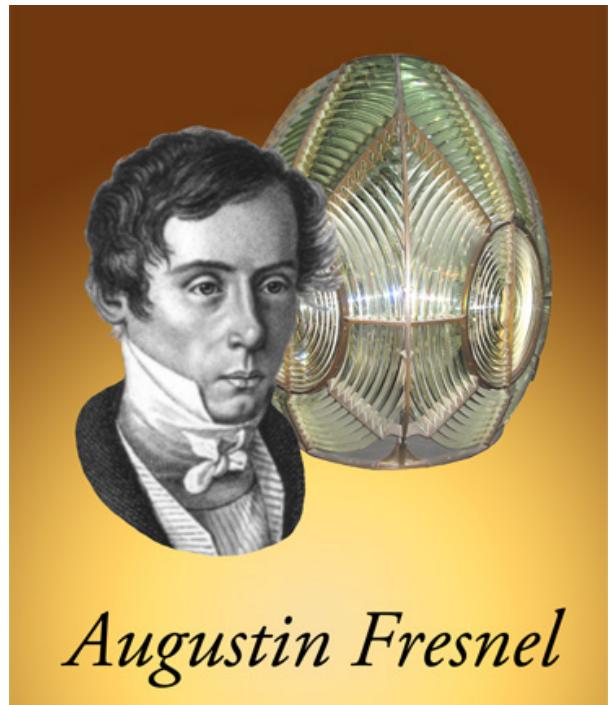
... Our most infamous local was the notorious Captain William Kidd, whose exploits in and around Narragansett Bay are numerous. Many more of his crimes likely went unreported, due to understandable fear of ensuing consequences if he was indicted. Who would be brave enough to point their finger at that guy? Reports of Kidd’s undiscovered ‘treasure’ concealed somewhere on Jamestown have persisted over the centuries. In a cave along the rugged bluffs around Beavertail, buried in the wooded lands or many sheep pastures on the island, or perhaps even in my back yard, who knows?

Not to be overlooked are Captains Henry Morgan, Thomas Paine and “Blackbeard” all of whom frequented Narragansett Bay during their ‘illustrious’ careers. Their crews, like all such, were paid and fed when and if they captured goods or valuables along the way. Otherwise they were hungry, grumpy and often cold & wet. It sounds like a lousy way to make a living.

There were also at least two notorious women pirates operating at the time, and while most historical accounts state they were primarily active around Jamaica, the Bahamas and elsewhere south of New England, at least one I found mentioned Jamestown and Newport. Anne Bonny and Mary Read were by any yardstick very tough, feisty individuals. At times disguising themselves as men and at others relying on their scary reputations, they could certainly handle most situations, as well as a sword. Eventually they were captured but when both were found to be pregnant, temporarily released. Mary was tried and convicted later on but Anne married and lived a comparatively ordinary life in Charleston SC. I haven’t any clue as to just how many ‘colonials’ lived as pirates or the like, but methinks few ended up living out her life as uneventfully as she.

Fresnel Was a Latecomer Part 2

In part 1 some of the trials & tribulations faced by early lens and lighthouse builders were related. The introduction concluded with a description of Kilwarlin, or South Rock, Lighthouse, the brainchild of Thomas Rogers. Located on a small island off Ireland, it was an engineering marvel. At the time (1797) it exhibited some ingenious design developments, both structurally and from an illumination viewpoint. But it was plagued by natural forces and personnel failures. In 1801 huge ocean waves began to undermine the tower foundation, and there were persistent complaints of lighthouse keepers who were apparently poorly trained. Some structural reinforcement was accomplished but Rogers had accumulated a number of critics. The Irish Revenue Board, their governing body for lighthouses, was managed by Rogers. By 1810 so many official complaints had been issued that the Revenue Board was replaced by the "Dublin Ballast Board" which surreptitiously sent out 3 inspectors to various lighthouses. Rogers was unaware of these developments. Ironically they prepared a generally positive report for Kilwarlin but other lighthouses were found in unsatisfactory condition. Over time, Rogers' contracts for the various lighthouses were terminated; he chose to manage them without compensation.



Augustin Fresnel

Back in London, his former partner George Robinson secured contracts to replace the equipment installed by Rogers with "better" equipment, and Rogers faded from the scene. The Robinson Company had gone through several internal partnership changes starting in the 1790's until 1846. His company was known for the construction of the Flamborough Lighthouse in 1806. Its highlight design involved a rotating vertical shaft to which were fixed 21 parabolic reflectors, 7 each on a 3-sided frame attached to the shaft. Red glass covered the reflectors on one side, allowing two white flashes followed by a red flash. Robinson subsequently supplied reflectors and lenses for various locations in England, Australia and Germany.

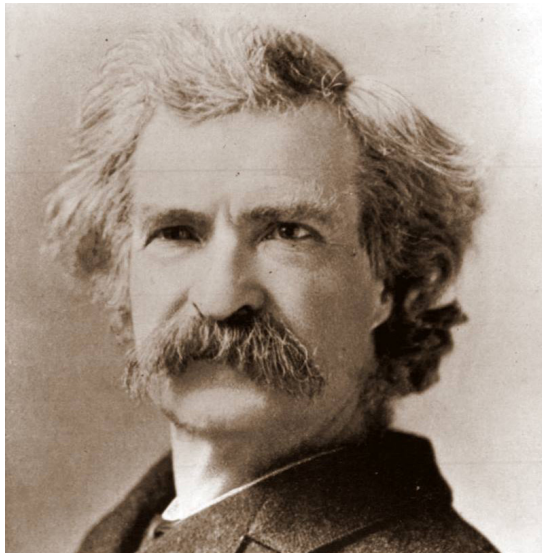
He had designed as well a half-sphere lens 4.5" in diameter, set near the focal point of parabolic reflectors, which was used later on both at Flamborough and the 'South Stack' lighthouse. The latter impressed Winslow Lewis sufficiently enough during a visit in 1810 that he used them as a basis for designing American lighthouses. Nearly all US lighthouses including Beavertail were required to use Lewis' convex projector lens from 1812 to 1840.

But the hemispherical lens design was inherently limited and provided no real magnification. Lenses were made of green bottle glass, which had entrained air bubbles and striations, a very poor quality material for lenses! Reportedly the reflectors were actually more powerful without his lenses fixed in front, and the lenses were subsequently removed. The British Trinity House was worried about the conflict of interest Robinson's company had, being both optics supplier and chief inspector. In 1822 he sold the company and retired after a few more years continuing his inspection contract.

In short, earlier lens and reflector designs were inferior for various reasons. All were ultimately replaced by the Fresnel lens, first designed in 1815-1816. Augustin Fresnel was a better inventor than he was a businessman though, and did not properly patent his new design. Others took advantage of his oversight, and the rest is history. There were ultimately 7 different classes of Fresnel lenses, including the one on display in our Museum. It still functions, at reduced power, and is as much a beautiful work of art as a historic aid to navigation.

A powerful tool for discovering the intricacies of the Fresnel lens is also located right here at Beavertail. There were two programmable flat screens installed in our Oil House in 2017. They display in spectacular detail the optics and brilliance (pun intended) of this 200+ year old technology.

A ‘Yankee’ in Beavertail Courtyard



“The cantankerous refugee from Hannibal stumbled onto a vista he’d never imagined. All his travels abroad fetched nothing quite like what he spied on this little jewel of New England. This was definitely NOT some berg on the muddy Mississippi overlooked by a decrepit, dust-choked grain elevator. Sam beheld a dazzling wave-tossed ocean framing a gleaming lighthouse. Thundering breakers and a tangy salt breeze. His imagination was captured by the unique seascape; that dusty hometown could never be called home again. Having led a ‘pure and blameless life’* Sam felt justified thinking his just desserts had finally arrived, that his ship had come in. That perhaps this Beavertail place could be available for his private purchase. He lit a small, foul smelling cigar in anticipatory celebration, then wandered around aimlessly, fouling that salt air with an acrid stench.

Others strolled the grounds with less sinister intent, admiring a grassy courtyard, speaking softly, almost reverently, and just staring at the horizon. Sky met sea there, a blue on blue

intersection. Ospreys, herring gulls and terns dived on schools of tiny fish, crying in midair.

Sam pondered writing home about this remarkable place, knowing at once that would be pointless. His neighbors could never envision what he wrote about the point. (They may as well have been reading about Bitcoin prospects.) Plus, he meant to find out who owned the premises without delay. He was sure a man of his many talents and glib tongue could hoodwink the owner into selling at bargain price. The owner was no doubt some naive local buffoon, as naive about business dealings as was the chieftain who sold Manhattan to the Dutch for a song.

But his publisher expected some sort of story, and the deadline was in 2 weeks. Sam stopped at a small bench alongside the path. What futile words could he employ, in a vain effort to convey these wonders? Folks back home considered a gnarled apple tree a landmark! How could he paint in words the image of huge, silvery bass caught off the point to those who saw a river catfish as a thing of beauty?

But as always that massive ego came to his rescue. His masterful style would seize the day, teasing their limited imaginations. No matter the challenge in dealing with, as he saw them, vastly inferior intellects; he was the great Sam Clemens, and defeat wasn’t in his vocabulary. So he outlined a wayfarer’s letter and molded it into his above-it-all style, planning to forward it the most next day.

Given the rudimentary mail service at the time, Sam never learned his dispatch was lost en route during a flash flood a mere eight miles south of its destination. Just as well perhaps. His hometown neighbors were a type generously described as “skeptical” and when all was said and done, they ended most discussions about anything new and different with a sarcastic ‘Show Me!’ Anyway, it was a safe bet they’d never head east of their wonderful river to be “shown” anything, even a place as idyllic as Beavertail.

The last anyone recalled, Clemens was still staring at our endless ocean, shaking his great mane of wild hair in amazement. His application for state citizenship was approved, albeit with some delays; rumors of silver mine claim-jumping in Nevada and a “borrowed” chestnut mare hounded him. He wisely forgot any ideas of buying our lighthouse and took up quahogging. He was fortunate - RI accepts pretty much everyone who wants in!”

* *Excerpt from “Curing a Cold”, 1863, a sketch by Mark Twain.*

This “essay” is entirely a work of fiction, and although the subject (Samuel Clemens/Mark Twain) is obviously a reknowned author of many books enjoyed by millions of readers (including your editor) no events described herein actually occurred to the best of my belief, nor should any opinions or descriptions of individuals from the central US be construed as anything but fanciful verbiage, and the product of an overactive imagination. The author did once visit a grain elevator in Hannibal MO, but regretfully had no spare time to spend with the fine people of that area.

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast Sandy Point/Northern Block Island (Part 1)



Of the many dangerous points on the Rhode Island coast, the northern end of Block Island and the waters around Sandy Point is high on the list. There is a light station on the peninsula leading to Sandy Point. The first lighthouse was erected there in 1829 but was positioned too close to the water and was replaced with a newer light, further inland, in 1837. This new light survived the encroaching sea but passing mariners considered the strength of the light to be insufficient and it was upgraded in 1857, after twenty years of service. Rapidly shifting sands overcame that third North Light and in 1867, after only ten years, the fourth and current lighthouse was erected here. The north point and nearby shoreline have witnessed nearly two

dozen wrecks over the years where the vessel has been totally lost. What follows is a chronological listing of those incidents. All but three of the vessels involved were sailing vessels with the largest of that group measuring 387 tons. Of the powered vessels, the largest was the Hungarian steamship PULASKI of 3,733 tons.

Without a doubt, the earliest recorded shipwreck in this locale is also the strangest shipwreck which has ever occurred on Block Island. Over the years, and indeed well into modern times, the apparition of a burning sailing ship has been seen off the western shore of Block Island. This legendary spirit ship is known simply as "The Palatine Light". Insufficient historical records have attempted to hide the true story of the vessel upon which the legend is based but after an in-depth study of the shipwrecks around Block Island, the mystery is unveiled. The year was 1738 and the British ship PRINCESS AUGUSTA was enroute from Plymouth, England for Philadelphia, PA. There are several theories about the immediate cause of the wreck; the most common is that the captain and crew of the ship intentionally sailed the ship continuously around the Atlantic giving them time to swindle the passengers by charging them for their daily rations with the intention of stealing all of their valuables. Most of the passengers were said to have died before the swindlers were satisfied with the amount of their spoils and when off the New England coast, the entire crew took their booty and departed in the ship's boats. Left helpless and adrift in a ship that they could not sail, the passengers ran ashore on the sandbar off Sandy Point. Later, the vessel drifted off but came ashore again in or near Cow Cove. The date was December 26, 1738 and there were only a handful of survivors that could be rescued by the islanders. The tale continues with the ship drifting off the rocks and being seen afire from the shore until she burned to the water's edge and sunk. The cause of the fire is unexplained but there is sufficient evidence of the stranding of the PRINCESS AUGUSTA, the remains of which have never been located.

Nearly sixty years after the loss of the PRINCESS AUGUSTA there is a documented loss of an unidentified local fishing boat off Clay Head, just southeast from Sandy Point. Four fishermen were aboard on that fateful day, February 9, 1797. The day was reported as pleasant with a southwest breeze blowing offshore from Clay Head. They had been seining perch in the harbor and were enroute for New York with their catch when their boat either struck on Brittons Rock or was capsized by a flow of wind off the bluff. During the night the wind changed to offshore and blew a gale and on the following morning the bodies of the fishermen were found ashore at the base of the cliff.

On January 25, 1824, a local coasting merchant vessel was lost by stranding on the northwest part of Block Island. The sloop SABINE, under the captain of a master named Howes (or Loveland) was enroute from Boston for New York City with a cargo consisting of American, English and Russian dry goods valued at \$20,000 when the grounding took place. Although the majority of the cargo was reported as salvaged, much of it was reported as damaged and the vessel declared a total loss.

This is the first of four articles which will document the twenty-two vessels lost in this area.



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 83
Jamestown, Rhode Island 02835

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

First Name 2nd Name Last Name
Address
City, State Zip



Museum Hours

Our museum will open Memorial Day weekend,
and tower climb dates appear below
and in Visitor Information also.

MONDAY MAY 28 12-3	SATURDAY JULY 28 1-4	SATURDAY SEPT 15 12-3
SATURDAY JUNE 16 1-4	SUNDAY AUGUST 12 1-4	SATURDAY SEPT 29 12-3
SUNDAY JULY 1 1-4	SATURDAY AUGUST 25 1-4	MONDAY OCT 8 12-3
SATURDAY JULY 14 1-4	MONDAY SEPT 3 12-3	

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.