



The Lighthouse Log

Summer 2015

The quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Message From The President

It is hard to believe the season is half over; pleased that we are having lots of visitors during normal hours and tower openings, Please plan to attend the special event on the Shipwreck Database and the annual meeting, more information on these is in the newsletter.

If you not seen the amazing video footage of Beavertail shot from a drone go to our website and click on the link.

With the expanded museum and tower openings BLMA needs more volunteers and docents, if you have time please contact Brenda Johnston or Linda Warner. It will be a very rewarding experience.

By the end of the summer the nominating committee will be seeking people to serve on the BLMA Board of Directors. If you are interested or know a person you think would be a good candidate please contact any current board member

SM ■



First hand experience with the Brenton Reef Offshore Light Tower

One of only two along the Atlantic Coast, the offshore tower replaced LV 102 in 1962. With four cross braced steel legs extending 80 feet and secured in bedrock, the facility was placed in unmanned service in 1962. Deterioration began almost immediately.

The electrical power was supplied by underground cable from Beavertail Light Station, with battery backup onsite. The supplier of services for the light ships had been Castle Hill Life-saving Station and this continued with diminished responsibility, primarily being sure the batteries were fully charged and the light was functioning. Former BLMA Director and Membership Chair Don Barrows recalled in a recent meeting what that duty was all about.

Don served in the U.S. Coast guard from 1957 to 1961 and in the CG Reserves until 1968. He was brought back from 1978 to 1986. Unlike some of his colleagues, Don loved the rescue calls. He was one of two seamen assigned to the four man 41 footer, the other two being a rated coxswain and engineman. Don's rating was Radioman and he stood regular radio watch. Castle Hill was the Group headquarters for all the R.I. light and life-saving stations and the Bristol ATN unit. There was a good deal of radio traffic to be monitored and routed. Don Served at Block Island and Point Judith Life-Saving Stations as well.

Don tells of jumping off the 41 footer at the base of the light tower and climbing the two ladders that were invariably covered with seagull droppings and quite slippery. The checking of the charge in the batteries was a weekly event. The large box-like structure at the top contained the batteries as well as leftover odds and ends from previous repair jobs. Don tells of the tower being in motion that was particularly noticeable when climbing the ladders.

The tower experienced rather rapid deterioration and was taken out of service in 1989, replaced with an ocean buoy. The tower was dismantled in 1992.

RES ■



COMMISSIONING CEREMONY AT THE LIGHT

An unusual sight greeted visitors to the museum on June 29th. A small contingent of U.S Marines, flags, a small pa system and fifteen or so guests set up behind the museum for the commissioning of Jacob Smaldone, a recent graduate of Norwich Academy in Vermont and the Marine Corps Platoon Leaders Class (PLC). The bars were pinned on by his sister and father.

A fondness for Beavertail held by Jacob and family was the reason for the location of the event. The proud new 2nd Lieutenant is off to Quantico, VA for the next phase of officer training.

RES ■



2015 BLMA Scholarship Awarded

Rachel O' Neill of Summit Avenue was awarded the annual \$1000 scholarship at the July meeting of the Board of Directors. A graduate of North Kingstown High, Rachel plans on attending the University of Vermont. She is considering psychology and nursing as majors.

Rachel presented for consideration an outstanding academic record with honors classes in chemistry, German, history and literature. Her high school counselor described Rachel as 'extraordinary young woman' who helped facilitate an anti-bullying program at the Jamestown Community Center where she had over 200 hours of community service in one year.

She held leadership positions at the high school and played lacrosse. Her counselor was quite taken by Rachel's "Thank You" to her on the completion of the annual student survey, the only one of one hundred fifty students who chose to use the annual student survey to show her appreciation for the help provided by the counselor.

RES ■



WINTER SCENE

For those who, sweltering in the recent hot, humid weather drove to Beavertail to cool off only to find every parking spot taken, take heart-scenes such as this are just around the corner. Robert Paquette, Chief, Parks and Recreation, DEM sent this photo last January taken by a friend flying a kite.

Shipwreck Database Celebration

Jim Jenney's Research of over 2000 Marine events in R.I. Waters

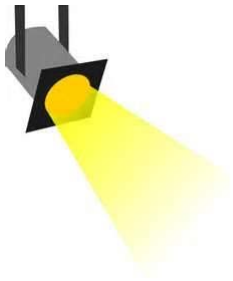
Many Lighthouse Log readers have been enjoying **Jim Jenney's** articles detailing episodes of marine disasters and shipwrecks since 2009 when his work made its first appearance in this BLMA member publication. Four times a year Jim has provided dramatic episodes from Rhode Island's rich maritime heritage selected from his vast collection of carefully researched maritime events.

Articles relating to the Development of the database bring developed in cooperation with BLMA have appeared from time to time in the past issues of the Log. The Winter 2014 issue asked for members to participate in a field test of the database accessed via the BLMA website. It is time to formally recognize this achievement and to honor Jim Jenney for what he has accomplished.

This special event will be held **August 29th from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm** at the museum. Jim will give a short presentation. Light refreshments will be available.

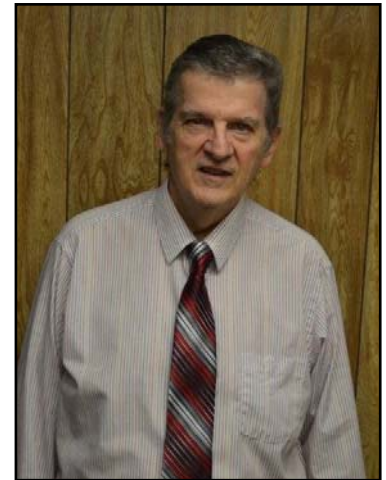


THE SPOTLIGHT SHINES ON



Jim Jenney, Marine Historian for the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association (BLMA), was born and raised in Newport, R.I. At the age of 12 he began a study that would become the passion of his life—researching and locating lost shipwrecks.

He began sharing his findings by writing articles, first for magazines and then a newspaper column “New England Underwater”. Several books followed. As his skill at finding lost vessels increased, Jim established the United States Shipwreck Data Bank, beginning with Rhode Island, expanding throughout New England and finally to all coastal regions of the United States. It was not long before Jim realized he needed to refocus the ambitious scope of his research.



Having graduated from college, married and raising a family, Jim chose to limit his research to R.I. waters. In 2008 a query from the BLMA resulted in Jim's including maritime disasters in which the vessel (s) may not have been lost. There is little doubt that the state of Rhode Island has much to offer in maritime history that goes well beyond instances when vessels were lost, leaving only memories to share.

Over two thousand documented maritime events are contained in the Shipwreck Data Base which is available at Beavertaillight.org and in the museum. Jim's research is likely to continue as long as there are records to find and details to uncover.

RES ■

RHODE ISLAND'S PERILOUS COAST—LION'S HEAD/HULL COVE **(PART 1)**

Between the southern tip of Beavertail Point and Mackerel Cove, along the eastern shore of Beavertail, there are two shore features which have been the sight of at least nine marine disasters over the years – eight of these resulting in the total loss of the vessel. Lion's Head is a small promontory about ½ mile above Beavertail Point. Hull Cove is a small cove situated just over ½ mile north from Lion's Head. The following is a brief description of the ill-fated vessels whose final voyage ended here.

Three days before Christmas in 1840 the schooner CHICKATABUT, laden with corn and bound for New Bedford from Elizabeth City, NC found herself lost in a snowstorm as she was approaching Narragansett Bay. She struck on Brenton's Reef, on the eastern side of the bay entrance but in a strong easterly breeze she came off the reef after a few hours, drifted across the channel and ran ashore on rocks near Lion's Head. Her master and crew managed to escape and made their way to Newport.

More than two decades later, on July 16, 1864, the captain and crew of the schooner MARY, outward bound from Providence for New London, CT, in ballast, found herself fogbound and in trouble here. Her master, Captain Fisher, was traveling along the shore taking care that his 68-foot long merchant vessel would be safe when her hull found the rocks north of Beavertail light on the eastern shore of the neck. Although there is no indication of a rough sea, the schooner struck hard and would not budge. As soon as her situation was discovered and given that she was an old vessel lying on rocks in a most exposed location, the local inhabitants set at removing her sails, rigging and, in fact, anything of value that could be quickly removed in anticipation of her destruction. She broke up where she stranded.

The first documented vessel known to have been wrecked in Hull Cove was the fishing schooner TICKLER. Caught in a storm on April 12, 1873 this small vessel ran ashore and became a total loss on the rocks. Launched in 1867, the TICKLER was only six years old at the time of her stranding. She had been launched in Groton, CT and sailed out of East Lyme on regular fishing trips. She was 49 tons capacity, a relatively small but typical coastal fisherman. An interesting remark relative to this incident appeared in the Boston Globe a few days later. In that newspaper it was noted that *"a party of shipwrecked sailors in Jamestown was charged twenty dollars for transportation from that place to Newport"*. This was a bit unusual since locals usually went out of their way, often at their own expense, to accommodate the needs of shipwrecked mariners, often paying their passage back to their homes after a wreck.

The fourth, and easily the largest, vessel which found herself in trouble here was the three-masted schooner ALFRED D. HUDDALL. The stranding of this 344-ton vessel took place during the summer of 1874. Inbound from Georgetown, DC for Bristol with four hundred tons of soft coal, she was, like most of the vessels in distress in this area, a victim of the weather. The news reported the two-day storm of August 8th and 9th as notable for a heavy sea, strong winds and copious amounts of rain (at Dutch Island one resident reported almost 7 inches of rain during this single storm). Captain Long reported that his voyage had been generally uneventful until the morning of the 8th when she was found to be leaking at a considerable rate. On the following morning this condition along with the weather led to her stranding as she navigated around the point of Beavertail. Owned by her master and others, the five-year old schooner ran ashore and almost instantly bilged. It was almost

immediately reported that no hopes were entertained of saving the vessel or her cargo. However, the Boston newspapers of the 27th stated that wreckers saved all of her running and standing gear, sails, chains, anchors, etc.

In the next edition of the log, the stories of four other vessels which met with disaster at this location will be detailed.





SHIPWRECK DATA BASE HELPS FAMILY SEARCH



A museum visitor enjoying a July vacation in Jamestown asked docent Courtney Crimi if the BLMA database contained information about a ship grounding on Block Island in the early 1900s. **Nancy Hellstrom** from Minnesota was trying to find more information about the shipwreck that her grandparents from the Azores had survived. With the help of **Varoujan Karentz** the data base was searched and the vessel **MORMUGAO** was located.

The vessel with 450 passengers aboard was bound for New Bedford. Two pages of detailed information about the stranding were found. All passengers were removed safely. Hellstrom learned some new information and confirmed other research data she had gathered. Three hundred of the passengers, including her grandparents, were heading for California to work in the orchards. She was pleased to be able to add new information to her family's history portfolio.

VK ■

MORMUGAO	
	
Built in 1904 as the ESNE (later changed to KOMMODORE) the steam passenger freighter MORMUGAO (pictured) was loaded with Portuguese immigrants when she ran ashore on Block Island.	
The Vessel	The Event
Type: Steamship Construction: Steel Use: Passenger Liner Dimensions: 411' long Tonnage: 6,013 Launched: Hamburg, Germany in 1904 Nationality: Portuguese Home Port: Lisbon, Portugal	Port of Departure: The Azores Port of Destination: New Bedford, MA Cargo: 450 passengers Date of Incident: April 29, 1921 Disaster Type: Stranding Cause: Fog Status: Got Off Location: On the southwest tip of Block Island
Narrative	
<p>Lockport Clarion-Sun and Journal - April 29, 1921 P1</p> <p>BIG LINER SLIDES ONTO ROCK LEDGE OFF BLOCK ISLAND</p> <p>Has Over 400 Passengers on Board but They Are Reported to be in no Immediate Danger</p> <p>NEWPORT, R.I., April 29 - The wireless at Nantucket lost contact with the stranded Portuguese steamer, MORMUGAO, this afternoon. The operator reported he was unable to get any answer from the vessel, which had been in constant communication with the station since daybreak. Officials were inclined to the belief the steamer's power plant was out of order.</p> <p>Carried 450 Passengers</p> <p>NEW LONDON, Conn., April 29 - There are 450 passengers on the Portuguese steamer MORMUGAO, which ran ashore off Block Island today, according to a message received from the Scott Wrecking Company. A wrecking fleet was rushed to its assistance.</p> <p>Went on Rocks In Fog</p> <p>BOSTON, April 29 - The Portuguese steamer MORMUGAO, which ran aground in a heavy fog on the southwest tip of Block Island early today, is resting on rocks and is not in immediate danger, according to wireless reports reaching here. Reports said high tide may float the vessel, on which are more than 400 Portuguese emigrants. Tugs and wrecking crews have gone to the ship's aid, however. Coast Guards are now standing by. The forward hold is said to be filled with water and some of the seams are leaking. Although the passengers are calm, it is expected they will be moved during the afternoon. Three hundred of the passengers are bound for California to work in orchards. One hundred are en route to New</p>	

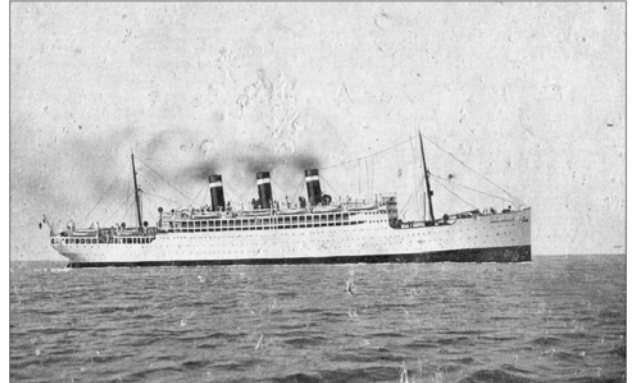
MORMUGAO
<p>Bedford and the remainder is on their way to New York. There was no danger of a panic when the vessel struck while feeling her way through the fog. Most of the passengers were asleep when she drove her nose onto the low shelf of rocks off the point. They rushed to the decks without waiting to dress, but were calmed by the officers and crew. The first warning the coast guards had of the vessel's plight was just before daybreak, when they heard the frantic wails of the siren. The sea was heavy and a dense fog hid the vessel from shore. The guards put off in life boats and guided by the distress signals finally located her. Meanwhile the steamer's wireless was sending out calls for help and the coast guard cutters ACUSHNET and ANDROSCOGGIN were sent to the scene. Wrecking tugs and apparatus were also dispatched from New London. The MORMUGAO formerly was a German freighter. She is a steel steamer of 5,285 tons. She was built in 1904 at Hamburg and launched under the name of COMMODORE. [one source indicates she was launched as ESNE and later renamed]. During the war she was seized from Germany by the Portuguese government and now operates out of Lisbon.</p> <p>The Sandusky Star Journal - April 29, 1921 P1 & P8</p> <p>450 PASSENGERS IMPERILED WHEN STEAMER GOES AGROUND</p> <p>LINER MORMUGAO, PORTUGUESE CRAFT, ON BLOCK ISLAND</p> <p>Wireless Says Forward Hold Filled With Water and Vessels Rushed To Her Assistance</p> <p>BOSTON, April 29 - Four hundred and fifty passengers were imperiled today when the steamer, MORMUGAO, bound from the Azores to New Bedford, ran ashore on the southwest tip of Block Island, according to a wireless message received here. There was a heavy sea running and the position of the steamer was obscured by a dense fog which shrouded the New England coast. ... The steamer is resting on rocks and is not in immediate danger according to wireless reports reaching here. Reports said high tide may float the vessel. Tugs and wrecking crews have gone to the ship's aid, however. Coast guards are now standing by. Although the passengers are calm, it is expected they will be removed during the afternoon. There was danger of a panic when the vessel struck while feeling her way through the fog. Most of the passengers were asleep when she drove her nose onto the low shelf of rocks off the point. They rushed to the decks without waiting to dress, but were calmed by the officers and crew. The first warning the coast guards had of the vessel's plight was just before daybreak, when they heard the frantic wails of her siren. ... The MORMUGAO formerly was a German freighter and was fitted for passenger service last year. This was her third voyage from Lisbon. She had a crew of 100 and carried cargo for New York and New Bedford. ...</p> <p>Although the outlook did not look good for the stranded vessel, passengers were removed the next day and longshoremen were brought from Boston to unload the sand ballast aboard the MORMUGAO in preparation for an attempt to pull her off. Unfortunately, the longshoremen discovered the ship was carrying illegal liquor hidden in the sand ballast and proceeded to help themselves. As you might suspect, this made the ballast removal a bit more challenging and they finally had to be removed from the ship and sent home by train from Providence. Despite that setback, the freighter was pulled off on the following day by the Coast Guard cutter ACUSHNET assisted by the tug GUARDSMAN and proceeded to New London under her own power, none the worse for the experience.</p>
Research Sources
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lockport Clarion-Sun and Journal - April 29, 1921 P1 2. The Sandusky Star Journal - April 29, 1921 P1 & P8 3. Fairport Daily Review - April 29, 1921 P1 4. Boston Daily Globe - April 30, 1921 P1 & P8

Rhode Island's Statue of Liberty

Well known to immigrants, New York's Statue of Liberty was the iconic view which welcomed them to the United States. It was the comforting landmark confirming they had reached America. Beavertail Light during those same immigration years of the 1900's served a similar role for thousands who came to make New England their new home.

The Port of Providence located along Allens Ave was indeed an immigration port of entry and arriving passengers lined ship's rail to see the prominent Beavertail Light at the entrance to Narragansett Bay, welcoming their arrival. Passing the sparkling white manicured buildings and granite light tower provided assurance they had safely reached America.

Over 84,000 immigrants entered the Port of Providence. So intense was the immigrant travel to New England from Europe, the Mideast and the islands of the Azores, the French steamship company "Fabre Lines" established a dock and offices on the Providence waterfront. Fabre Lines with 11 ships during the years 1911 to 1934 made stops at New York, Azores, Madeira, Lisbon, Marseilles, Genoa, Naples, Algiers, Piraeus and Constantinople.



SS PROVIDENCE

In 1919 Fabre Lines named a new ship, the SS PROVIDENCE, a vessel of 11,900 tons and close to 500 ft in length. She completed 24 trips, including American citizens on return trips to Europe. Ironically Fabre Line's maiden voyage in 1911 into Providence was the SS Madonna piloted into the bay by Tad Dodge, the Block Island Pilot highlighted on our museum's Piloting in Narragansett Bay storyboard

VK ■

Annual Meeting Around the Corner



The BLMA Annual Meeting, scheduled for September 16th at 7:00 pm, promises to be most interesting. Astrid M. Drew, manager of the archives for the Steamship Historical Society of America will speak about this national organization's history, objectives and diverse collections of ships plans and models, fine art, promotional materials and menus as well as a comprehensive reference library.

Founded in 1935 the Society's mission is to record, preserve and disseminate the history of steam powered vessels. With headquarters in Warwick R.I., the Society is the world's leading organization committed to, in its own words, "stewarding a collection of hundreds of images, artifacts, periodicals, artwork, official records, memorabilia and ephemera archived in more than 100 collections..."

The society has eight local chapters scattered across the country. The organization values the forum it provides for the amateur and professional historian to meet, share ideas and work collaboratively on projects of local or regional interest. Refreshments will follow.

RES ■



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MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Shipwreck Database Celebration

August 29

At the Museum

4:00 pm to 6:00 pm



2015 BLMA Annual Meeting

September 16

At the Jamestown Library

7:00 pm

