



The Lighthouse Log

Winter 2018

The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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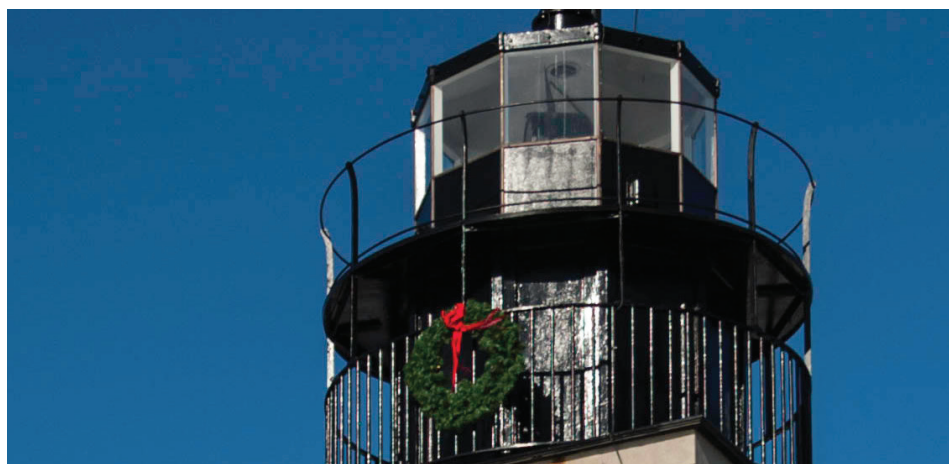
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Editor's Message February 2018

2017 Fundraising Campaign Expecting to Exceed \$590,000!!

A new year is upon us, and groundhogs either checked out their shadows, or couldn't, depending on your zip code. At BLMA we are recharging our collective energy banks. After expending lots of that commodity in 2017 some down-time is most welcome. There may never be another year like it, and it would be nice to be hibernating somewhere. Once I worked in NYC, just to prove I could, but not one of 17 years spent in Manhattan seemed half as full. A sabbatical in a sunny, warm clime right about now sounds great, but I'd miss the seals, bufflehead ducks and snowy owls at the point.

Beavertail's facilities have survived the off season so far, more or less. High winds during a severe storm on the anniversary of Hurricane Sandy detached the copper roof over the old Fog Signal building. A new roof cover will be installed once weather improves, and a tarp has been nailed down for now. There are new garage doors, matching the old doors in appearance as required. They were provided free of charge by Overhead Door Garage Headquarters of Warwick RI. Our sincere thanks go out to ODGH.

The Open House on Dec. 3 went extremely well. Many familiar faces enjoyed our annual pre-Christmas event, and we opened the following weekend as well. The food was excellent as always, and a lot of fun was had by all who could make it; the gift shop was a big factor. We opened New Years Day as a special tribute to everyone who made our museum a part of their life in 2017.

The tally of last year's phenomenal fundraiser is nearly completed. Although accounting is not yet finalized for the 2017 Fundraising Campaign, we expect the combination of donations and matched funds from benefactor Jim Buttrick to exceed \$590,000. As a result a perpetual endowment fund has been established for future building repairs and maintenance. Our appreciation for all who contributed

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can't be overstated. Jim Buttrick, of course, provided those matched funds, for which we will be forever grateful. Board member Nicole Contino made it actually happen and we would not have fared anywhere near as well without her.

The efforts by our staff in 2017 can't really be measured, but an immense amount of time and energy was involved.* All I really had to do was report their fine work, sample some gourmet cuisine, and enjoy the panoramic view from our tower alternating weekends. Nice work if you can get it!

In this issue you will find more about the waters off deceptively beautiful Block Island in Jim Jenney's latest chapter of "RI Perilous Coast." Jim's addition to the RI website "Small State, Big History" can be found at <http://smallstatebighistory.com/>; it is titled Rhode Island's Greatest Shipwreck Disasters. Also included: plans for a new courtyard, an item about Beavertail's "ghost" and a very small holiday visitor. Signal equipment upgrades made by the USCG, details of which they provided, are much appreciated.

Before I forget, it would be great to hear what YOU want to read about. If you had an especially memorable visit, recently or a decade ago, please tell us about it. If you've been curious about one thing or another please drop us a line (or a main sheet or halyard as you prefer.) There are doubtless many Beavertail related topics or favorite memories of yours, that readers would love to hear about. We're still accumulating old photos of former keepers, their families and even pets (One lighthouse dog named "Useless" from around 1960 comes to mind.) We have a few faded pics of living quarters and the grounds circa 1950-1970; if you have any photos you feel I can be trusted with, I promise to return them.

From the mea culpa category, belatedly we report Mary Heureux, our docent coordinator, was also voted Docent of the Year, and got her award at the annual meeting. Thank you Mary for handling the toughest job we have.

Finally, please note that we are planning a 25th anniversary event. Time frame is expected to be next spring or summer but the date, venue, food and activities are being worked out. Please stay tuned for further details.

** An actual summation of the hours donated by staff appears in an article titled 2017 Accomplishments.*

Warm regards

Bob Dutson

Light and Fog Signal Repairs

Upon request the US Coast Guard has kindly provided us with technical details relating to the repairs made on site in November 2017. Repairs were made to remedy light station navigation equipment outages, which had been widely reported. Visitors inquired about the light in particular, and to follow up on an article in a previous issue, we are including those updates for members.

First, a recap of the past year's events:

The beacon light had been rendered inoperable several times, dating back to November 2016, when the light itself and the drive & gear mechanism required replacement. There were subsequent public utility power surges, and reported lamp failures attributed to those surges, possible ground faults, and other undetermined causes. The result was a series of on-again, off-again light availability. US Coast Guard tech reps tested various control panels and power/control cables. They recently replaced three plug-in relays in the tower light control panel which had been in service an extended time. The "tension setting" on the lamp changer was adjusted, new primary potential transformers were installed and a new electrical distribution system was provided. At about the same time, the fog detector adjacent to the tower was examined as a possible cause for the fog signals working intermittently. Some damaged underground power wiring near the tower, connecting the fog signals across the road to the light station, was replaced.

Long story short, both the light and fog signals should be fully operational after underground cable work completion; the secondary signal is functional during the upcoming work. The diligent efforts and long hours put in by the Coast Guard, and their cooperation in providing the above information are much appreciated. Special thanks go to Richard J. Galipeault, EM2 of the USCG, ANT (Aids to Navigation Team) based in Bristol RI contributed details for this article upon request.

- BD



2017 Accomplishments

Maintaining 6 major structures within a few feet of the sea, on the end of a narrow peninsula surrounded at times by high winds and corrosive salt spray, while at the same time operating a museum is not an easy task.

As we look ahead into year 2018, we must also look back at our accomplishments in 2017. There were many additions and changes bringing the museum and BLMA another step up by improving exhibits and preserving the site. The additions and improvements within the museum gained new recognition and complimentary notices. The Beavertail Museum is getting to be known as the best small museum in Rhode Island.

It began with the award of two grants, one from the newly established Heritage Harbor Foundation dedicated to telling stories about Rhode Island culture and evolution including the state's maritime history and Narragansett Bay. The \$1600 grant enabled the installation of two 40 inch touch screen displays inside the 1907 Oil Storage Building. The exhibit documents lenses and lights in Rhode Island and their contribution to the state's maritime history plus Fresnel video description excerpts from Artworks of Florida. Eleven education modules created by BLMA can be selected by visitors, including the dynamics of prism reflection and refraction. The exhibit is probably the most comprehensive description of how Fresnel's lenses function in any lighthouse museum.

The major grant (matching) totaling \$84,500 was used to bring back the external protection for the two brick Keeper buildings, oil house and two car garage structures. This included all wooden surfaces being stripped, sanded, primed and double coated with paint along with epoxy painting of all metal surfaces on the light tower. The work included hand scraping and removal of all loose exterior "parge" coating of brick surfaces, sealing of all stone window sills and applying the special protective coating approved by the RI Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission. Beavertail Light Station is back to its gleaming white profile.

US Coast Guard (Bristol Aids to Navigation Team) graciously loaned us the original 24 in diameter light beacon used in the light tower for decades for display purposes in the oil house building and added three large fixed navigation lanterns for display in the museum lens room.

Our BLMA web site was given a new look and improved selection of events, history and information. The ship wreck data base selectable on the website has been increased to the unbelievable collection of over 2500 individual maritime events and remains the largest repository of Rhode Island maritime incidents anywhere. Coupled with the new web site, BLMA has also joined the social network "Facebook" and the BLMA quarterly newsletter took on a new look with all color photos.

The museum's gift shop for the first time is now accepting credit cards, a significant positive venture adding profitability through additional sales and providing a much needed convenience to customers.

This past year, the idea and design concept of adding a courtyard within the boundaries and replacing the black asphalt staff parking lot was begun, thanks to a study grant from the Palmieri Charitable Trust. The courtyard will not only remove vehicles from the immediate property, but will also return the property to its more open and pastoral past and provide a central theme location for tour groups and visitors alike.

In the spring of 2017 we hosted over 650 visiting school children and teachers from various schools where they were exposed to 18th century lighthouse living and the maritime navigational use of Beavertail's light and fog signals.

By far, the matched fund raising drive and establishment of a perpetual endowment fund and the "Night at the Light" event was the highlight of the year. Over 320 donors from coast to coast, individuals, families, organizations, corporations and the Town of Jamestown recognized the need to preserve Beavertail and its history for future generations helped establish this endowment. Add to all this a Docents' appreciation party and lighting up Beavertail in December to celebrate Christmas, all of which made 2017 a very special year.

How did all this happen? In addition to funded grants, the names are too many. It involved twelve BLMA board members, sixty docents and a dozen volunteers who worked over 16,000 hours this season to welcome over 33,000 visitors, bringing together one of the most productive years of its organization.

- V.K.

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast Southeast Light, Block Island (Part 2)

In 1874, a lighthouse was built at the top of the bluff at the southeast corner of Block Island. This area had been a problem for mariners for many years but the lighthouse at Sandy Point, on the north end of the island, was considered more important and caused delay in the construction of the light at Southeast Point. That the lighthouse was a success is evident by the fact that although there were maritime incidents at this location over the next forty years, none of them resulted in the loss of a vessel. That changed markedly after the turn of the century.

On January 21, 1903, the United States tug LEYDEN, bound from San Juan, Puerto Rico for Newport, ran ashore in a dense fog under Mohegan Bluffs at midday. Six men from her crew of thirty-three left the scene of the wreck in



a small boat but as they approached the shore it was dashed to pieces on the rocks. Good fortune won out that day and the lifesavers, who were already at the scene, rescued the twice wrecked men. The remaining crewmen were taken off the stranded tug in a breeches buoy by the lifesavers at around 3 o'clock after a number of attempts to launch a rope to the craft had failed. The heavy swell was threatening to tear the tug apart and within a half hour after she struck she started going to pieces. The LEYDEN displaced 450 tons and was 137 feet in length but was no match for the relentless seas. Built in Boston in 1866, she was approaching forty years of age when lost and although

her hull featured a double bottom, she would end up in splinters at the scene.

Two years later, on March 19, 1905, an iron steamer would meet a similar fate to that of the LEYDEN when she too ran ashore near Southeast Point, Block Island. This one was the 226-foot freighter SPARTAN and was southbound from Providence for Philadelphia with a cargo of textiles and other goods. At nearly 1,600 tons, she was more than three times the size of the navy tug that had left her bones in the vicinity. In this incident, although foggy, the sea was calm and the lifesavers proceeded to the wrecksite in a surfboat. The master of the freighter declined assistance and was confident that with this good sea that he could work his vessel back into deeper water as the tide rose. As nightfall approached, the sea increased and still the vessel would not budge. Soon the seas began to pound her sides and break over her, sweeping her decks fore and aft and making the crew increasingly apprehensive of the outcome. Eleven of the crew men were removed by the lifesavers while the others chose to stay aboard. During the night, SPARTAN's bulkheads were crushed and her hull filled with water. All hopes of saving the vessel were abandoned and at daybreak the remaining crew members were rescued by a breeches buoy. The cargo, valued at \$200,000 and the vessel, valued at about \$200,000 were both lost but not until after a valiant effort by salvagers to profit where they could. Thirty days after the stranding it was reported that her bottom was out, indicating to all that she would be a total loss as she lay on the rocks.

Fog was again the culprit when on February 10, 1939, the 6,400 ton tanker LIGHTBURNE, carrying 72,000 barrels of gasoline and kerosene, became the next victim to the rocks below the lighthouse at Southeast Point. The tanker was enroute from Port Arthur, TX for Providence at the time and despite the fog in the area, the master of the tanker was accused of negligence for not taking soundings as they proceeded. His excuse was that he felt that the cross directional radio beams were sufficient to keep him far enough offshore to avoid such a calamity. The weather had been extremely boisterous on the day before the stranding, adding to the severity of the situation. A signal from the stricken craft sent 15 minutes after the incident brought a number of Coast Guard and civilian craft to the scene, the first being the steamer THOMAS TRACY followed in short order by the Coast Guard patrol boat ACTIVE out of New London but it took nearly two hours for the rescue vessels to arrive at the scene. The weather was described as raw but other than exposure, the crewmen suffered no loss during their wait and no hands were lost from the 416-foot long ship.

In the next part of this story, we will look at the remaining vessels which have met with disaster here - another steamer and four fishing boats.

- JFJ



New Garage Doors at Beavertail

Thanks to Overhead Door Garage Headquarters of Warwick RI we have new garage doors. They might appear identical but they're a big improvement over the old doors, being weather and rust resistant PVC materials. They match the size, shape and color, as required for historic building upgrades, but are expected to withstand our hostile winters for many years. The best part of course is that ODGH donated all materials and labor to BLMA. Noting we had a serious situation they offered to fix it, free of charge. Santa came to Beavertail a few days early on Dec. 22.

The old doors were heavy wood panels, with steel springs and other fixtures. They were deteriorating rapidly due to the wood rot and rusted steel associated with high humidity and proximity to salt water. What made the doors truly dangerous was that they appeared to be intact if given a cursory glance (see "Before" photo.) But they were very difficult to lift and a hazard to all who used them. The metal springs and rollers which ordinarily lift and help doors roll up smoothly were missing or not fully functional, which made lifting doors a real problem. Safety cables were detached, compounding the risk. Every time they were raised there was a chance of injury as they would not stay open; if released a heavy door slid down quickly. It was probably just a matter of time before a serious incident happened. But thanks to ODGH, this hazard was removed when they provided the two doors shown in the "After" photo below. This gift to BLMA is a perfect example of a highly regarded firm recognizing our need, then stepping up promptly to correct the situation. As a not-for-profit organization, we benefit directly from their generosity. BLMA is extremely grateful for this philanthropic gesture.

- BD

25 Years Old

In 2018 the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association turns 25 years old. We formed as a 501c(3) not-for-profit organization in 1993, with a small board of directors and a tiny group of docents. At the time only the Assistant Keeper's building was utilized, with a gift shop and two display rooms. The remainder of the light station was off limits. Until word spread we were an unknown entity, and visitors to the park came primarily for the fishing, a family outing or catching some rays.

Today, we've expanded the museum to fill the entire first floor of the 2 primary buildings, plus storage space in the 'Assistant Keeper's' 2nd floor. Not to mention the detached Oil House. That represents an area approximately 3 times the size of the museum when we first opened. The displays once consisted of a few story boards, that rather famous mounted striped bass, the Fresnel lens and small navigational aids, plus a couple of charts of the bay. They were nicely exhibited, and well received in their own right. Now though, we have six flat screens for videos, slide shows and the shipwreck database, the "theater" room and a redesigned gift shop in addition to all the original facilities. We renovated the Oil House in 2017 to include two of those programmable flat screens (dedicated to Fresnel lens history & technology) and of course the former beacon light.

Our immediate future plans include a courtyard with a central point of attraction, replacing the current parking area, and improved accessibility for those with disabilities. Then, there's 2019....

- BD

A Beavertail Carol

Charles Dickens took up more than adequate space in an earlier issue, and I had no intention of giving him another round. Then a board member reminded me of something; it gave me pause to reconsider. Dickens was fascinated with the Christmas season, how could I neglect our younger members? (I had toyed with the idea of using Mark Twain as a Rhode Island Yankee in the Beavertail court-yard.) The catch is, our last issue comes out before Thanksgiving each year, making a Christmas story awkward before turkey day. February may be even more so. Still, with the many classroom visitors this past year, it was just possible Tiny Tim tagged along with his American counterparts, and we never noticed. He IS tiny after all, and would blend in easily (if he left his crutch on the bus.) I checked our visitor sign-in logs to no avail; his name wasn't there. But of course if he were trying to be inconspicuous he wouldn't advertise himself, and likely couldn't reach the logbook in any event. So, Mr. Dickens gets a another shot after all.



If "Tim" did enjoy his earlier visit with schoolmates, he might have returned during our Open House on Dec 3. Perhaps incognito, dressed as one of the elves. He would definitely have sampled the sumptuous food, a luxury rarely seen in the Cratchit household. I did notice a vanishing trail of cookie crumbs, heading out through the doorway away from our buffet table. And a thin, reedy voice heard during Christmas carols in town did not seem to emanate from anyone I could actually see. More than anything else, what leads me to believe he was really here, at least in spirit, was a casual observation: our guests seemed to be especially thankful for their blessings this past year. As if we longed to forget Scrooge-like politicians for a while, and the better half of our essence said "God bless us everyone!" And here on Jamestown we've more to be grateful for than almost any other place I can name. Tiny Tim brightened up my holidays and I sincerely hope he was present for yours too. (Thanks to an anonymous board member for her suggestion, and also to a special friend & fellow Dickens fan. She convinced me to complete my immersion into Dickens' works by saving A Christmas Carol for last.)

Sam Clemens, Faulkner and most definitely Hemingway, my American inspirations, will have to be patient. They just may get some free press in the future if they can prove they've been well behaved. (A real challenge for Ernest.) In the interim I'll be making a list of authors, and checking it twice. Yeah, I know that's hokey but I couldn't resist. Sometimes when its really cold my creative juices solidify and it may be next June before they thaw completely.

- BD

Is Beavertail Haunted?

That is a good question. A number of other U.S. and international lighthouses feature 'documented' testimony of pesky or outright belligerent poltergeists. Depending on your inclination, believing in or scoffing at the idea of ghosts, there is evidence supporting your preference. At the Beavertail Museum we have a framed photo in the Lens Room, which purports to show a shadowy 'presence' in the room directly above it. The photo was taken from outside at ground level, and the unearthly resident is visible (or perhaps not) through the window at the upper left corner. We use this room for storage now, but it was living quarters for Assistant Keepers' families from construction in 1898 until 1972, when the light was automated. A good number of keepers, spouses and children lived up there. Three winters ago I used the room as a work shop to restore the HMS Bounty model recently auctioned during the 'Nite At The Lite.' While I was up there, it was frequently cold enough that my breath was visible, and I usually lasted about 1-1/2 hours before I sought some warmth. But, I saw no other apparition other than that water vapor. I neither "felt" a presence nor heard any footsteps, doors closing, anguished cries or moans. On the other hand, I have never stayed there at night and even in broad daylight the winter wind moans & howls like a banshee at the museum. And upon close examination that photo does capture some sort of shadowy form, partially outlined against the light emitted through the window. Our full time tenant, providing a security and caretaker role off hours, lives in the adjacent primary structure designated the Keeper's Building. And despite the elusive spirit, he and his dog have managed to live on site for several years and intend to stay on for the present. So, the legend has not put him off. As for myself, I'm keeping an open mind because, well, you just never know for sure do you?



- BD



Winter at the Point

If Beavertail is a regular stop during winter months or you just drop in on a blisteringly cold day, you know how arctic it can feel. As if to emphasize that, while this article was taking shape, the blizzard of Jan. 4 slammed into RI; so far the wood stove in my living room is thankfully up to the task.

Actually the winter of 2017-2018 may redefine cold. On the plus side it proves, once and for all, that Global Warming is a myth, or so a 'highly intelligent' source has stated. If someone can please explain to me how one's political leaning is influenced by the credibility of climatology, or vice versa, I would be eternally grateful.

But if you do brave the elements at the Point you might enjoy scenes few get to see. Harlequin ducks diving in sync, spectacular sunrises, 'fiery' skies at dusk and a mirror smooth ocean out to the horizon. A tug & barge slide on by, wrapped in serpentine vapor plumes on an extremely frosty day, of which we've had plenty. Unforgettable snowscapes of our historic lighthouse etched against a sky so bright it hurts. Following footprints in the snow through the Tunnels in the Trees.

There might even be a boating enthusiast or two who disdain the concept of 'seasonal use only' and earn a lot of credit for determination (or maybe some deep, prolonged therapy with a licensed professional.) Some fanatics reportedly defy law enforcement warnings and visit during our howling blizzards; how I came to know this I can't divulge, invoking the 5th amendment.

Beavertail off-season is an experience that's not for everyone. It IS worth the trip if you're prepared however. That means insulated gloves and winter shoes, several layers of clothing, a hat with ear protection etc. And it's worth noting that driving the "loop" around the lighthouse facilities may mean negotiating an icy road surface even after plowing of roads. A 4-wheel or all-wheel drive vehicle is essential. Discretion is the better part of valor! Here are a few pics of the off-season at Beavertail. I find it irresistible.

- BD





BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
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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

First Name 2nd Name Last Name
Address
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Museum Hours

Our museum will open Memorial Day weekend, and tower climb dates for 2018 are to be determined. Complete details will be available on our web site under Visitor Information.

For a complete schedule and Tower Opening Dates please see Visitor Information.

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.