



# The Lighthouse Log

Spring 2021

## The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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## Message From the President

Dear Members,

As I write this, we are coming up to the one-year anniversary of the historic shutdown of the country due to the coronavirus. It has been such a long and challenging year for so many people. BUT it is also getting warmer out – a sure sign that spring is on the horizon. And with the glories of spring weather and the renewal of greenery comes the hope that we see an end to this crisis.

Our winter has not necessarily been a quiet one. We always stay busy during the winter months doing repairs here and there. And I am pleased to report that the roof on the Fog Signal Building has finally been repaired. There is no new information about the transfer of the Lighthouse from the USCG, but there have been discussions with both the Town of Jamestown and RIDEM about forming a partnership to ensure that the preservation of the historic structures continues into the future.

As we look forward to spring, I am sorry to report our Courtyard project is temporarily on hold. Although the RI Coastal Resources Management Council approved the original plans, they must still approve soil excavation and the removal of concrete pathways because of their proximity within 200 ft of high water. The USCG, as owner, is the only one that can request approval. We hope to get this resolved soon.

We also hope to be able to reopen as planned on Memorial Weekend. To that end, our Board is working on plans that can be implemented at reopening to keep our docents and visitors feeling safe and comfortable. At some point in the next two months, once we know more from the State of RI about any restrictions, we will be contacting our docents to see who wants to return as a volunteer.

We opened our online gift shop late last fall and were successful in being able to accommodate our members' holiday gift needs. Please go to our website if you are interested in purchasing something.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page.

We are looking to expand our online inventory soon to give our members more buying options.

Unfortunately, there will be no Docent Breakfast again this year, but we hope to have a celebration of some type in the fall if that is feasible.

I am excited to report that we expect to have an intern working with us this summer to archive our historical photos and artifacts. The intern will be a student from a local college.

We are extremely grateful to the many donors who continue to help us. I know there are a lot of organizations in need right now, Beavertail being one of them. Our organization works very hard to ensure that the Lighthouse and Museum continue as important navigational and educational resources for the people of Rhode Island and visitors from around the country and the world. Please think of us for your annual giving.

In closing, please stay safe and well and enjoy the spring weather. I hope to be able to greet you personally in the spring!

Best regards,  
Diane

## QR is Online



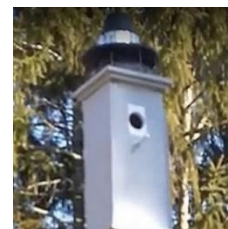
QR Scan Code to be  
Scanned at Each  
Station

In 2017, BLMA undertook a project to install information postings around the light station and points of interest surrounding the state park. Twenty-eight distinct QR signs were created and installed. The project was very successful and we have now added them to our web site. From the Home page click on the “QR Armchair Tour at Beavertail” button or enter <https://www.beavertaillight.org/qrtour/> into your web-browser.

The project provides historical tour information to both the onsite visiting public and visitors on the BLMA website. The concept allows thousands of computer users to visit Beavertail virtually, obtain answers to questions, and become better educated about the peninsula’s history and geological makeup. Included in the tour are twenty-eight significant overlooks or historic locations, including the individual light station buildings.

## Beavertail Birdhouse

We see Beavertail models of different sorts from time to time. Here is an interesting one! Docent Art Scholth took on a project in his garage this winter by making a Beavertail two-story birdhouse for his garden. You can watch the construction on YouTube [https://youtu.be/\\_KevyI8t9TU](https://youtu.be/_KevyI8t9TU).



Art Scholth's Beavertail  
Bird House

## Winter at the Lighthouse



Left to right: Mark DAlmeida, Bob Dutson, Matthew Ellsworth, Ursula Parenteau

## Lighthouse Madness

Tévennec Lighthouse was established in 1875 to protect vessels traveling through the treacherous Raz de Sein- a minefield of rocks and reefs with powerful currents located off the rugged coast of Brittany, France.

Legend says that Tévennec's first Lighthouse Keeper Henri Guezennec went insane. Who could blame him? He was the only Keeper isolated on a rock in the middle of the ocean surrounded by 60-foot waves for a year at a time. One need only look at modern-day depictions of Lighthouse Keepers, such as in the 2019 movie *The Lighthouse* starring Willem Dafoe and Robert Pattinson, to see that the myth of the lighthouse making Keepers go insane is still alive and well.

The truth may be much simpler to explain. In the late 1800s, when heavy Fresnel lenses like the one on display at the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum came into use, a basin of mercury was used as a lubricant to help the heavy glass lens rotate with ease. Mercury is a very dense liquid and will not compress under the lens' heavy weight, ensuring that the rotation's timing was kept at the expected interval.

As the Keepers at that time were often in the lantern room cleaning and tending the light, they were exposed to the mercury vapor daily. Even worse, the Keeper had to filter the mercury of debris and dust regularly by filtering it through a cloth, also exposing their skin to the toxic metal which may have caused mercury poisoning.

Mercury poisoning affects the nervous system and can cause confusion, hallucinations, and depression. Often, when a Keeper could get leave from lighthouse duties, their symptoms would clear up, but when they returned to work at the lighthouse, the symptoms would reappear. Many blamed the Lighthouse itself when the real culprit was, most likely, mercury.



Tévennec Lighthouse located off the rugged coast of Brittany, France

CV

## Tempest Weather System Installed

Beavertail now has a new weather system that provides information via our web site. Installed on the inactive Radio Direction Finder antenna onsite, the solar powered detector is connected wirelessly to our Wi-Fi router. It provides a mass collection of live weather information continuously. The information is available via [www.beavertailight.org](http://www.beavertailight.org). The Tempest device not only checks the present weather information, it also forecasts oncoming weather and archives its history.

The map feature included allows selection of world-wide weather information at any time, and any place.



Solar Powered Tempest Weather Module

## Use Amazon Smile to Support BLMA

When you shop at Amazon using this link, <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/05-0476508>, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association. You can also get to Amazon Smile by clicking on the link on our website - [Beavertailight.org](http://Beavertailight.org). There is no cost to charitable organizations or to AmazonSmile customers. The shopping experience is identical to Amazon.com with the added benefit that the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate to the charitable organizations selected by customers.





## Early Lighthouse Records

*Dr Light-House on Beaver-Tail with James Clarke Cr*

1770 Aug. 11 To Cash paid Robt Stevens for 5 quire large Paper . . . . . 12.9	1771 May 7 By Light Money received for foreign Vessels from May 7. 1770. Registered 128 Tons . . . . . @ 2.4 of Ton } £ 76. 1. 4
do paid Francis Skinner for binding and hauling a book for the Naval Office . . . . . 15.9	May 7 By Light Money received for 128 Coasters from May 7. 1770. . . . . @ 1/6 } 31. 11. 6
24 To Cash paid Aaron Lopez for 2 Casks Oil . . . . . 5. 0. 3½	By Light Money received for 14 foreign Vessels put in for a Harbor, Registered 658 Tons @ 2. . . . . 5. 9. 8
do Cash paid for Trucking of Oil . . . . . 1. 2	By Light Money received for 18 Coasters put in for a Harbor . . . . . @ 1/6 } 3. 12. -
Oct. To Cash paid Jonathan North for bundles . . . . . 5. 2	Cash received for one shot . . . . . 1. 0. -
Nov. 2 To Cash paid James Robinson for 9 Barrels of ½ gallon of Oil . . . . . as of Bill } 24. 6. 10	Subsd. from 13. 1771
do paid for Trucking . . . . . 2. 10	Errors excused by James Clarke Att.
27 To do paid Josiah Arnold Esq for ½ a year Salary due the 15th instant . . . . . as of Receipt } 20. -	Colonel of Rhode Island
1771 February 13 To do paid Puffer Marmy for Transporting the Oil to James Town . . . . . 6. -	To the Honble the General & Assembly of S. Colony now sitting at Newport on the Second Monday in June 1771
April 23 To do paid Josiah Arnold Esq for his Quarters Salary due Feb 15. . . . . } 10. -	
May . . . 4 To do paid William Martiens Will for hauling the Oil to Beaver Tail . . . . . } 1. 10. 2	
do paid for a Lock for the Door . . . . . 3. 4	

Detail of Beavertail Lighthouse, report upon account of James Clarke, naval officer, / expenditures connected with June 1771

C#0261 – General Assembly Reports, 1728 – 1860, v. 3 # 60 & 67 – Rhode Island State Archives

Appointed as the Naval Officer in charge of Beavertail Lighthouse bookkeeping as early as 1770, James Clarke kept the lighthouse accounts for several years. This June 1771 report gives us insight into the daily expense of running the lighthouse at that time. Unfortunately, Clark, a fierce Loyalist during the Revolutionary War, was forced to leave Rhode Island as the British pulled out of the war. Most of Clarke's documentation was lost; fortunately, these documents survived. Debits are shown to the left, and credits or income are shown to the right. The money appears in the English context of pounds, shillings, and pence, hence the odd decimals.

This document helps to establish the service of some of Beavertail Lighthouse's earliest Keepers. Recorded is Lighthouse Keeper Josiah Arnold's salary over several quarters. Josiah Arnold was Beavertail's third Lighthouse Keeper working from 1770 to 1783. Peter Harrison, Beavertail Lighthouse's designer, sent Josiah Arnold to Boston to bring back a model of the lantern of the Boston light in the early 1760s. Harrison hoped to copy the model as the replacement of the lantern on Beavertail's tower.

Also listed in this document is the purchase of many gallons of oil (whale oil was in use at this time), the cost of the transportation of the oil to the lighthouse, and sundries such as candles, cotton wick, and a lock for the lighthouse door.

This exciting document also shows that Aaron Lopez, the wealthiest man in Newport, was paid for two casks of oil and the trucking of the oil to the lighthouse. According to Wikipedia, Aaron Lopez joined eight other merchants to form a trust to control the cost and distribution of whale oil in this area.

Continued on page 5



Continued from page 4

7<sup>th</sup> February 13 To d<sup>r</sup> paid Griffin Barnes for transporting the } 6.  
 Oil to James Town .....  
 April 23 To d<sup>r</sup> paid Josiah Arnold Esq for his Quarters } 10.  
 Salary due Feb 15 .....  
 May 4 To d<sup>r</sup> paid William Martins Bill for carting the } 1. 10. 2  
 Oil to Beaver Tail .....  
 d<sup>r</sup> paid for a Lock for the Door ..... 3. 1  
 d<sup>r</sup> paid James Robinson for 2 barks of Oil as } 5. 10. 2  
 Bill .....  
 d<sup>r</sup> paid for Trucking d<sup>r</sup> ..... 1. 4  
 d<sup>r</sup> paid for 1 c 9 1/2 cunes Cotton Wick ..... 4. 2 1/2  
 15 To d<sup>r</sup> paid Josiah Arnold Esq his Fourth and } 10.  
 last Quarter .....  
 d<sup>r</sup> paid James Robinson for 1 Cask coal } 4. 11  
 12 1/2 Gallons Oil as Bill .....  
 £ 24. 1. 0 1/2  
 To my Commissions on receiving the Light Money. 5. 17  
 £ 29. 18. 6 3/4  
 To Balance due to the Light House ..... 27. 1. 11 1/2  
 £ 117. 0. 6

Newport June 13. 1771  
 Errors excepted } James Clarke Esq.  
 Colony of Rhode Island &  
 To the Honble the General Assembly of the Colony  
 now sitting at Newport on the Second Monday in June 1771  
 We the Subscribers, being appointed a Committee to audit  
 the accounts of the Naval Office with the Colony for the  
 last year, do report, that we have carefully examined his  
 Books and compared his Charges against the Light House  
 with the Vouchers and find a Balance of Twenty Seven Pounds  
 one Shilling and eleven pence one Farthing Lawful Money  
 due to the Light House from Mr. James Clarke Naval Officer, agreeable  
 to his Account herewith exhibited  
 W Bowler.  
 J. Bennett.  
 Pardon Tillinghast Esq.  
 The Colony to the Committee  
 Newport June 13. 1771. To our Service by examining the Books and  
 18

Detail of Lighthouse, Beaver Tail, report upon accounts of James Clarke / expenditures connected with, June 1771

C#0261 – General Assembly Reports, 1728 – 1860, v. 3 # 60 &amp; 67 – Rhode Island State Archives

This document shows that William Martin was one of the vendors who carted oil to the lighthouse in 1771. He became Beavertail's fourth Keeper starting from 1783. In 1790, the federal government took over management of the lighthouse, and Alexander Hamilton, the Secretary of the Treasury, suggested that William Martin remain the Keeper at Beavertail Lighthouse. William Ellery, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and also the Newport Customs Collector, became Rhode Island's first Lighthouse Superintendent. Ellery called Martin "well qualified" for the job. William Ellery and President George Washington signed Martin's employment contract in 1790 approving his annual salary of \$140. Martin kept the position until his death in 1803.

One of the final entries on this unique document is James Clarke's commission of 5 pounds, 17 shillings for "receiving the Light Money," which is a per tonnage tax collected from foreign vessels as they come into port. The government used this Light Money to offset the maintenance and operating costs of the lighthouse. A committee appointed by the General Assembly of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations examined the report to determine the balance due to the lighthouse.

CV

Special thanks to Cherry Fletcher Bamberg FASG, Editor of Rhode Island Roots, a Journal of the Rhode Island Genealogical Society, for finding and sharing this fascinating document.

## Rhode Island State Register of Historic Places

The State of Rhode Island is promoting its history by certifying its historical sites. Beavertail, of course, is one of them. This plaque now hangs in our welcome hallway.



## Rhode Island's Perilous Coast Beavertail Point (Part 4)

In this edition of the Lighthouse Log, the stories of the final five vessels which have been totally lost on Beavertail Point will be presented.

After the loss of the EUGENIA in 1928, it would be a scant two years before there would be a double loss. On the same day, two vessels would become little more than a pile of splinters on the east side of Beavertail Point in the vicinity of the lighthouse. The two vessels, barges, were owned



by the same company and were traveling together when caught in a severe storm on October 17, 1930. At 538 tons, the wooden barge HENRY HOWARD was fifty tons larger than the 488-ton HOWARD SISTERS. Both measured over 100 feet in length and had an enormous capacity for coal. The larger carried 1,000 tons of coal while the smaller carried 600 tons of the valuable commodity. It was not stated whether both barges were carrying anthracite or bituminous coal. Still, the smaller one was specified as carrying "*stove and nut anthracite*" coal destined for families in Newport. The larger vessel was headed to Providence. The barges left New York City under tow of the tug JULIA HOWE which was also towing a third barge, the VAN WINKLE. Although the weather at the time of their departure was good, they encountered a fierce nor'easter after rounding Point Judith, and as they approached Narragansett, R.I., the towing hawser broke. Soon all three barges found themselves at the mercy of stormy seas. The two Howard Line barges drifted together, perhaps still attached to one another, and struck the shore at Lucky Strike Rock, north of Beavertail Lighthouse. To the dismay of salvagers, the local inhabitants, as has been the case for countless ages in countries around the world, looked at the wrecked barges as a sort of deliverance. And so, the great disappearing act of 1930 began. Of more than 1,500 tons of coal aboard, only 500 tons was commercially salvaged with estimates that an equal amount disappeared to the local inhabitants. It is hard to imagine carting off 500 tons of coal, one lump at a time, but it must have seemed like the right thing to do. As far as I know, no one was ever charged with a crime for "*helping*" the salvagers with their task.

Fifty years would pass before another vessel was lost on Beavertail Point. The 78-foot fishing boat CAPTAIN LAWRENCE probably suffered from a modern-day problem associated more with automobile drivers than helmsmen on boats – "asleep at the wheel" – and for no other apparent reason the vessel ran straight ashore on the tip of Beavertail Point. It was August 8, 1980, and, like many others, I played the role of spectator when the scalloper ran hard aground. And for the next few days and weeks, I visited with my camera to document the disintegration of the steel-hulled craft. What could be salvaged was, and there are few remains today that tell the tale of her final voyage and needless destruction. But let there be no doubt...once on the rocks at Beavertail, your chances of survival are minimal.

Just a few years ago, on June 2, 2012, yet another craft added her name to the list of lost vessels at Beavertail Point. Two men piloted the 32-foot fiberglass fishing boat called DREAM CATCHER from Atlantic City, NJ, to Newport, RI. Reports disagree as to whether the men ran out of gas or made an error in navigation, but, regardless, they came to anchor off Beavertail Point in seas 10-12-foot-high with wind gusting to 30 knots; they were in trouble. The Coast Guard made an effort to rescue the men, but apparently, the boat was too near shore by the time they arrived, and help through those means was not forthcoming. Although there was considerable difficulty involved, both men made it safely to shore. The DREAM CATCHER made it to shore as well but was reduced to small pieces in short order. A similar situation caused the latest totally lost craft to

Continued on page 7



Continued from page 6

achieve that status when on August 17, 2016, the 6-ton, 31-foot-long fiberglass pleasure boat THE GOOD LIFE came to grief in almost the same location as the DREAM CATCHER. There were four persons aboard who were on a trip from Wickford to Block Island. As they approached Beavertail Point, they encountered seas that were rough enough to convince them to turn back when the boat suffered engine failure in one engine. Shortly afterward, the other engine overheated and died, leaving the group in a perilous situation off Newton Rock.

They set an anchor, but the line chafed on the rocks, finally allowing it to drift aimlessly to the shore. All of the craft occupants got ashore unhurt, but the boat's life expectancy dwindled in short order. Shortly after the wreck, a portable crane was brought in and placed the remains onto a flatbed trailer. The last two losses clearly illustrate that despite all of the modern technology and materials, and available knowledge that we have in this modern world, the seas off Beavertail Point are still to be reckoned with. This brings to a close the discussion about vessels that have been lost on or near Beavertail Point. In future editions of the Lighthouse Log, we will look at the vessels which have met their end on the south shore or at the southwest point of Block Island.

JFJ

## Fog Signal Building

Eighty-three years ago, as a result of the Great Hurricane of 1938, a new fog signal building was built and was covered with a copper roof. It, too, then survived several hurricanes and exposure to the salt spray from storms. The site was automated in 1976, and the RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) occupied the building, which they eventually converted into an aquarium managed by DEM Naturalists. Local fish in tanks, shellfish, aquatic specimens, and touch tanks became popular with both children and adults. In



2014, BLMA repaired the glass block windows and added two replica fog horns.

Two years ago, a storm tore a portion of the roof off, and BLMA repaired it. A year later, a winter storm damaged another section of the copper roof, requiring 100% replacement. Copper roofs are expensive. The project sat on hold, but nine months later, the RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) and BLMA teamed together to finance the entire project and replace the roof.



## Scholarship Season



The W. Craig Armington Memorial Scholarship Fund was established by the BLMA for high school seniors living in Jamestown, RI, who have been accepted at a college or university and will begin studies in the fall. The student selected will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to be applied toward college tuition, books, or fees related to the courses of study. Scholarship applications must be postmarked no later than May 16, 2021. Applications can be downloaded from the BLMA website Home page. Copies are also available at the Jamestown Library.

## CALL FOR DOCENTS!

We need your help! Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association is looking for more volunteers to help at the museum and tower when we reopen this season. If you like to meet new people, gaze out at beautiful vistas and want to help preserve and protect the heritage of the Lighthouse, then volunteering to be a docent at Beavertail is just the thing for you!

If you are interested, please let us know at [info@beavertailight.org](mailto:info@beavertailight.org).



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](http://www.beavertailight.org)

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



## Tower Climb Schedule

**The tower climb schedule is undetermined at this time, pending updated guidelines for group activities from the state of Rhode Island. We will issue further clarification on our web site when RI announces any changes to state requirements for this type of activity.**

To contact the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum please call (401) 423-3270, or email us at [info@BeavertailLight.org](mailto:info@BeavertailLight.org).

## Group Tours & Events

The Beavertail Lighthouse Museum will remain closed for the foreseeable future as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

No Group Tours, Tower Climbs or other Events are currently scheduled.

We will announce any updates and/or changes to this policy on our website at [BeavertailLight.org](http://BeavertailLight.org).

Weddings and private events on the Lighthouse grounds are not allowed by the U.S. Coast Guard. For information on scheduling events at Beavertail State Park contact the RI Dept. of Environmental Management (DEM) at 401.884.2010.