



The Lighthouse Log

Fall 2020

The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Log Editor

Cheryl Vislay

Marine Historian

Jim Jenney

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Cheryl Vislay

Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association

PO Box 83

Jamestown, RI 02835

401.423.3270

Email:

info@Beavertailight.org

Web site:

www.beavertailight.org

Message From the President

Dear Members,

Welcome everyone to our Fall edition of the Lighthouse Log. I would like to take a few moments to tell you about our year. It has been a strange year to say the least. Last December 2019, we had a wonderful event entitled Sparkles & Spirits and our Holiday Open House at the Lighthouse, which was beautifully decorated by our volunteers. We were also open two weekends for holiday shopping. Who knew then that this would be the last time we were open. As you know, because of the coronavirus, we made the difficult decision to remain closed this season to protect our volunteers, members and the visiting public.



It is hard to believe that summer is over. The hot sunny weather we had has given way to cooler temperatures and changing foliage. No doubt about it, it is a beautiful time of year especially here in Jamestown.

I have some news I want to share. I am pleased to welcome our newest Board Member, Robert Bendick. Robert was Assistant Director, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management from 1978-1982 and Director, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management 1982-1990. Robert joined BLMA at our Annual Meeting in September. Besides his work with RI DEM, Robert has long been involved with The Nature Conservancy, working on natural resource management and coastal and marine conservation. He will bring a diverse set of skills to our Board.

Due to the closure of the gift shop, we have been looking for different ways to increase sales revenue. We are pleased to tell you that we have now added gift shop sales capability to our website. We have started with a few items and will expand our offerings if this proves successful. Also, we have explored using a site such as Redbubble on which to sell Beavertail items- see inside for details.

Speaking of our website, we are always looking for ways to update it for our membership to make it even more user friendly. People can now donate to us through PayPal by clicking the "DONATE" button on our site. Plus, we can now accept stock donations through a brokerage account. Please think of us when you are planning your year-end giving.

As you may have read, both Prudence Island Lighthouse and Watch Hill Lighthouse were recently designated by the US Coast Guard as excess property and turned over to

Continued on Page 2

Continued from Page 1

the General Services Administration for disposition. We should expect Beavertail Lighthouse to be next. This is in accordance with the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act. BLMA has asked the Town of Jamestown to be a partner with us and RI DEM who would be the property owner. We have drafted a management agreement for the museum and for the preservation of the buildings which is under review by DEM. We expect this to happen sometime in 2021.

That is all for now. I hope everyone has a wonderful fall and holiday season.

Best Regards,
Diane Bakley
President

Summer 2020 at Beavertail Lighthouse

Each year the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum welcomes tens of thousands of visitors who come to take in the scenic beauty and to learn more about the lighthouse and some of its history, but 2020 is no ordinary year! First the perimeter road around the lighthouse was closed, and when COVID-19 hit about a month later, Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo established a series of rules restricting the number people visiting public places. The museum, due to its small sized rooms, could not meet the spacing requirements needed to allow for the social distancing of museum visitors. The risk of exposure to our many visitors and our volunteer docents who greet thousands of visitors each summer compelled the BLMA Board of Directors to close the museum for the season. Even sadder was that Beavertail State Park was also closed for a time; this when people were looking for a great escape from being cloistered in their homes for extended periods of time. What better way could there be to social distance on Beavertail Point and take in the fresh sea air and beautiful vistas?



RI DEM gradually opened up the parking lots, and visitors were again free to roam the open spaces of the park including the lighthouse grounds. The lighthouse, sitting out on the Point overlooking the beautiful Narragansett Bay, is a popular destination, once again, and its interpretive signs on each building still provide visitors information and history about the site.

In the meantime, the BLMA board took full advantage of the closed buildings and undertook numerous repairs while also updating exhibits in preparation for the 2021 season.

VK



In Memoriam: Former BLMA Treasurer Richard Koster

Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association is sorry to share this sad news. Our own C. Richard Koster of Jamestown passed away peacefully at his home on September 15, 2020 where he was surrounded by his loving family; he was 82 years old. Richard leaves behind his beloved wife of 40 years, Jane (Woods) Koster, his loving children, Kimberly Olivier (Robert), Rick Koster and Kathleen Koster, three devoted grandchildren, Michael, David and Jennifer, and several beloved nieces and nephews.

Born in Providence and raised in Warwick, Richard was a former Treasurer for many years with the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association. Richard was active in all phases of BLMA activities. Whether it was bringing the financial recordkeeping into the 21st century as Treasurer, coordinating the Docents, or acting as a Docent himself and interacting with Beavertail Lighthouse visitors, Richard was an important part of BLMA. He was a kind and thoughtful person with a great sense of humor and he will be dearly missed by BLMA Board Members, the Docents, and the many lighthouse visitors that he met and interacted with over the years.

Contributions may be made in memory of Richard to Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association, P.O. Box 83, Jamestown, RI 02835 or the Humane Society of Jamestown, P.O. Box 681, Jamestown, RI 02835.

Meet Our Docents

Arn Lisnoff

Hi, I'm Arn Lisnoff and I love being a docent at Beavertail Lighthouse Museum. One day, a bit over three years ago, I met my cousin for a picnic lunch at Beavertail. We wandered over to the museum and I remember saying on stepping in "This place is amazing, I'm going to volunteer here." Within two weeks I was on the schedule learning my way around and being somewhat intimidated by just how much there was to know. Lucky for me, the other docents kindly took me under their collective wing and within a very short time I felt competent at guiding visitors and attempting to match their questions and interests to the many wonderful displays, photos and videos displayed within the museum.

What can be said about the views? The ever changing seas, a parade of watercraft, morning and evening light that photographers yearn for; what a "workplace"! In any season and weather, it's breathtaking.

My favorite visitors (to date) were a family from Providence who showed up about closing time. Older folks with two primary school aged kids. I think they came in to sit and rest after a warm afternoon exploring the rocky coast (fortunately, they did it safely). I try not to be boring, especially for young people. I watched as their eyes lit up with every new story. Their questions were incisive and challenged my knowledge. Before I knew it, everyone except my visitors had left and it was an hour after closing time. A week later when we were opening, they were back! We spent another hour with stories and interactive videos. Those children's beautiful and inquisitive wide eyes! That's the reason I volunteer.

Besides being a docent at the lighthouse, I spend time working on some basic building maintenance on the property. From scraping rust and repainting the light room to replacing broken fence rails, it's been the best possible way to self-isolate in the age of COVID. I live in North Scituate and spend Winters on the North Shore of Oahu. I grew up in the then-bustling mill village of Arctic, a part of West Warwick. Most of my life I've lived in the middle of nowhere on what was a dirt road off a dirt road on the Foster-Connecticut line. All of my neighbors had four legs. Career wise, I was divided between management careers in human services and construction. Now that I'm retired, I have several volunteer gigs between here and Hawaii.

Upon opening or closing the lighthouse I like to stand quietly in the former home of the keepers for brief meditation. I imagine the stories of the people who once lived here. Large families, demanding and dangerous work in all seasons and weather; it was a rugged, awe inspiring life. Their stories are told and still live within these walls.



Docent Arn Lisnoff displaying the Hawaiian Shaka hand gesture in front of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum. The Shaka hand gesture symbolizes reverence, solidarity and friendship.

Mitigation Contractor Returns to Beavertail



When the one hundred and sixty-four tons of contaminated soil was removed from the lighthouse grounds, replacement soil was brought in along with hydroseeding of the entire area. Unfortunately, the seeding was unsuccessful due to the lack of rainwater. The environmental contractor has twice tried to get the grasses and shrubs to grow without success. A third attempt is taking place now, this time with automatic sprinkler heads and time clocks. The contractor, Renova Environmental company, provided the equipment, richer soil and has re-seeded the site. BLMA is volunteering to move the sprinkler heads daily to keep the mix wet over the next 30 days.

Keepers

William W. Wales

From this 1884 Coast Guard photo of Beavertail Lighthouse, taken about fourteen years before the Assistant Keeper's house was built, if you blow up the picture, you can just make out the impression of a white beard on the Keeper to the right. This is, most likely, Keeper William Wallace Wales as he served at Beavertail Lighthouse from 1873 through 1895 and is known to have sported a long white beard. The Keeper on the left is most likely Assistant Keeper George A. Brown.

A native Rhode Islander, William W. Wales was born in Middletown around 1821. At age 22, he filed a Seaman's Protection Certificate which indicates that he was a mariner at the time. By 1856, he married Catherine Horton, settling into domestic life as a Clerk at her father's Newport hotel, Pelham Street House. By May of 1862, Wales, now the father of four small children, volunteered as a Private in the Union Army. He was later promoted to Sergeant in Company G of the 5th Rhode Island where he would eventually work in the Ambulance Corps. Ironically, Wales missed, by mere months, fighting against former Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper Silas G. Shaw's brother, Henry M. Shaw, during the Civil War. Born in Newport, Henry M. Shaw was a North Carolina Congressman turned Confederate Colonel who fought against General Ambrose Burnside and the 4th and 5th Rhode Island Infantries at the Battle of Roanoke Island in February of 1862. Colonel Shaw was captured, released and was later killed near New Bern, North Carolina in February of 1864. Wales and the Rhode Island 5th, now a Heavy Artillery unit, were still in combat in the New Bern area at the time. Wales mustered out July 15, 1865 just after the war ended.

After the Civil War, possibly as a form of government benevolence, veteran William W. Wales was assigned the position of Keeper at Dutch Island Lighthouse where he and his family would remain for about eight years. His next assignment was at Beavertail Lighthouse. As we can see from the photo, the lighthouse was not as pristine as we see it today; it looks a little grimy and run-down.

Tragedy struck a few years into his service when his three year old grandson, Willie, fell into a tub of scalding hot water at the lighthouse; the child died a day later. Life went on and Wales and his wife and family spent the next two decades of their lives at Beavertail Lighthouse. His son, John S. Wales, served under him as Assistant Keeper from 1885 to 1888 and from 1888 to 1895 his youngest son, George B. Wales, would also serve as his Assistant. William W. Wales passed away at Beavertail Lighthouse on June 21, 1895.

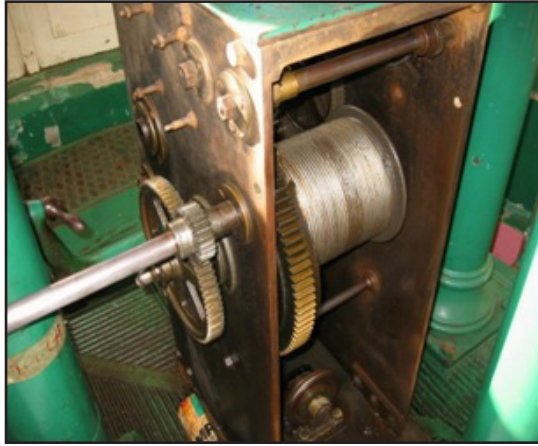
It is said that Wales had many visitors to the lighthouse over the years and often hosted large gatherings on the point



with a clambake, inviting friends and neighbors from near and far to sample his fish chowder, which was renowned even beyond Rhode Island's borders. His passing was much lamented by all to whom he was well-known. Wales' son George assumed the Keeper's position at Beavertail for the next several years and son John, who had been in the Lighthouse Service as an Assistant for 30 years, would have his turn as Keeper of Beavertail Light from 1915 to 1919. After his death, William W. Wales' wife, Catherine, received a pension for her husband's service in the Civil War.

Rotating Lenses at Beavertail

Beavertail Light over its two hundred and seventy one year history has seen many changes and improvements in both lamps and lenses. Technological development was readily adapted at Beavertail from early oil lamps to the present VRB -25 acrylic lens beacon installed this year. Always, the important design criterion was to provide the navigator of any vessel entering Narragansett Bay easy identification of Beavertail Light from other lights in the bay. This was accomplished by providing Beavertail its own unique beacon characteristic, or the number of times the Fresnel lens flashes and the amount of time-lapse between flashes. One of the methods in use at Beavertail during the 1930's was to rotate a Fresnel lens at a specified speed (one revolution every 15 seconds with two light flashes of .03 seconds each and an eclipse of 3.4 seconds). The Fresnel lens was similar to the one on display in the museum, but with two centered "Bull Eyes."

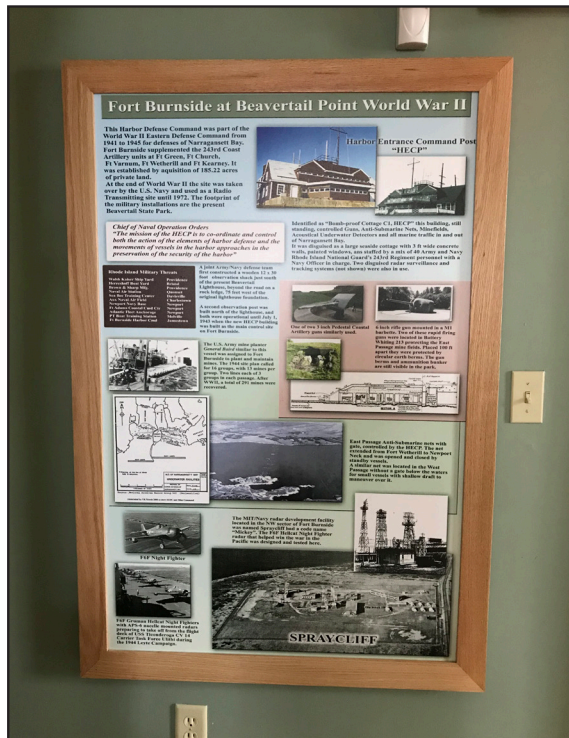


The rotation was accomplished by a very accurate hand wound clock mechanism, located in the watch room below, attached to the lens apparatus. The rotation mechanism in the clock included a hand crank, a variety of gears and a heavy lead counter weight (similar to the mechanism used in a grandfather clock) attached to a cable running down through an iron conduit pipe centered in the spiral staircase of the tower. As the cable drum unwound, the lens rotated every 15 seconds showing two flashes. In addition to replenishing oil in the lens lamps, Keepers had to rewind the clock a number of times each night.

This picture is representative of a typical lighthouse clock mechanism. There are very few in existence today.

VK

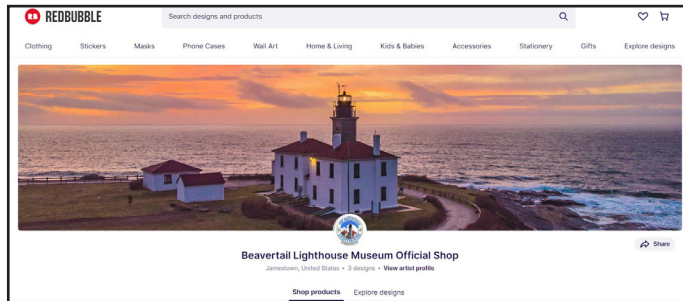
New Fort Burnside Display



The newest wall display at the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum is **Fort Burnside at Beavertail Point World War II**. The display starts with this bit of information: "This Harbor Defense Command was part of the World War II Eastern Defense Command from 1941 to 1945 for defenses of Narragansett Bay. Fort Burnside supplemented the 243rd Coast Artillery units at Ft Green, Ft Church, Ft Varnum, Ft Wetherill and Ft Kearney. It was established by the acquisition of 185.22 acres of private land. At the end of World War II the site was taken over by the U.S. Navy and used as a Radio Transmitting site until 1972. The footprint of the military installations are the present Beavertail State Park." Images and narratives include information about the Harbor Entrance Command Post (HECP) building, the artillery guns at Battery Whiting protecting the East Passage mine fields, locations of the Anti-Submarine nets, and the Top-Secret MIT/ Navy Radar development facility named Spraycliff.

Ursula
Parenteau

Gift Shop News



While the museum and gift shop have remained closed this year, the gift shop committee has been working behind the scenes setting up two shopping experiences. You may purchase select items from the physical gift shop by visiting the BLMA website and using the link to view the merchandise (see photos of two sample items to the left below). We also have created a Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Official Shop online, on redbubble.com. These gift items feature unique photos donated by various patrons printed on masks, tote bags, mugs, pillows, coasters

and more (see sample items in photo to the right below). Website links are <https://www.beavertailight.org/on-line-gift-shop> and <https://www.redbubble.com/people/beavertail/shop>. All profits from your purchase are used to maintain the historic buildings and museum. Start your holiday shopping now and help keep the light shining for future generations!

Ursula Parenteau



The Sea



"I really don't know why it is that all of us are so committed to the sea. I think it's because in addition to the fact that the sea changes, and the light changes, and the ships change, it's because we all came from the sea. And it is an interesting biological fact that all of us have in our veins the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean. And therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail, or to watch it, we are going from whence we came."

— John F. Kennedy (Speech given at the America's Cup Dinner in Newport, Rhode Island in 1962.)

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast Beavertail Point (Part 2)

In the last edition of the Lighthouse Log the stories of four vessels lost at the lighthouse at Beavertail Point were presented. What follows are the details of an additional five whose final voyage ended there.

Nearly two decades passed before another vessel would be totally lost at Beavertail Point. Built in Warren, ME in 1825, the WILLIAM was a three-masted schooner that spent her time in search of cargos in ports along the east coast of the United States. At 166 tons and just 79 feet in length, she was not a



particularly large tern (three-masted) schooner, but she kept reasonably busy at her trade. On her final voyage, she was under the command of a Captain Wye and bound to the Connecticut River from Rochester, NY looking for a cargo. The date was March 11, 1832 and there was no mention of a storm being involved with the incident, but as she ran ashore on a Sunday evening at 8 o'clock and at quite a distance from her destination; she was either storm driven or lost. She ran aground and went to pieces near the light, but her crew survived the disaster.

Four years later a local pilot boat, the schooner KUTUSOFF came to grief off the point. Which direction she was sailing in was not stated, but she collided with the brig GRAND TURK, inbound for Providence. Although pilots were not mandatory in state waters at that time, it is possible that the schooner was approaching the incoming vessel to offer services. The incident took place on April 12, 1835 and the pilot boat was sunk off Beavertail Point.

A winter storm was the cause of the destruction of the schooner EMMA on December 29, 1853. This storm has earned its reputation as one of the top ten New England winter storms in history. In all, the storm claimed more than forty vessels, mostly in Massachusetts, which were caught unawares when it struck. The EMMA was another Maine schooner that spent most of her career carrying coal from southern ports to New England. On this trip she had departed from Philadelphia under the command of Captain Smith and was headed for Boston. As the storm began, she came to anchor "inside of Beavertail" but soon commenced dragging. The crew cut away her masts to stabilize her but to no avail. She went hard aground and sank shortly after in just two fathoms of water at the Point. Fourteen other vessels were driven ashore and damaged during this storm in and around Newport, but only the EMMA became a total loss.

One of the more interesting wrecks, or perhaps I should say one of the wrecks with the most interesting cargos was the 180-ton schooner HARVEY F. PAYTON of Bristol, R.I. which was lost on Beavertail Point on March 3, 1859 in a snowstorm. The PAYTON was southward bound for Alexandria, VA from Boston, MA with a 140-ton cargo of cut building stones. After petroleum and bulk lime, heavy stone was one of the most dangerous cargos a vessel could carry, for if not secured carefully the stone could slide around the cargo areas where contact with a wooden hull would often lead to a leak and the inevitable sinking of the vessel. To this day, remnants of the cargo of the PAYTON can be seen from the rocks at Beavertail Point and there is even a proposed plan to retrieve at least one of the enormous stones for display at the museum. No lives were lost in this incident.

The month of March, 1859 was particularly boisterous and just weeks after the loss of the PAYTON yet another schooner came to grief on Beavertail Point on March 31, 1859. Northbound with 270 tons of coal, the SARAH BRIGHT ended her career on the western side of Beavertail Point. The 109-foot-long schooner was launched in Wilmington, DE just two years before her loss. Wilmington was also her home port and she was commanded by William Noble on her fateful final trip. Salvagers stripped the vessel shortly after she ran ashore and then turned their attention to saving the precious cargo. As ton after ton was removed, the remains of the vessel became lighter and moved a bit until she finally came to rest in six fathoms of water about 100 yards from the point. In all, 90 tons of her cargo was removed and sold.

The saga of lost vessels at Beavertail Point will continue in the next edition of the Log.

JFJ



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

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.

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.

info@beavertail.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.