



The Lighthouse Log

Fall 2014

The quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Message From The President

I am privileged to start my third year as President of BLMA and am very grateful for the dedication of the Board and members of BLMA. We have been very fortunate to receive many generous grants that have enabled BLMA to bring Beavertail Lighthouse back to its former glory. The latest achievement is the Fog Signal Building including the replica Fog Trumpets.

The Board is currently reviewing the 2006 Master Plan with recognition that the environment then and now regarding Beavertail, Jamestown, DEM, Rhode Island and the USCG have changed. With BLMA's mission statement in mind, possible projects need to be identified and prioritized. As with all projects a funding plan must be identified.

I urge everyone to support these efforts in any way possible – volunteering of time, identification of expertise, suggestions of what you would like to see done at Beavertail and of course monetary donations.

Thank you in advance for your support and understanding as BLMA starts this next phase.

SM ■



Beavertail Light Station in the late 40s, Early 50s.

CHARTER SCHOOL VISITS BEAVERTAIL PARK

Seventh and eighth grade students from the Compass School in Kingston R.I. enjoyed an outing at beavertail Park on a beautiful October day. The students enjoyed their time in the museum, finding the technology in the Interactive Room to their liking.

An outdoor presentation by Varoujan Karentz provided a context for presentations by the museum docents. Teacher Dr. Hilary Downes-Fortune a graduate of URI's School of Oceanography gave a detailed talk connecting geology and marine biology in a very effective manner.



"Miss Hilary" as she is known by the students and Varoujan Karentz discuss the positioning of Beavertail Point at the entrance to Narragansett Bay and the importance of the 1749 Newport Light for colonial shipping.

RES ■



THE SPOTLIGHT SHINES ON

Paula Samos is a newly selected member of the Board of Directors. Over the past two years Paula has become a valuable member of the team that greets and informs tour groups about Beavertail Light Station and environs. Paula particularly enjoys interpreting the stories associated with the Lens Room and dispensing information available from the Welshman lighted chart in the Rhode Island Room.

Paula, a registered nurse with extensive experience at Women and Infants Hospital, has taken a leave from professional activities to pursue a number of personal interests for which BLMA is a beneficiary. Paula is active with the Potter Animal League in Middletown, secretary for the Jamestown Tree Preservation and Protection Committee, a graduate of the R.I. Tree Council's Tree Stewart program, a member of the Jamestown Abuse and Prevention Coalition and a birder who has a trip planned to Costa Rica in December.

Paula brings enthusiasm and a genuine enjoyment of people to her involvements.

BLMA is fortunate to have her commitment and the Directors look forward to an energized and productive next few years with Paula on board.



RES ■

RHODE ISLAND'S PERILOUS COAST

The subject of this story will be a bit different from previous articles about shipwrecks that have appeared in the Lighthouse Log. While those have dealt with individual maritime disasters of interest, this article will give an overview of the top sites along our shoreline where vessels have met their end.

The statistics presented are based on confirmed incidents in which the final status of the vessel is either total loss, wrecked, went to pieces or simply lost. What is interesting to note is that the number of vessels lost does not equate to the number of vessels imperiled; thus, this ranking of totally lost vessels would not match the statistics regarding vessels that have been threatened and were subsequently rescued or retrieved. Let's look at these in countdown fashion starting from the eleventh most dangerous site in Rhode Island.

With six (6) losses, the area known simply as "The Bonnet" has had an interesting history starting with one of the earliest documented wrecks in Rhode Island but it is most well known for the loss of the side-wheel steamer RHODE ISLAND in 1880. In the tenth position are two sites - the immediate vicinity of Lion's Head/Hull Cove on Beavertail Neck and a prominent offshore rock on the south side of

Block Island known as Black Rock. Each of these areas can claim nine (9) vessels that have been totally lost, the most



prominent being a four-masted schooner named POCAHONTAS lost off Black Rock in 1890.

The ninth most popular wrecksite in the state is another tie. This one includes Whale Rock

(between Beavertail and Bonnet Point) and Castle Hill, Newport and its offshore reef known today as Butterball Rock. Each of these areas is known for eleven (11) total wrecks along with many other incidents. The eighth most common area of loss is the southeast point of Block Island. In this area twelve (12) vessels have come to grief, the latest documented being in 1996.

Number seven in the ranking is the north end of Block Island - Sandy Point and the beaches in the immediate vicinity - where thirteen (13) losses range from a frigate named PRINCESS AUGUSTA in 1738 to a tiny vessel named FURIOUS DUCHESS in 1946. The sixth most popular area for wrecks is at the eastern end of the state - Sakonnet Point - where at least fourteen (14) wrecks, mostly schooners, have ended their careers.

Number five on this list is one of the most feared areas by mariners over the years - Brenton Reef (and the immediate shore). Though there are many more incidents here where vessels have not been lost, there are at least nineteen (19) documented totally lost vessels. The fourth most common area for marine disasters encompasses the south shore of Block Island other than Black Rock and Southeast Point. Generally, this means the Southwest Point area, near the Block Island life-saving station, which has claimed twenty (20) vessels since 1797 including two four-masted schooners.

At number three is our own Beavertail Point where at least a dozen schooners join a list of twenty-one (21) vessels which have, in most cases, gone to pieces right in front of the lighthouse. But even the combined total number of vessels at the entrance to the East Passage does not equal the second most common area of peril in Rhode Island. That area is Point Judith, where the confluence of

ANNUAL MEETING SUCCESS

The 2014 Annual Meeting of BLMA was well attended. Attendees were treated to good food, good news and a splendid program. A short business meeting chaired by President Stewart Morgan welcomed two new Board members Paula Samos and Steven Meade and thanked retiring Board members Guy Archambault, Warren O'Sullivan and Betty Gulley for their service.

Those in attendance were astounded by a dizzying list of accomplishments for the year including more than 39,000 visitors, a completed shipwreck storyboard with a 44 inch wall mounted touch screen display, completion of bar coding all of the gift shop items, training the volunteer staff in the point of sale system and the exterior restoration of the Fog Signal Building along with the installation of two replica fog horn trumpets.

These accomplishments tied in nicely with Richard Koster's Treasurers Report which proved that the Gift Shop expansion is paying off handsomely thanks to buyers Linda Warner, Joan Vessella

With business completed, those in attendance had a pleasant surprise. The advertised speaker, Lenore Skomal, author of the "Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter" was joined by Dr. Marion Gagnon, former journalist, who is currently a faculty member at Johnson And Wales University. Dr. Gagnon brought the documentary video she created, "America's Forgotten Heroine: Ida Lewis, Keeper of the Light."

She showed about five minutes of the stunningly photographed film author Skomal

gave a lively presentation of the life of Ida Lewis, a woman of physical courage and great integrity. She became an overnight celebrity on a grand scale but resisted every attempt to separate her from the love of her life, her lighthouse work.

Ida was credited with saving 18 lives and served more than 39 years at Lime Rock. She was called "the bravest woman in America" and in 1924 The R.I. State Legislature renamed Lime Rock Ida Lewis Light. There had been no biography written until Lenore took up the task, publishing the original "The Keeper of Lime Rock" in 2002.

Attendees enjoyed refreshments, a chance to speak informally with the two presenters and the opportunity to purchase autographed copies.

The book and video are for sale in the Gift Shop. JB ■



Lenore Skomal (L) and Dr. Marion Gagnon (R) brought high energy and genuine enthusiasm to the Annual Meeting.

OCCASIONAL SERIES

From time to time, articles related to lighthouses will be presented



*Plymouth (Gurnet) Lighthouse and Duxbury Pier Light (Bug Light)
Photos Courtesy of Jeremy D'Entremont*

Located at the entrance to Plymouth Bay on a sandy Peninsula known as the Gurnet, a house containing two lights was erected in 1769 on land owned by John and Hannah Thomas. Hannah became the first female lighthouse keeper in America, succeeding her deceased husband. Hannah served from 1776 until after the light was ceded to the federal government in 1790, the later years with assistance of her son. John succeeded his mother in 1791 and served until 1812.

Named by the Pilgrims based on a similarity with headlands on the English Channel where Gurnet fish were caught, the several mile long peninsula defined the eastern boundary of Plymouth Bay, providing a harbor of refuge for shipping particularly after the opening of the Cape Cod Canal in 1914.

In 1801 the lighthouse burned after an oil lamp overturned. A temporary beacon funded by Plymouth merchants took its place, A Congressional appropriation was given as reimbursement for the temporary beacon and \$2500 was given to replace the two lights with twin light towers and a keeper's house. This two light system was replaced with a single light when it was determined in 1838 that the two lights were too close together and were mistaken for Sandy Neck Light off Barnstable.

For most of the 19th and early 20th centuries the arrival of ships laden with hemp and later abaca (manila) bound for the Plymouth Cordage Company was a regular occurrence. A channel marking light was deemed necessary and in 1871 the first offshore cast-iron caisson in the country was constructed.

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Known as Duxbury Pier Light the structure served to mark the edge of the channel into Plymouth Harbor. The light survived a severe battering in the hurricane of 1944. The 5th order Fresnel lens was removed and the light automated in 1964. Solar power was added in 1994. When asked about the "Bug Light" designation one former keeper stated that when you were out there you went "buggy."

Plymouth Light was automated in 1986 and converted to solar power in 1994. The current light tower is the oldest wooden freestanding light in the country.

Both lights are leased to Project Gurnet and Bug Lights, a non-profit devoted to preservation, restoration and maintenance of the two facilities. Volunteers work on the properties and have the Plymouth Light open for visitors the Saturday of Memorial Day Weekend. In addition, Station Gurnet, the lifesaving station close by Plymouth Light is also open. Privately owned by Richard Boonisar, the facility has been restored, is in immaculate condition and Richard gives tours. Be sure to mention to Richard your affiliation with Beavertail Lighthouse Museum. Duxbury Bay Maritime School will have information next spring about the Memorial weekend Opening of the Bay festivities.

RES ■



BLMA Group with Dominic Turillo at Rose Island

Beavertail Keeper Visits Rose Island Light

On September 11th a group of BLMA members accompanied former Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper Dominic Turillo, 91, and family members on a visit to his former station where he served as an Assistant Keeper. Dominic now living in Narragansett with family frequently visits the Beavertail station to view new exhibits and meet docents.

BLMA members Suzi Andrews, Varoujan Karentz, Alex Brincko, Diane Stover and the Warners along with four members of Dominic's family were hosted by Dave McCurdy, executive Director of the Rose Island Foundation. Visitors were picked up by Dave at the East Ferry Dock.

Rose Island recently had a new 6th Order Fresnel Lens installed by Artworks Inc. of Florida. BLMA docent Alex Brincko suggested that Dominic might enjoy seeing the new lens installed in his former duty station where he served 1950-51 prior to a fourteen year assignment at Beavertail. Enjoying his first trip to Rose Island in 63 years, Dominic reminisced about life at both stations. Linda Levesque, Dominic's oldest daughter was thrilled to see where she had once lived.

VK ■



Linda Levesque served as a director during BLMA's formative years.

Retired Teachers Visit Museum

An enthusiastic Group of retired New York state teachers visited the museum on September 23rd as part of a three day tour of southeastern Connecticut and southern R.I. Organized and led by Lori Cavelli, owner of Bella Tours, the visitors enjoyed presentations by Paula Samos, George Warner and Varoujan Karentz.

The sophisticated technology in the Interactive Room was truly appreciated by this group of individuals whose careers were all about the presentation of information in interesting and informative ways.

Lori Donlon, President of the New York State United Teachers, was particularly impressed with the touch screen shipwreck display and the ease with which information could be accessed.

Tours such as these provide additional revenue during periods when the museum is closed. On this particular day, gift shop sales handled by Linda Warner and Missie Burrows supplemented a donation from the tour company.

RES ■



Picture: Loretta Donlon on left is president of the retired ny state united Teachers with her is Carole Gehrig from Whitesboro N.Y.

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tides from Narragansett Bay and Block Island Sound combine to create the “confused seas” that have led to countless maritime incidents over the years. What is left in this countdown is the number one most dangerous area of our coast and, frankly, this one is a surprise.

I have always considered the waters of Block Island to be the most dangerous to shipping and, in terms of the total number of incidents that is an accurate statement. But in terms of totally lost vessels over the years, the single site with the greatest number is Watch Hill Reef (including the point area and immediate beach, though not including Napatree Point). Fifty (50) vessels ranging from the REVENGE (under the command of then Lt. Oliver Hazard Perry) in 1811 to the AKBAR in 1946 have left their bones here. It is important to note that an area not discussed is the inner waters of the bay where incidents such as the 1938 hurricane have caused an incredible number of losses. These losses are, however, mostly small craft and confirmation of individual vessels has not been possible. In upcoming editions of the Lighthouse Log, each of these areas of disaster will be looked at in-depth in an effort to offer a better understanding of Rhode Island’s perilous coast.

JFJ ■



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www.beavertaillight.org



Mark your calendar!

Saturday, December 6 Holiday Fair at Lawn Avenue School
Sunday, December 7 BLMA Holiday Open House, Museum
1:00pm to 3:00pm

Writers for this issue: Judith Bell, Varoujan Karentz, Stewart Morgan and Richard Sullivan