



The Lighthouse Log

Winter 2021

The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Message From the President

Dear Members,

Welcome to 2021! Last year was an unusual and challenging year, but the wonderful news that the new vaccine was approved and is becoming available gives us all hope. I don't think any of us were sad to see the end of 2020, even if it meant bringing in cold weather and the possibility of snow.

We are excited that a new year is beginning and look forward to bringing new events and happenings to Beavertail. We hope that conditions will improve enough so that we can open on schedule in May.

We are pleased to report that, in early spring, construction will begin on a new courtyard adjacent to the Museum entrance, which will be an area for visitors and school children to congregate prior to entering. We are thankful for the generous donors who have made it possible to start this project, and we are contemplating displays or exhibits that would work well in this area so visitors can have a learning experience while waiting outside. We are hopeful that more support will be forthcoming to complete the construction and exhibits.

The fog signal building roof is finally being repaired thanks to a generous grant from the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission. We were amazed that the tarp covering the roof stayed on so long! By the time you read this, the work should be completed.

Our membership renewal drive is ongoing right now. If you have not renewed your membership yet, please do so now. Our website provides information on the different types of membership levels and offers an easy way to renew. The support of our members is critical to our survival in these hard times. Keep in mind that all members enjoy a 10% discount on any item in our gift shop. Your support makes all the difference.

Last year, as museums struggled to remain open and staffed, many turned to virtual tours of their collections and artifacts. BLMA is looking into setting up a virtual tour for Beavertail. This is an exciting project, and we are all looking forward to its completion. In this newsletter, you will learn more about QR code



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tours to be set up in January. In addition, Dave Smith, our Vice President and tech wizard is busy working on adding a new section to our website entitled "Archives" enabling visitors to review our history through documents and photos as well as our newsletters. The link for this is:

<https://www.beavertailight.org/archives/> Please check it out.

Finally, in closing, I would like to wish everyone a healthy and safe New Year! See you in the spring!

Best regards,
Diane Bakley
President

New Wall Display

We have a new wall-mounted interactive display: *Rhode Island Lighthouse Locations*, which replaces the twenty-year-old display. The display will be especially popular with children since it has 30 buttons that can be pressed to show the locations of all the 30 lights in the bay and on Block Island.

The new display uses a Narragansett Bay Chart as the background and a blinking red light located at the exact location of present active lights, privately owned lights, and lights that no longer exist, including the lightship location off Brenton Reef.

The display supplements the individual RI lighthouse photo/narrative exhibit on the adjacent wall.



VK

Last of Its Kind

In 2019, devastating hurricane Dorian hit the Bahama Islands, home to the candy-striped Elbow Reef Lighthouse in Hopetown. The Elbow Reef Lighthouse is the world's last kerosene light, and it is one of the few remaining lighthouses that is manually run by a Keeper.



Keeper Jeffery Forbes Jr. is the son of a Lighthouse Keeper, who is also the son of a Lighthouse Keeper. Each night, Jeffery climbs the 101 steps of the lighthouse tower, first to carry the two gallons of Kerosene used as lamp fuel to the lamp room. Every two hours after lighting the lamp, which can sometimes be a feat in itself, Jeffery walks those 101 steps to hand crank the lens mechanism an astonishing 427 cranks each time.

Folks at the Elbow Reef Lighthouse Society had contacted BLMA through our Marine Shipwreck Historian Jim

Jenney asking for help with ideas and projects in preserving this historic landmark in its current manual state.

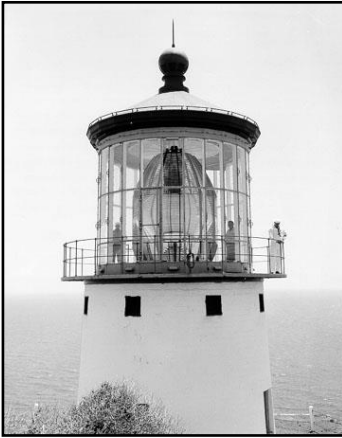
As you might imagine, parts for the mechanism and even mantles to fit the lamp are hard to come by these days. You can Google "The Kerosene Keeper YouTube" to find an interesting documentary on the lighthouse and its Keeper, Jeffery. Keeper Jeffery loves his job as he says in the documentary, lighthouse keeping "it's in my blood."

If you would like to learn more about the work needed to run an old fashioned lighthouse, this documentary is quite informational and inspiring and is well worth your time.



Elbow Reef Lighthouse Keeper Jeffery Forbes Jr. cranking the lens rotation mechanism by hand.

Largest Fresnel Lens in the U.S.



The Beavertail Lighthouse Museum's most significant artifact is its fourth-order Fresnel lens, which was actually used in the granite tower at one time. It contains 56 prisms and stands about 3 ft, 4 in tall. It is on loan to the museum from the U.S. Coast Guard and is valued at \$250,000. A third-order Fresnel lens, which was a foot taller, preceded it in the tower.

This past November, our docent Arn Lisnoff, who winters in Hawaii, learned from his work at our museum that one of the world's largest Fresnel lenses is located at Makapu'u Point. He hiked to the location on Oahu Island. The lens is a whopping 9ft in diameter and is 12 ft tall, and it consists of over 1,000 individual prisms. Exhibited at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and identified as a Hyper-Radiant Fresnel Lens, it became operational at Makapu'u in 1909.

Scholarship Season



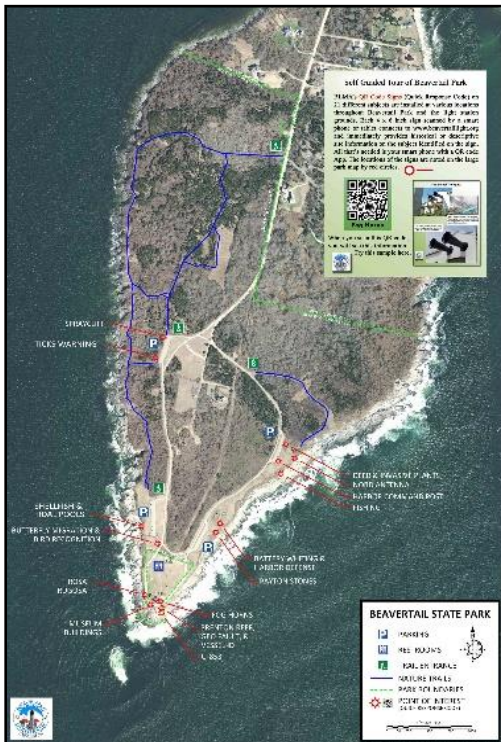
The W. Craig Armington Memorial Scholarship Fund was established by the BLMA for high school seniors living in Jamestown, RI, who have been accepted at a college or university and will begin studies in the fall. The student selected will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to

be applied toward college tuition, books, or fees related to the courses of study.

Scholarship applications must be postmarked no later than May 14, 2021. Applications can be downloaded from the BLMA website. Copies are also available at the Jamestown Library.

QR Armchair Tour of Beavertail State Park

We are very excited to bring you an Armchair Tour of Beavertail State Park. The QR Tour signs placed at various locations throughout the park a few years ago are a popular activity for visitors to explore and learn about the tour will be in full swing online via the beavertaillight.org website by the end of January.

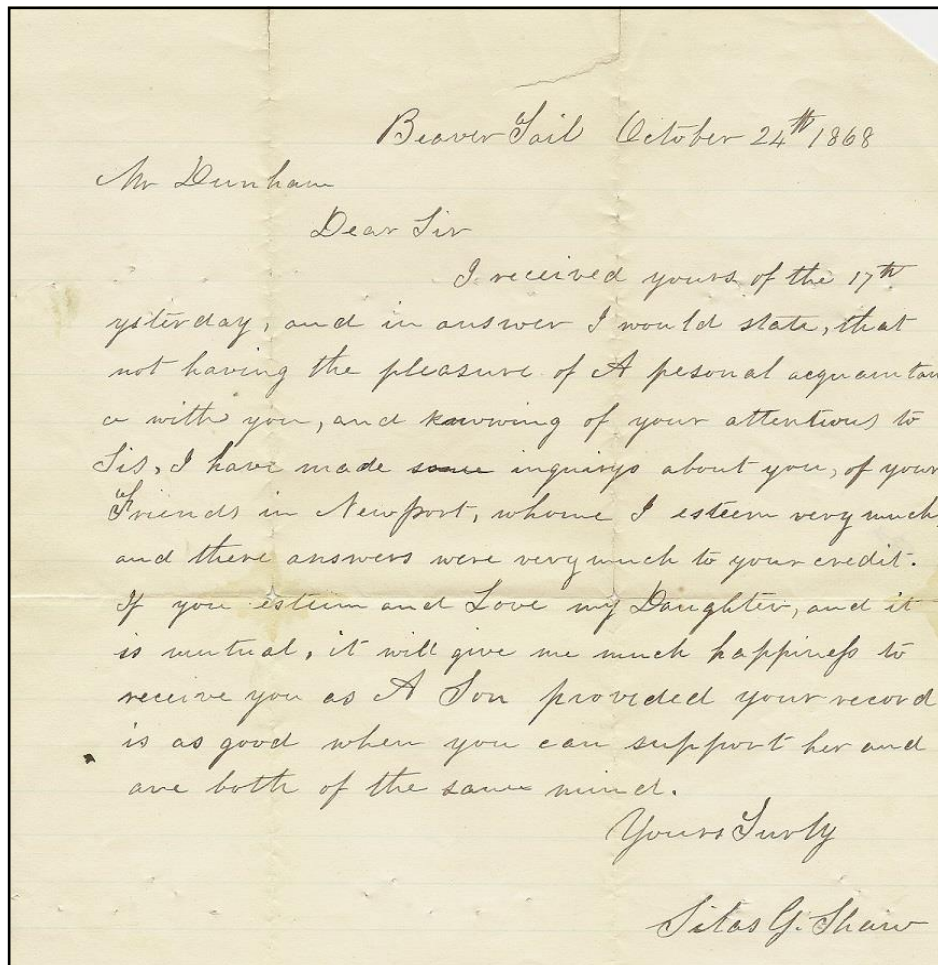


You can take the guided tour by clicking each step listed on the web page and then clicking the blue marker placed on the map at the QR sign location for that step, or you can simply click red circles on the map for each QR sign location. Either way, a page for that location will open to give you its related information. Within the 21 sites, you will find facts about the Fog Signals, Battery Whiting, Brenton Reef, Vessel Identification, and environmental material. The QR Virtual Tour is an enjoyable way to educate yourself about Beavertail Park's unique characteristics and the significant activities that have helped shape the landscape in the past years.

Ursula Parenteau



A Lighthouse Romance



Letter from Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper Silas Gardner Shaw to William Robert Dunham.
Donated by the author to the Jamestown Historical Society



Emily Ann Shaw "Sis" about 1869
Author's private collection



William Robert Dunham about 1875
Author's private collection

Emily Ann Shaw "Sis" was just eight years old when she came to Beavertail Lighthouse with her parents and four younger siblings in December of 1858. How impressive it must have been to pull up to the lighthouse with the big waves crashing all around now that her father was the Lighthouse Keeper. Three brothers were to be born at the lighthouse over the next several years, and in 1864, Emily's mother Ann became the official Assistant Lighthouse Keeper. With no other Assistant but her mother, who would give birth to her ninth child early the next year, it was childcare or lighthouse duties for Emily, no doubt.

After several years helping out with chores at the lighthouse, Emily, now a teenager, was allowed to live with her great aunt Ann Eliza Weaver in Newport on Spring Street. Emily attended Newport High School there and, according to the 1865 RI state census, future Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper William W. Wales and his family were next-door neighbors.

Newport must have been a welcome respite from the isolated life as a Lighthouse Keeper's daughter; even so, Emily must have missed her family and the lighthouse immensely.

During her time in Newport, Emily eventually met William Robert Dunham, a young bank clerk, who must have seemed quite debonair with his handsome mustache and dignified puritan manner. While Emily's family had its earliest roots in Rhode Island through the ancient Arnold family, William's lineage goes back to Plymouth, Massachusetts. William is a proven descendant of the Mayflower passengers Thomas Rogers, Richard Warren, and Peter Brown.

Silas was known to have a wicked sense of humor, and one can imagine him, Ann, and their brood of children

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sitting around the dinner table at Beavertail with Silas mirthfully deciding how best to answer William's proposal of marriage to his daughter. To be sure, there must have been a few lighthearted jokes at Mr. Dunham's expense, but, in the end, Silas answered the letter quite soberly, and he warmly accepted William's proposal of marriage to his daughter.

It seems that her father was true to his word; about a year later, after Emily graduated from Newport High School, Silas welcomed William as his son when the couple married on December 20, 1869.

Emily and William moved to Providence, where William rose through the ranks to become a bank manager with a stint in the Rhode Island Militia- First Light Infantry Regiment. Emily and William raised their family in Providence and Warwick, Rhode Island, and had a long and seemingly happy marriage, which resulted in six children. Later in life, they settled in New Haven, CT, where William died in 1932.

In her old age, Emily returned to Jamestown to live with her son William and his family on High Street. She must have relished visiting Beavertail once again with William and her granddaughters by her side, perhaps, telling them stories about her childhood at the lighthouse. Emily died in Jamestown in 1941 at age 90.

It is evident that Beavertail Lighthouse touched the hearts of Emily's family, for her son William and later two of his daughters had their ashes released from Beavertail Point upon their deaths.

CV



Emily on the rocks in Jamestown, RI at age 86

Fog Signal Roof



During a storm this past February, a portion of the 82-year-old copper roof attached to the Fog Signal Building (aquarium) peeled back, similar to what happened to another portion of the roof torn off two years earlier. A dispute between RIDEM (a user of the property), the USCG (the property owner), and the RIHPHC (the state historical commission) could not be resolved. BLMA stepped up, as did the RIHPHC, to fund the repair with a matching \$25,000 grant.

The Museum on PBS

This past November, Bartley Price, a Senior Producer of Rhode Island Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), asked if he and his photographers could film Beavertail and interview staff members. They filmed every room, including a climb up into the tower and the lantern room. Two BLMA members, Linda Warner and Varoujan Karentz, were interviewed explaining the history of the museum's light and artifacts. While no broadcast date was available at the time, it will be posted on our website once it is scheduled.



Board Member Linda Warner being interviewed by PBS producer Bartley Price

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast

Beavertail Point (Part 3)

In the last two editions of the Lighthouse Log, the stories of nine vessels totally lost on Beavertail Point have been presented. The story continues in this edition with the story of four more unfortunate vessels.

In the annals of the maritime history of disasters at Beavertail Point, none has a more unusual twist than the story of the loss of the 197-ton schooner FLORA. Launched at East Boston, MA in 1869, this 107-foot long coaster carried a variety of cargos during her short life.

Under the command of E.A. Sawyer, the schooner was on a voyage from Cape Ann, MA to New York City when she met with disaster due to a navigational error (the newspapers were more polite and said she was sunk *"in consequence of mistaking her way in the thick darkness"*) and ended up on the western shore of Beavertail Point on March 26, 1871 after two years of service. Like the HARVEY F. PAYTON she was carrying stone when lost. Two days later, she was reported as going to pieces in what was a heavy sea outside. Now here is where it gets odd...on April 21, 1871, there was a report that a trial of torpedoes was made upon the schooner FLORA and that from the number of splinters thrown up, the explosion was very successful. It is known that torpedo testing was going on in this period, but, from most reports, the testing was performed in the outer harbor of Newport, often with dignitaries in attendance. So the question is...were the remains of the FLORA, which wrecked at Beavertail, pulled off and taken to the inner harbor to be blown up, or was that simply another vessel named FLORA? It seems highly unlikely that the salvage of Beavertail's wreck could have been successfully undertaken in such a short period of time. But the question remains...



A decade later, on August 5, 1881, yet another coastal schooner came to grief at Beavertail when the PERSIS L. SMITH had the misfortune to run ashore on Newton Rock and then drifted to the point of Beavertail on a foggy day. The SMITH was 84 feet long and weighed in at 116 tons. She called Portland, ME home and was en route from Moncton, New Brunswick, to Providence with timber when the disaster occurred. As our own Varoujan Karentz posed in his book *"Beavertail Light Station"* – *"one must experience standing on the deck of a ship surrounded by fog... Perception is incalculable... All hands are straining to hear the dreaded surf or a shipboard fog signal announcing a vessel somewhere, knowing that odds exist where they could collide without having time to take evasive action. Add to this anxiety, straining an uplifted ear to identify the tone characteristic of a whistle buoy or gong or that of a lighthouse fog signal and then trying to determine its direction..."* Add to that the disappointment that you have failed at the task and are now at risk of losing not only your vessel but also, perhaps, your crew. To call this a foggy day would be an understatement, for no fewer than nine vessels ran ashore on Block Island alone on this day. Within days the vessel broke up, but as the cargo was intrinsically buoyant, the salvagers fared much better than they would with a stone cargo.

It would be almost a half-century before another vessel would come to an end at this particular spot. On June 30, 1928, the auxiliary schooner EUGENIA, inbound to Newport, RI with a mackerel cargo, met with disaster just off the point at Newton Rock. The vessel was 100 tons and 89 feet long and called Gloucester, MA her home port. It was from there, under the command of Captain Frank Foote, that her fateful voyage began. Caught in a storm, with her crew of fourteen fishermen aboard, many of them asleep at the time of the stranding, could have made the disaster worse than it was. As it turned out, all hands were roused from their berths and managed to escape from the doomed craft just moments before she slid off the rock and sunk in the deep water next to it. Captain Manders, at Beavertail Light, immediately contacted the Coast Guard at Price's Neck, Newport, who responded and rescued the endangered men. One can only imagine the outcome if this disaster had taken place in the colder months...the results could have been considerably different.

In the next edition of the Lighthouse Log, the stories of the final five vessels totally lost at Beavertail Point will be presented. You may be surprised that two of them have been lost in the 21st century, despite all of our modern technology and expertise.

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



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 83
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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

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.

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.