



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

# The Lighthouse Log

Summer 2016

## *The quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA*

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Bob Dutson

### **Marine Historian**

Jim Jenney

### **Published by**

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### **Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association**

PO Box 83

Jamestown, RI 02835

401.423.3270

Email:

[info@Beavertailight.org](mailto:info@Beavertailight.org)

Web site:

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

## Message From The Editor

Our 2016 season has seen a surge of new visitors due in part to the beautiful weather we have been blessed with this summer. Even though the Memorial Day opening was hampered by inclement weather, we had many visitors stop by looking for an alternative to a soggy day. Sales at the gift shop were brisk. On Tuesday June 7th we hosted a U.S. Lighthouse Society tour group who accessed the tower by special arrangement and indicated they were extremely pleased with the museum staff and personalized tour. We are open 7 days per week 10:30AM-4:30PM through Labor Day and weekends thereafter until Columbus Day. A recent poll compiled by TripAdvisor of those vacationing in the area who visited us was overwhelming - out of 252 people polled, 249 respondents or 99% voted Beavertail Lighthouse Museum as very good or excellent. Only 1 vote was unsatisfactory, from a visitor who stopped by last year after we had closed for the season in October!



We are currently undertaking a massive fundraiser campaign to establish an endowment for building preservation. As reported in the *Jamestown Press* in the August 11th edition we are exceedingly fortunate to have received the generous support of the local historian, **Mr. Jim Buttrick**, in support of this effort. He will match donations we receive up to \$500,000 which we must raise to finance extensive repairs and maintenance of the primary buildings. Nicole Contino is wholeheartedly and generously coordinating the fundraiser.

A memorial event for Richard Sullivan was held at 5PM on Saturday June 18<sup>th</sup>. Linda Warner, Varoujan Karentz, and family members spoke of their recollections of Richard who will be remembered with fondness and great respect. A plaque dedicating the "Model Room" to his memory was installed under the large mounted striped bass in this section of the museum. Please take the time to view the plaque when you next visit us.

The new QR code signs have been posted on steel poles across the street from the museum and at strategic locations around the park for use by members, visitors and staff. You can access and scan them using any smart phone. They provide useful technical and historical information and are a fun way to get extensive background data concerning our facilities and the park. Additional info is contained in an article in this issue

Staffing by our returning crew as well as the new docents has been very loyal and absentee issues have not arisen to date. I look forward to continuing in this role as editor and contributing to our Log each quarter. It has been very enjoyable and my appreciation for the Association grows each time I add to this publication. The same can be said for the Tower Climb dates on alternating weekends which I am privileged to assist with. We are accumulating additional submissions for future issues and would love to hear from one and all! If your travel plans include New England, please join all the newfound friends who have visited our landmark this season. We have enjoyed meeting visitors from all over the USA, Canada, South America and even Germany, Italy, and Japan. Obviously the word is out that the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum is well worth the trip to Conanicut Island! In closing I wish to personally thank all of you who have stopped by and said hello while visiting and your kind remarks regarding our facilities.

Warm regards,

*Bob Dutson*

## Keeper George Light Returns to Beavertail

It was a surprise to see Keeper George Light and his family in the museum this past July. George, his wife Donna and daughter Jennifer Bouldin plus granddaughter Sydney were visiting his old home. George now retired living in Ohio, comes back to Beavertail from time to time. This visit got him back up to the open catwalk on the tower, and he admitted it was much easier climbing those spiral stairs in his earlier years than now. The view from the tower “was always the best” he said.



Daughter Jennifer and Wife Donna

Chatting with docents Dave Smith, Alex Brincko and Varoujan Karentz, he filled in some unknown facts about the fog signal after the horns were removed from the building and the flashing green characteristics of the light itself at that time. He had transferred to Beavertail in 1969 as an MM 2<sup>nd</sup> class from the Woods Hole USCG Station. George, whenever he answered the station's telephone, always would say to the caller “Beavertail Light, Light speaking”.



George Reminiscing from the Top of the Tower



Granddaughter Sidney who was tall enough to climb the tower with mother Jennifer Bouldin

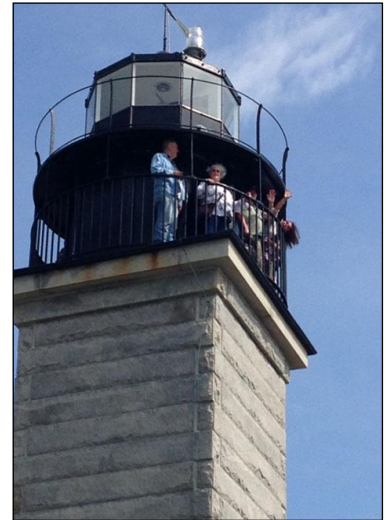
## Keeper John Morris (Sabin Point Light)

With Beavertail so easily assessable to visitors compared with other RI lighthouses, from time to time we try to tell the stories of other keepers and other lights. Photos are rare and the picture below of Apprentice Seaman John F. Morris was presented to BLMA by his sister Elizabeth Downey. Morris (*deceased*) a native of Pawtucket was stationed at Sabin Point Light, a beautiful stone structure, which was demolished in 1968 to make way for a wider channel into Providence.



## Visit by USLS

On June 7th, 37 members of the U.S. Lighthouse Society (USLS) visited Beavertail as part of a New England lighthouse tour. USLS is headquartered near Seattle Washington and holds a vast collection of historical lighthouse information. Their “Keeper’s Log” magazine often features Beavertail stories and related information. Jeff Gales of USLS was the tour manager and complimented BLMA on its museum upgrade since his last visit and enjoyed the view from the tower.



*USLS Visitors Viewing From the Tower*

## Women Lighthouse Keepers

With the addition of a new wall mounted story about women light keepers in the model room highlighting Rhode Island women who stepped up to fill their deceased husband’s shoes tending the light, our board member Dorrie Linn took it one step further.

Missing a head and also a name, this model shows a shapely female dressed in period clothes standing at the bottom of the light tower’s spiral staircases ready to welcome all that climb the tower.

A head, or a complete mannequin, and an appropriate name is welcomed from readers.



## Pokemon's GO APP

Last July’s mania with “Pokemon’s GO” reached Beavertail and a bevy of smart phone owners. The free play mobile phone location based reality game supplemented by newspaper front page reviews included animated monsters roving around Beavertail and the light station buildings. Surprisingly, users also sampled historical information on the two keeper buildings and the oil storage building. Alex, the DEM naturalist in the aquarium, demonstrated how it works.

The free app uses your phone’s GPS and keeps you busy chasing and capturing virtual creatures at the same time teaches much about the light station you never knew about.





## RHODE ISLAND'S PERILOUS COAST WHALE ROCK (PART 1)



Just a little more than a mile west by south from Beavertail Light is one of the most interesting maritime dangers in the state. Whale Rock is sometimes noted as the smallest island in Narragansett Bay but is really little more than an exposed rocky ledge whose name is derived from its appearance. It sits rather as a guardian to ships choosing to enter Narragansett Bay via the West Passage and has claimed almost a dozen vessels which have been lost in the surrounding waters in the past century and a half. The following briefly describes those lost vessels.

The first recorded vessel lost in this area is the 69-ton merchant schooner ANN M. STILL. It was 7 o'clock on a Saturday night, November 22, 1862, and she was headed to Fall River with a cargo of fresh oysters. Her master, Captain Walter Hudson, was at the helm when the small schooner ran on Whale Rock by accident. Built in 1850, the vessel was just twelve years old when lost. Within fifteen minutes after striking Whale Rock the ANNA M. STILL came off and sunk at the cost of three lives. The captain climbed up to the small portion of the mast which remained out of the water and held on for fourteen hours before being rescued from his perilous position.

Three years later, on October 19, 1865, another schooner came to grief at Whale Rock and, once again, three men (this time including the captain) were lost. The ISRAEL H. DAY was a 250-ton schooner built in Middleton, CT. in 1858 and hailed from Providence. She was caught in a storm and struck the rock when inbound from Baltimore, MD. for Dighton, MA when she struck the rock. Exactly what happened next is conjecture but her captain, D. Chase, may have attempted to continue northbound or to reach the nearest shore. She sank when about ½ mile above the rock and was lost.

The smallest vessel to be lost here was the schooner ADELBERT of Boothbay, Maine. She had departed Vineyard Haven Harbor, Martha's Vineyard on February 28, 1871 and was likely fishing in the coves and off the beaches all along the coast. Fogbound on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, the 65-ton vessel ran aground on a small reef that lies between Whale Rock and the mainland. This reef, called Dicken's Reef, is the final resting place for at least two and probably three vessels. Her master's name was Farnham and his fate, along with his crew, is uncertain.

On April 16, 1874, the coal laden schooner WIND had the misfortune to come into collision with the steamer A.C. BARSTOW of Providence. The accident occurred about ½ mile south of Bonnet Point or roughly two-thirds of the distance between that point and Whale Rock. The WIND displaced 117 gross tons and carried about 215 tons of coal when sunk. She belonged to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company and sailed out of Trenton, New Jersey but exactly where or when she was built has not been determined. The crew survived the collision but with nothing except the clothing on their backs and were graciously sent to New York free-of-charge by the Narragansett Steamship Company.

*Continued on next page . . .*

## RI PERILOUS COAST *(CONTINUED FROM PG 4)* . . .

Two months later another schooner came to grief on Dickens Reef. The date was June 1<sup>st</sup> and the victim was the 160-ton merchant schooner JOHN FERRIS of Norwalk, CT. which had been launched there just ten years before this incident. At 160 tons, the FERRIS was about average size for two mast-ed schooners of the time. When lost, she was in command of a captain named Savage or Field (the records are unclear) and was traveling from Pawtucket, RI for New York City in ballast. Wreckers went to the scene but there is no indication that they were successful despite her being a fairly young vessel.

November 18, 1875 brought another storm to Narragansett Bay and the coal schooner ROBIN, of Cherryfield, Maine found herself in trouble. In fact, her entire voyage had been problematic. She sailed from Port Johnson, New Jersey via New York in weather so extreme that she had to be towed through Hell Gate (East River, NY) and anchored at Riker's Island where she remained two days for the weather to moderate. She reached Block Island Channel where she was becalmed. On Saturday another gale arrived and forced her to turn back and seek safe haven at New London, CT. On the following Thursday she set out again for New Bedford, MA, her destination, but as she passed Point Judith she ran into thick weather and decided to head for Dutch Island for the night. Two hours later she struck Whale Rock and tore the bottom out of the 125-ton schooner depositing more than 210 tons of coal on the ocean floor. The crew were rescued by the keeper of the Dutch Island lighthouse but saved nothing but the clothing they had on.

In the next edition of the Log the stories of the remaining vessels that have been lost at or near Whale Rock will be presented.

JJ



Ponce de Leon Inlet Light,  
Daytona, Florida

## Keeper/Docent Allen Bestwick, Returns to Beavertail

It was nice to see our own uniformed docent, Allen Bestwick getting lots of attention from visitors as they see a Lighthouse Keeper of the last century on the grounds and in the museum. Allen, who now lives in Florida is also a popular sight at the 175 ft. high Ponce de Leon Inlet Light south of Daytona where he teaches visitors about lighthouse living and early radio communications. Allen was back at Beavertail for a visit last month and presented his new lecture about the U.S. Lifesaving Service and how they supplemented the lighthouses in saving lives off stranded ships and warning vessels of impending dangers. Allen had the authentic uniform complete with Keeper insignia made for himself to replicate living at a lighthouse.

VK



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE  
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION  
P. O. Box 83

BLMA 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.beavertaillight.org](http://www.beavertaillight.org)

## QR code signs installed

BLMA's information matrix codes signs project is complete with 21 signs installed at various locations throughout Beavertail Park and the light station grounds. Each 4 x 6-inch sign scanned by a smart phone or tablet connects to [www.beavertaillight.org](http://www.beavertaillight.org) and immediately provides historical or descriptive site information on the subject identified on the sign.

A map showing the location of all the signs is located in the museum hallway bulletin board and on BLMA web site.

