



# The Lighthouse Log

SPRING 2016

*The quarterly Newsletter  
of the BLMA*

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## Message From The Editor

"It is with great sadness I report to any who may be unaware that Richard E Sullivan passed away in March 2016 after battling a protracted illness. For over 30 years Richard was a Docent and was a past President of the BLMA. He brought a great deal of warmth to the Association and will be sorely missed. Please bear with me as I inherit his role as editor of the Log and get up to speed. I only hope to follow in his footsteps and look forward to contributing to our Log where possible and receiving submissions for future issues.

It may not feel like Spring has arrived here on Narragansett Bay but the calendar says we are over a month into the new season. It seems especially strange owing to a relatively mild winter but the wind really has teeth in it this morning as I prepare this message for you. Conventional wisdom says that once the dandelions are in bloom the blackfish should be biting. Not so this year or at least not for my efforts off the rocks by the lighthouse, something I have relished for over 50 years now; perhaps the fish are looking forward to mild weather too. Happily, there do not seem to be as many punch-list repair items as last year, and the lighthouse complex apparently fared well during the cold months. I will also be assisting Varoujan Karentz for a second year preparing facilities for the upcoming season.

The annual Docent Appreciation Breakfast reception was held on April 23<sup>rd</sup> and was very well received. There were new, enthusiastic docents present, and Linda Warner presented all with an introduction into expectations and docent activities. The museum and tower will open to the public starting on Monday May 30. All expectations at this point are that we should meet or exceed the fine results experienced in 2015 when we set record sales. In closing I wish all of you a happy and healthy season and hope to meet as many of you as I can in the near future."

BD 





## NEW STORY BOARD

Closely associated with Rhode Island lighthouses during the period of 1840 to 1920 was the "U.S. Life Saving Service." This organization actually went out into raging storms to rescue crews and passengers off shipwrecked and grounded vessels. Six Life Saving Stations were located on Rhode Island's south shore and three on Block Island. All were within walking distance of each other, so "Surfmen" would search the beach at night for vessels in trouble or wrecked. Hundreds of lives were lost, but hundreds more saved since travel and shipment of goods were primarily accomplished by coasting schooners. The building of roads and railroads changed this way of travel by early 1900.

A new story board in the museum tells more about these stations, the men who manned them and how this service and the U.S. Lighthouse Board supplemented each other.

VK 

## RICHARD SULLIVAN



We regret to report the untimely death of *Richard Sullivan* this past March. He was a past BLMA President who for over 30 years has been involved with the light serving as a Docent and on many committees including editing of the organization's "The Lighthouse Log" newsletter. Richard was instrumental in the long range planning and the development of many of exhibits in the museum. His presence, guidance, and knowledge will missed.

VK 

## BLMA QR PROJECT

BLMA's "QR" (Quick Response Code) project is expected to be up and operational by late spring.

Over 22 QR sites have been identified around the lighthouse grounds and the related information connected to our web site. All that's needed is your smart phone with a bar code app and you can get information on any of the 22 subjects where a QR sign is located.

VK 

## VISIT BY FRIENDS OF NOBSKA LIGHT

Recommended by the U.S. Coast Guard's New England engineering office to visit the museum at Beavertail, four representatives from "The Friends of Nobska Lighthouse" "overlooking nearby Woods Hole, MA were hosted in late April. Nobska Light is being turned over to them, and they have interest in establishing a museum.

The USCG advised them to visit Beavertail as a successful example of a lighthouse museum. They were hosted by *Linda Warner and Varoujan Karentz*

VK 



*Left to Right; Charlie McCaffrey, Brian Nickerson, Steve Levy and Catherine Bumpus*

## 2016 TOWER OPENING DAYS

The 2016 dates for public viewing from the catwalk of Beavertail's granite tower are listed below:

<u>Day</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Hours (PM)</u>
Monday	MAY 30	12-3
Saturday	JUNE 18	1-4
Saturday	JULY 2	1-4
Sunday	JULY 17	1-4
Saturday	JULY 30	1-4
Sunday	AUGUST 14	1-4
Saturday	AUGUST 27	1-4
Saturday	SEPTEMBER 10	12-3
Saturday	SEPTEMBER 24	12-3
Sunday	OCTOBER 9	12-3



*Openings are weather dependent; if uncertain, call 401.423.3270.*

VK 

## RHODE ISLAND'S PERILOUS COAST LION'S HEAD / HULL COVE (PART 2)

*In the Summer 2015 edition, we presented Part 1 of this piece which described the fates of vessels lost near the eastern shore of Jamestown, RI immediately north of the lighthouse, in the area of Hull Cove known specifically as Lion's Head. We now conclude this article following the Black Rock, Block Island Article.*

This is a continuation of a discussion of the wrecks which have taken place at Lion's Head and in Hull Cove, on the eastern shore of Beavertail Point. Previously detailed were four of at least eight known totally lost vessels here and in this edition of the log we will look at the others.

Fifteen years after the loss of the three-masted schooner HUDDALL on the rocks at Lion's Head, another schooner came to grief here. The schooner BUCCO was outbound from Fall River for her home port of St. John, New Brunswick when she found herself fogbound at the entrance to Narragansett Bay on July 2, 1889. In a manner similar to the schooner MARY, wrecked twenty-five years earlier, this Canadian vessel found herself on the rocks in a very exposed situation which she would not survive. The BUCCO measured 87' x 26' x 9' and displaced 145 tons. It is unclear whether or not she was carrying cargo at the time but, regardless, the twenty-three year old vessel's days were numbered as nothing could be done to prevent her from breaking up as she lay. Some salvage was reported but within five days, she went entirely to pieces. She was owned by J.W. Scammel and under the command of a captain named Wilbur who, with the crew and her single passenger, made it ashore safely.

It would be almost two decades before another vessel would be lost in this area. Unlike those that met a similar fate before her, the IONA was a small boat. On Tuesday, May 7, 1908, a storm visited Narragansett Bay which was described as "lively". The newspaper account said of the storm that, "the rain fell in torrents accompanied by a high wind" and remarked that, "the weather bureau had given ample warning of the coming of the storm so that small vessels had opportunity to remain in the harbor". Apparently not everyone paid attention. The IONA was a small pleasure craft; neither registered, enrolled or licensed indicating that she was not a commercial vessel. Why she was out in such stormy weather is unknown, but she ended her career as a total loss in Hull Cove.

Five years after the loss of the IONA, another small craft went ashore and became a total loss in Hull Cove. The ITE was an 8-ton fishing yawl which measured 34' x 12' x 4'. Owned by Anna P. Richardson and under the command of Theodore N. Peckham, the ITE called Newport her home port. She was reported as well constructed and had just recently had an engine and propeller added to her rig. The date of this disaster was August 8, 1913 and the weather must have been relatively calm as it was reported that her stranding was a mystery. A local tug was dispatched to the scene almost immediately but her master decided it unwise to pull her off at that time. A short time later, Captain Kenyon and the life-saving crew on the IDA LEWIS went to her but found her unsalvageable.

In late September of 1934 the sloop MURMUR became another victim at Lion's Head. Little is known about this sloop except that she was twenty-five feet in length. Her home port, owner and master remain unknown but those aboard were not presumed lost. The wreck occurred on a Sunday night, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, but was not discovered until Monday morning when local fishermen discovered her remains and made an effort to salvage what they could. Captain George Manders, the Keeper of Beavertail Light, observed the salvagers and went to the scene to learn what he could of the occupants of the vessel but, other than her name, the remains of the wreck did not yield those details. Before long there was nothing left of the wreck except for small pieces. The newspaper report stated, "the mast had been split in three places, the sails were torn to shreds, and all that remained was a few ropes and pieces of board".

Although these wrecks illustrate the most disastrous examples of vessels which have come to grief in the area, there were others, most notably the steamer MOBILIGHT which survived a stranding here.



## WAS DAVID MELVILLE AN HONEST MAN?

One of Beavertail's more noted inventors was *David Melville* of Newport, whose experimentation of gas lighting both in Newport and his one year "Gasometer" contract at Beavertail in 1817 led to his notoriety and established his reputation. Recently however, we find his honesty tainted by an expose of his wrongdoings on another project at Beavertail.

This past year, the U.S. Lighthouse Society notified us the Beavertail Fog Signal using a bell as a signaling device was the first ever used in America. The building housing the bell and its apparatus was constructed in 1829 and contracted to David Melville by *Christopher Ellery* the Customs Collector and Superintendent of Lighthouses. (*The foundation of the bell building still exists and can be seen next to the present fog signal.*) From Newport County court records (affidavits) dated 1834 and 1837 state Beavertail's Lighthouse Keeper *Sylvester Hazard* testified the building built by Melville was not solid brick as was contracted. Melville had built the center walls with stone and it was reported that this deception made one third to two fifths difference in the cost of the building.

Melville, also prior to the inspection of the building by authorities covered the face with bricks hiding the stone and after the inspection removed the bricks and substituted more stone. This was stated under oath by a workman. The court ordered sections of the bell building taken down where more stone and sand was evident. No records were found as to how this case was resolved.

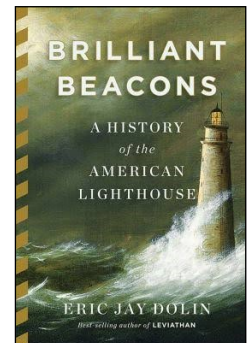
Despite his failures in Newport and Beavertail, his pioneering work on gas lighting eventually led to a multimillion dollar industry that swept through the country before electricity. He died in Newport in Sept of 1856 at age 84.

VK 

## THE DIMMING OF BEAVERTAIL LIGHT

David Melville was not the only principal with a shady history from events at Beavertail. In a recent book titled "Brilliant Beacons" by *Eric Jay Dolin* the author relates the dispute by Beavertail's irritant land owner *Josiah Arnold*, who in 1766 informed the Governor in Newport his lighthouse keeper *Joseph Austin* would not be allowed to lite the lantern. Apparently Arnold had not been paid by the colony in two years and was adamant that "no pay, no light". He threatened to kill anyone who tried tending the light on his property. Citizens in Newport flooded the Governor's office with complaints. Promises were again made that Arnold would be paid, but not before a shipwreck occurred and Arnold publically argued his private fortune was not intended to benefit the public good. He eventually decided the light would again be tended.

In 1789 the newly formed government of the United States took cession and title to the lighthouse by decree of *President George Washington*, but it was not until 1889 that the U.S. Government finalized \$3,500 for purchase of additional land from Arnold's estate for fog signal installation.

VK 



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE  
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION  
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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)

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## FOR SALE



**HMS Bounty:** A very large detailed wood model of the famed ship Captained by *William Bligh*, taken over by the mutinous crew led by *Fletcher Christian* in 1789. *It is a scale replica 63 in. long, 24 in width and 46 in. high.* It was gifted to BLMA for sale or auction.

This is a striking replica for a home large enough to display it. 100% of the proceeds to be used to preserve the lighthouse buildings. Sale price is \$1,800. (It is valued at \$2,800 to \$3,000) Contact Varoujan Karentz at 401-423-0636.



## Dominic Turillo



Beavertail's Light keeper from 1951 through 1969 Dominic Turillo passed away at age 91 on May 8, 2016. Assigned to Beavertail from Rose Island Light, Dominic was a frequent visitor to Beavertail after his retirement. He often came into the museum with a news clipping about his days at Beavertail and especially enjoyed relating his favorite fishing story and location on the rocks around the light.

An energetic Keeper and amazingly the father of 11 children, 40 grandchildren and 40 great grandchildren, he left a legacy at Beavertail to be remembered by all BLMA docents and those that met him.

VK 