



The Lighthouse Log

Summer 2011

The quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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W. Craig Armington Memorial Scholarship

The Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association (BLMA) was established in 1993 to preserve the historic lighthouse and maintain it as a museum in order to share its history with our community and friends. The W. Craig Armington Memorial Scholarship Fund was established in memory of one of the founders and officers of the BLMA. Each applicant is judged on their academic achievements and their involvement in their school and community. They are asked to submit their high school transcript, a letter of recommendation and an essay based on the history of our lighthouse. Each student must be a fulltime resident of Jamestown.

This year, two one-thousand dollar scholarships were awarded. The students who won may apply the monies toward college tuition, books or fees related to their education.

Matthew Archer of Ocean Avenue is the son of Eric and Deb. Matthew graduated from the St. George's School in Newport. He graduated Cum Laude Society and is in the National Merit Scholarship Program. At the St. George's School, Matthew was a well-rounded student and was very active in school athletics, participating in basketball, baseball, and track and field. He was captain of both the basketball and baseball teams. To be given this scholarship, a student must give back to the community and Matthew has participated in the Jamestown Community Farm and the

Martin Luther King Center Feed-A-Friend Food Drive since the 7th grade.

Matthew will be leaving in the fall to attend the University of Wisconsin in Madison and will be studying Labor Relations.

Our second recipient, Eric Holtzman, is the son of Jay and Patricia of Beacon Avenue. After graduating from North Kingstown High School he will be attending Northeastern University in Boston. Eric's academic interests include math, science and music.

Eric holds numerous honors and awards including recognition from the National Honor Society and World Language Honor Society while also a Designated Rhode Island Scholar. He has won many awards in science, music and physics. In addition to his academic achievements Eric is also an athlete. He was named captain and MVP of the NKHS varsity football team.

Giving back to the community is very important to Eric. Complementing the time he has given for talks with youth groups about substance abuse, Eric has also been a tutor and has expressed his talent for music by performing and participating in numerous groups and concerts in town.

It is with great pleasure that Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association can gift scholarships to these two young men for their hard work in their schools and community. We congratulate them both and wish them the best in their futures. ■

A Message From The President

Volunteer opportunities abound as we swing into the middle of our busy summer season. The lighthouse museum is open seven days a week until early September. As visitors from near and far discover Beavertail's breathtaking beauty, there is increasing interest in learning more about its history and function since 1749. Volunteers, called "docents", greet visitors as they enter the museum and guide them through it, describing the artifacts on display. They also handle sales in the popular gift shop. The museum / gift shop is open daily from 10AM until 4PM. Docent duty is divided into two periods: 10AM to 1PM, and 1PM until closing at 4PM. Two docents are on duty at any one time.

If you enjoy meeting people from throughout the World, this is a wonderful volunteer opportunity and you will be providing a needed service while enjoying an enriching experience.

Summer is also the time to perform much needed maintenance to the Beavertail Light structural exteriors. This year we are focusing on renovating the garage exterior. While much of the carpentry repairs will be done by professionals, there is a great need for volunteers to prepare and preserve (paint) the cinder block

exterior walls. Can you devote 3-4 hours per week until early September? Your help is sorely needed and will be deeply appreciated.

To volunteer as a docent in the museum or to help renovate the garage, please call or email Varoujan Karentz (epic@juno.com) (423-0636) or Guy Archambault (gaarch@cox.net) (423-2823). You will be performing a great service while meeting new people. ■



Volunteer docents receive orientation.

Fifth Graders Visit and Create Lighthouse Exhibition



The Museum has hosted many tours for school children this spring. The grade 5 students from the Stony Lane School in North Kingstown visited in early June. After the tour each child was assigned a specific lighthouse to study. They each constructed a model of their lighthouse.

An exhibition was held to share what each child had learned. Construction materials included such items as sugar cubes, ice cream tubs, Legos, paper towel tubes and much more. Many of the lighthouses had working lights. The models were very well done and we were very impressed with the imagination and work that went into them.

Both the teachers and students were very pleased that they had come to see the exhibit. ■

Neither Snow, Nor Rain, Nor Gloom of Night...But

Although this motto is often misquoted, its origin is known to almost everyone. It is the motto of the United States Postal Service and makes it clear that those who are in their employ take their work very seriously and will do everything in their power to ensure delivery of the mail entrusted to them. Mail delivery relies on various modes of transportation that includes trains, trucks and ships. And when you live on an island, the latter is most important to you. That brings us to a local ferry called the NARRAGANSETT. For many years she plied a routine course between Jamestown and Newport carrying passengers and light freight but also the all important US mail. On April 14th, 1910 she set out on her assigned path in a sea that could be considered heavy but not stormy. As you know, I deal with the history of vessels in trouble so you might expect that I am going to tell you of the day this ferry was lost...but you would be wrong. The ferry arrived okay but arrived carrying a bit lighter load than she started with...but let the news of the times tell the complete story, a very unique one in the annals of maritime incidents in Narragansett Bay, *"There was a maritime disaster in the harbor this noon, due to the heavy southwest wind. Ferryboat NARRAGANSETT was coming across from Jamestown with the mail when the truck carrying the mail bags was blown off the deck and two of the bags containing first-class mail were lost, at least temporarily, the others being recovered. The NARRAGANSETT left Jamestown at 12:20 and was due here at 12:40. She was just off the end of the south dock, Long Wharf, and had blown the signal that she was about to turn the corner when the captain was notified that the mail had gone overboard. It was supposed from Long Wharf that a*

man had gone overboard, but such was not the case. The ferryboat was stopped and the Training Station launch coming along went to her assistance. The mail bags, or eight of them, floated and were picked up by a small boat dispatched from the NARRAGANSETT. They were picked up off Briggs Wharf, having floated to the north under the heavy blow. The ferryboat then went to her landing, reaching there about 1:25 or more than three-quarters of an hour late. Later the captain and purser went to the post office to explain what had happened. The mail bags were put on a large four-wheeled truck which was in the care of the boat. When the wind gusted through the carriage space, as it had a chance to do approaching Long Wharf, the truck started, not being chocked, and when it struck the guard gates in the stern, the gates gave way and overboard went the truck and the mail. It is supposed that the two missing bags are held under the heavy truck off the stern of the boat. When the sea is somewhat calmer the bottom can be

dragged for the missing bags. As you can imagine, the US Post Office was not happy about this situation and not entirely prepared to handle it. However, steps were taken immediately, and on the following day the missing mail bags were recovered and order restored to the system. Nothing was said about the condition of the soaked bags and it makes me wonder whether getting the mail delivered, despite the adversity, would end up being worth the unusual efforts taken to retrieve it. But my place is not to ponder that...my place is to share the story of an unusual and unique event. In all of my studies of maritime incidents in Rhode Island, this is the singular case of which I am aware where not only the mail, but the mail truck was lost...or almost lost. As to the fate of the mail truck...that was not reported but its presence on the bottom in the inner harbor of such a busy port as Newport suggests that it too, before long, was delivered from what could have been a watery grave. JFJ ■

Light Station Tower Open to Visitors

Enjoy the summer breeze from a different perspective and the magnificent panoramic view from the top of Beavertail Light. The tower will be open to the public on the following Saturdays this season: July 23, August 6, August 20, September 3, September 24 (National Museum Day). Additionally it will open on Monday, October 10. Hours of operation are 12 noon until 3PM. The tower rises to a height of 40.9 feet while the steel top section adds another 15.3 feet, for a total height of 56 feet.

If you plan to climb the tower remember to wear comfortable shoes and clothing because you will ascend a 49 step spiral iron staircase...and it's breezy at the top. There is no elevator, either. The top of the tower is 85 feet above sea level. You will enjoy a beautiful view.

As a safety precaution, young children unable to meet minimum height requirements will not be allowed to access the tower. ■



19th Century Lighthouse Illuminants

Historically, the fuels and lamps used in lighthouses mirrored the technology available for illumination in the larger community. Although William Manchester's [A World Lit Only by Fire](#) dealt with the European Middle Ages, the title describes illumination throughout the world until the very end of the 19th century when dependable sources of electricity were first available.

Various fuels in liquid or solid form were ignited, producing a flame that served as the source of light. Lamps to contain the flame and often the fuel were designed to maximize brightness, require low maintenance and incorporate safety features. The introduction of a new fuel often necessitated an existing lamp modification, after trial and error.

Whale oil had widespread commercial and lighthouse use in western Europe and north America in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries. The cleanest burning, most desirable oil was from the rendered blubber of the sperm whale. By the second quarter of the 19th century increasing demand and a dwindling supply had resulted in sperm oil being very expensive and alternative fuels were being investigated.

The French were using colza oil (later, canola oil) made from the rapeseed plant. The British and Canadians were beginning to use it as well in lighthouses and commercial settings. The manufacture of fuels from plant material became a significant industry in the United States as the 19th century progressed. Ethyl alcohol was being used in conjunction with turpentine and camphor oil to produce camphene or burning fluid. This product was widely used domestically and commercially during the 1840s and 50s, but saw limited lighthouse use, in part due to volatility. The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 dramatically reduced the supply of turpentine and the imposition of a \$2.08 per gallon tax on ethyl alcohol to help finance the U. S. war effort effectively eliminated camphene from use in the industrial North.

The United States Lighthouse Board, organized in 1852, conducted experiments with lard oil, finding it to be as bright as sperm oil at a much lower cost. This product was used in lighthouses starting in the early 1860s. At the same time, kerosene from Pennsylvania petroleum was quickly replacing illuminating fuels of all kinds in the U.S. and became the primary lighthouse fuel by the early 1880s. ■

Richard Sullivan



EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE MANUFACTORY.

"R. H. SPALDING Co., Boston, MA, circa 1850"

NEW SITE INTERPRETIVE SIGNS

The new building interpretive signs funded by a grant from RI Council for Humanities and the Gerard Daniel Smith Memorial Fund have been reviewed and approved by the RI Historical and Heritage Commission and are being mounted in prominent locations for visitor information. A total of nine signs will be mounted outside the buildings including four pedestal mounted signs describing the 1749 foundation, an overlook sign of the Narragansett shore, Whale Rock and a new Beavertail historical summary sign. All the signs were designed by BLMA member Jim Rugh with historical input provided by various BLMA members.

These signs will add new visitor knowledge to the identification of the site buildings and their historical significance as they roam through the light station site. ■

Oil House Exhibit

Our team of Varoujan Karentz, Richard Sullivan and Lanette Macaruso have been working on the finalization of the story boards to be placed on the walls of the restored oil storage house once the new concrete floor has been installed. The wall panels are in process of completion and the story boards themselves are under review prior to going to the printer. The story boards will tell visitors about early illumination at Beavertail, the use and source of fuels, lamps and lenses, plus the story of David Melville who attempted to light the tower with gas during the early 1800's. ■



Johnston Elementary School kids and their teachers on tour of the lighthouse station on June 16, 2011.

Dollhouse Raffle

There could be a dollhouse in your child's or grandchild's future! BLMA has tickets available at the museum to raffle off a beautiful, furnished dollhouse shaped as a lighthouse. The 48 inch tall model has four levels (with the electrified light tower) and includes such features as a yard with picnic table and chairs and model boats moored adjacent to the structure.

It is a captivating model, sure to enchant and provide many hours of pleasure to anyone "young at heart". The museum will have tickets available through September 24, 2011 (National Museum day) when the winning ticket will be drawn. Raffle tickets are \$2 each and 3 for \$5.

Other prizes to be awarded are bottles of Beavertail labeled white wine and a very attractive Beavertail Light water color. A photo of the dollhouse will be on display at the museum along with the painting and the label wine. Raffle proceeds will benefit BLMA continuing development.

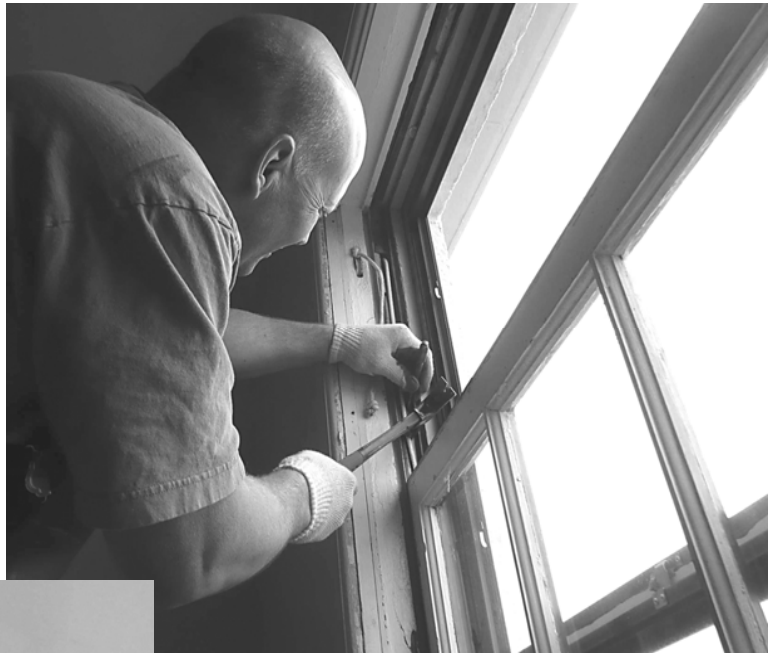


Champlin Grant Progress

Work is progressing satisfactorily on two major aspects of the 2010 Champlin Foundation grant.

The major restoration of all the windows in the museum building has been completed and work has started on the windows of the Keeper house and the three windows in the light tower. The contractor, David Lamontagne of Lamontagne Woodworks of Pascoag, is removing each of 32 multi pane windows, taking them to his shop, stripping the lead paint and repairing each window as needed. The process required completed sealing of the museums gift shop, wall displays and second floor storage areas with plastic sheeting while sills, sashes, stops and molding were also stripped, sanded and re-painted. The re-installed windows have been fitted with new sliding hardware and latches. Docents will no longer struggle with opening windows for ventilation during the summer months.

Concurrent with the window work, the two keeper building are in process of major electrical upgrade to meet electrical code requirements with new distribution boxes, wiring and much needed wall mounted receptacles in each room. A new complete fire alarm system will be installed in both buildings on both floors plus a new security system with inside and outside sensors and lights. BLMA has also considered museum expansion into the Keeper building and will be installing new overhead track lighting on all 1st floor rooms. Looking into the future new telephone and internet data cables will also be installed. After a competitive bid where 5 contractors responded, the contract for the electrical work was awarded to Coastal Electric of Newport. Electrical drawings have been completed and were approved by USCG. Work is expected to be completed by the end of July.



Brian McInnis at work.



David, Guy, Stew & George discussing window restoration.

Lighthouses are rapidly disappearing all around the world, and with them goes an invaluable link to our past. Your membership will help a great deal to keep Beavertail Lighthouse, the third oldest in the United States, from following that sad pathway. Please talk to your friends, neighbors and family members and urge them to join all of us who are thoroughly convinced that Beavertail Lighthouse is most worthy of our efforts to save it. Thank you in advance for sharing this membership application!



WE OFFER THE FOLLOWING MEMBERSHIPS:

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- ☐ Sponsor \$ 100
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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
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activities necessary for enhancing
visitor experiences.*

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Mark your calendars and save the date!

The BLMA annual meeting will convene at the
Jamestown Philomenian Library at 7 P.M., *Tuesday, September 20, 2011*.
We have been fortunate to obtain a very special person as guest speaker. He
is John Hattendorf, PhD. Dr. Hattendorf is the
Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King Professor of Maritime History, Chairman of the
NWC Maritime History Department, and Director,
Naval War College Museum.

It promises to be an interesting evening. Plan to attend.

