



The Lighthouse Log

Autumn 2018

The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Autumn 2018 Message

The 2018 season is now in the books. We set new benchmarks for attendance, tower climbs and gift sales. I believe I said that last November too. So who says there's only one way to go from up? We estimate over 34,000 visitors came to see us this year. As Thanksgiving nears those of us here at BLMA have a great deal to be thankful for, thanks to the unwavering support and enthusiasm you bring to us year after year. Thank you one and all.

A few notes about events since the summer issue:

- If you are a recent visitor to the lighthouse you probably noted both the beacon light and fog signal were inoperative. As of October 31, the light has been restored to service and we will continue to observe this situation closely. The light situation is being studied for possible use of an alternative design light. However, the USCG is giving serious consideration to permanent discontinuation of the fog signal device, due to maintenance costs and buried power line water damage. A public comment period, which expired on October 12, allowed mariners an opportunity to request that the fog signal remain in operation. We at BLMA are deeply concerned about this situation and issued a group statement to the USCG. In the statement we requested they maintain the fog signal intact and fully automatic. As recreational boat owners, a number of individuals including myself sent separate comments with the same recommendation. More detail is contained in our article in this issue titled "Beavertail's Navigation Aid Problems".

- The Annual BLMA meeting was held at Jamestown Library on Sept 18. Our guest speaker was David Robinson, of URI's Marine Archaeology Dept. He gave a remarkable presentation about an historic ship 'graveyard' discovered and studied in upper Narragansett Bay. The wealth of information & photos of the site known as Green Jacket Shoal added a new slant to our info database of the bay's maritime history.

- The final tower climb and season's end for the museum took place on Columbus Day, Oct. 8. That's always a day with mixed emotions, but it was the capstone for a great season. A total of 1311 people showed up for the 11 climbs in 2018 enjoying the best view in the state. The tower crew had a great time as always. I just realized we enjoy that view a day and a half each year, 3 hours at a time!



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And now we're preparing for the annual Open House on Sunday Dec 2. Expect a festive time and food & beverages as always. We actually open the museum & gift shop one day earlier on Dec 1, and the following weekend as well. Please join us, it's always enjoyable, not to mention an easy way to pick up a holiday gift or two.

Approvals for the proposed courtyard plans have been obtained from the RI Historic Commission, DEM and US Coast Guard. The overall project concept meets their criteria. Additional details need to be refined including contractor estimates and funding plans with an on site activity start hopefully in mid 2019.

Two important reminders: If you wish to receive our newsletter faster than ordinary mail please update your email address. An electronic copy will go out to you as soon as it's published. Second, for updates on 'all things Beavertail' check the website weekly at www.beavertaillight.org

A quick side note: I've rediscovered real peace of mind, thanks to a rescue dog. She is a handful and ate my sneakers. She's also the reason I have a rib contusion but life in general is sweeter, and things are in proper perspective. Let's face it, there will always be those who need to "help" you whenever they can. But their unsolicited advice about training her and doing (or not doing!) this or that simply fade away. Something to laugh about in hindsight. Her enthusiasm for everything is infectious. Thank you Nora.

And so once again I face the difficult task of closing out the year before Turkey Day. Not one to be taken lightly after celebrating 25 years as a museum association. Obviously I wish one and all happy, healthy and safe holidays. The off season can be an exercise in patience if you long for bay activities we relish each summer. But it's also a great time for reflecting on the year's achievements, which were not insignificant at The Point. We've had a truly memorable anniversary season, set new records and made new acquaintances from the world over. We could not be what we have become over this past quarter century, or hope to achieve our goals for upcoming seasons, without you there to enjoy the ride with us. We are very much aware of that and want to make your trip even more memorable in 2019. So let us know what we can do to make sure that happens. We are good listeners.

We approved yet another board member at the October meeting, Eileen Donnelly, and now have 3 new board members who've joined us in the past 3 months. We are very fortunate to have them and I'm sure they will be exemplary in their new roles.

Warm regards

Bob Dutson

Autumn 2018 Photos

A few late summer and fall memories, mostly from a perspective of looking out from the light station. There has been a lot of maritime activity in the waters just off The Point. The vintage photo circa 1895 (on the cover) is a framed photo from a good friend. The stone wall is long gone but I'd wager parts of it could be found along the many walls fronting on Beavertail Road.



The weather at Beavertail never sits still for long.



Kayaks off the point.



A regatta rounds the point.



A huge cruise ship passes Beavertail point in early autumn.



As of October 31, our tower light has been restored to service.

Lobster Pots Invade Beavertail

Well not really. But there sure are plenty of them just off the point. Small wonder owing to the rocky bottom surrounding us at Beavertail, that's lobster heaven. You can get a feel for the actual number from many vantage points, at ground level right in front of the museum or close up from a boat. Or best of all looking down at the pots from the tower. You can see just how many "floats" there are very clearly from 50 ft plus above grade.

I've seen them from all three perspectives over a lot of years, and except for avoiding a tangled float rope around my boat prop, never paid them much heed. But a neighbor and commercial lobsterman changed all that recently. He offered to take me aboard his lobster boat and as he put it, give me

a chance to "cross one item off my bucket list." And help him out by pulling over 30 pots in the offing, enhancing his business a bit. So I jumped at the opportunity. I had actually wanted to work on a lobster boat when I was much younger, and never got around to it. I might never get another chance.

Long story short, I met him in his driveway one morning, wearing old clothes and fishing boots. He supplied the coveralls, modified fishing waders actually, and heavy duty gloves. We headed out from his mooring straight down to Beavertail, and approached the pot line. We were having a great time on a beautiful morning, or at least I was. In truth, I slowed his usual routine down considerably, and gained a lot of respect for his line of work in the process. He reminded me that his daughter was the best first mate he ever had, just to 'boost' my ego. I accepted that challenge. Then he gave me the quick version of Lobstering 101 and I got down to work.

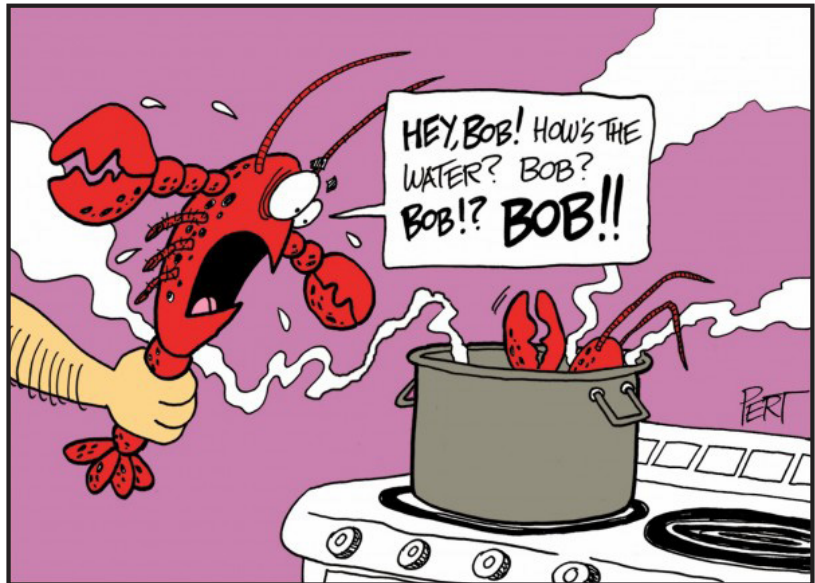
At each lobster pot I would lean over the gunwale, snag a pair of floats connected by rope using a modified boat hook, return the hook to a holder in a plastic tube and CAREFULLY feed the rope onto a motorized winch. If you're not attentive with the winch, you might end up being called 'Lefty' the rest of your life! Then, after the winch pulls the pot clear of the water, you shut it down with utmost care, wrestle the pot by hand over to a wood platform and unlatch the top. And then the real fun starts.

Working as quickly as you can, you grab an unwilling lobster with one hand, avoiding those formidable claws, and pick up a special tool in the other hand. The tool is for securing those heavy duty rubber bands one finds on live lobsters at the store. The bands are tricky to pick up with only one hand holding one end of the tool, which resembles specialty pliers. It's even trickier to stretch them taut, wrap each claw and give a quarter turn with the 'pliers' to release each claw. If you twist your hand the wrong way you snap off the claw, and end up throwing the lobster overboard. That's the law. It tends to upset the captain for some odd reason.

Next you sort the lobster by size and/or number of claws, assuming it only had one claw when trapped. That's a 'cull' in lobsterese. Finally, you clean out any debris, rebait the pot with a very gamy fish carcass, close and latch it, and toss it back in the bay. Just when you figure it's OK to relax for a minute, you'd better jump out of the way or the floats wrap around your leg and pull you into the bay too. Did I tell you how much fun we were having?

Repeat that 35 times and, if you're lucky, you only have a few small cuts, a sore back and newfound admiration for anyone who does it for a living. Not to mention a real need to find a long shower ASAP.

I was either fortunate, or unusually attentive (based on past experience) and managed to keep all my digits. And it really made my day when my neighbor told me that I might be a slow learner but at least I wasn't the worst first mate he ever had. Best of all I ended up with a pair of huge, first rate lobsters that were the tastiest, hands down, I had ever eaten. Cross one item off that list.



The DEM at Beavertail

This is the third in a four part series. In this chapter we list the duties and other activities of the R.I. Dept of Environmental Management, also known simply as the DEM. They are mostly known for their management of state environmental regulations including pollution control. They also maintain state parks & have a large role in controlling marine fisheries regulations to ensure species are caught only “in season” and that the fish or shellfish are caught or gathered legally (minimum size and maximum number, and not in waters considered unsafe for human consumption.) Salt water species, like fresh water types, may now be caught only by licensed parties. There are DEM police patrols wherever fish or shellfish are available.

The DEM role at Beavertail includes operating the aquarium as well as maintaining the state park north of the light station. The former Fog Signal building is outfitted with fish tanks stocked with local species of fish, crabs and other marine life forms. A staff of marine biologists monitors tanks and the species within for proper conditions to keep them healthy. BLMA maintains the building, recently replacing a portion of the copper roof since it is a historic structure, but DEM did not contribute any funds to the aquarium they occupy. They merely staff and maintain the aquarium equipment on a seasonal basis; their season is approximately the same as ours. (This year the aquarium opening was delayed due to unusual difficulties encountered in getting state historic commission approvals for the copper roof replacement. Ironically the DEM, another state agency, would not help fund the roof repairs, which increased the delay.)

The DEM also maintains the detached restroom facilities and conducts the ‘landscaping’ and trail clearing work within Beavertail Park proper. They keep a small powered vehicle in the garage building for park work. Their park upkeep and restroom cleaning is done year round.

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Beavertail’s Navigation Aid Problems

The year 2018 so far has been one of the worst years keeping both the light itself and the fog signal operational. They remain active navigation aids maintained by the Bristol USCG Aids to Navigation Team (ANT) unit. A series of failures of the light and fog signal were frequently requiring repair parts. One occasion was the result of a downed power line. Both the rotating beacon and the fog signal while not antiquated are relatively old. The DCB -24 rotating beacon was replaced 2 years ago with one which is of the same vintage.

USCG has been upgrading active lighthouses throughout the United States with the installations of LED long life 12 volt rotating beacons designated as the Standard VRB 25. The likelihood for Beavertail to receive one in the near future is unlikely according to the Bristol unit.

In September USCG announced they are considering discontinuing Beavertails’ fog signal permanently because the cost of repair may be prohibitive. Accordingly they have issued a “Notice to Mariners” to comment on this issue with a due date of 12 October. BLMA has submitted its position stating fog signals have been operational at Beavertail for over two centuries and historically was also the test center of the US Lighthouse Service’s fog signal developments along with comments that Beavertail is noted nationwide as a “Light Station” with both an active light and fog signal.

If USCG determines the fog signal will remain active at Beavertail, they would consider upgrading the signal’s technology with a system called MRASS “Mariner Radio Activated Sound Signal”. Mariners key their VHF-FM radio a designated number of times on a designated VHF FM channel. The sound signal is activated for a period of 15, 30, 45, or 60 minutes after which the activated assistance automatically turns off. Castle Hill light our neighbor lighthouse is presently equipped with MRASS.

The other significant navigation aid is the primary Radar Beacon (RACON) sea buoy located exactly 4 miles south of Beavertail designated “NB”, which identifies the entrance into Narragansett Bay. This Sea Beacon is a form of transponder in that it receives a radar pulse from interrogating vessel’s radar and replies to that pulse with a coded response. That response on the vessels radar display provides the mariner precise information regarding the identity and location of the RACON. It also provides range and bearing information.

VK

New Signs

When the museum closes after the summer months, Beavertail and the Light Station continues to attract visitors. Ten years ago, we installed outdoor interpretive signs on the buildings and the seaward overlooks. These signs are read year round and provide information to visitors providing historical data as to what the buildings are, how they were used and what they see along the west passage shore.

Five of the signs have discolored, effected by sun, salt spray and corrosion and have been replaced. Remarkably, nothing needed to be reworded or added, proving that history indeed remains while mother nature continues her relentless attack on fixtures.

VK

Sharks off Beavertail?

There have been loads of news features about Great Whites near Cape Cod for a decade or so. Most involve sightings of these sharks as they go about their 'business.' That means hunting seals or feeding off whale carcasses for the most part. And usually well off shore. Most of them have very little to do with us except in cases of mistaken identity. (A surfer may appear to be a large seal skimming the water's surface, or so one theory goes.)

But two recent shark attacks off Cape Cod, one fatal, remind us that however rare they may be, deadly shark incidents do occur. Shortly before these incidents a scientific research vessel following a white shark near Wellfleet MA had a "close encounter" that also made the evening news. Does that portend an increase of aggressive sharks, or that they're developing a taste for human flesh? Is global climate change responsible for a local change in ocean water temperature or current patterns, with sharks following suit? Those are really good questions for which I haven't any answers. Though I very much doubt their diets now favor people over pinnipeds (seals, that is.)

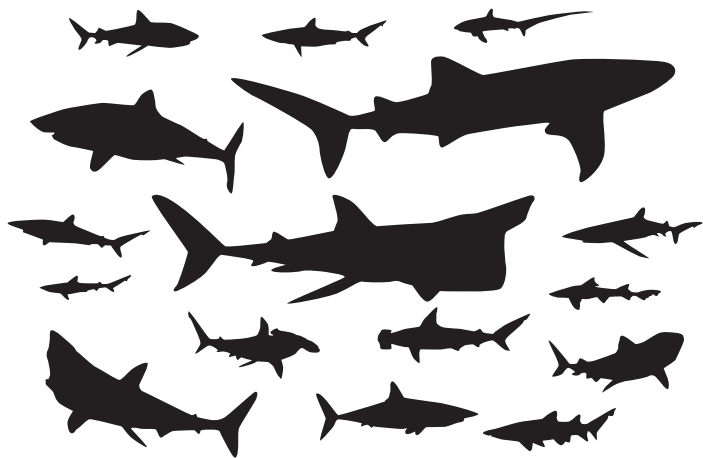
Keeping in mind also there are other species which are dangerous types as well as benign, there have always been sightings in our vicinity. Solitary sharks are often found in the waters south of Block Island. After the five wind turbine generators were installed near Block Island, a 15 ft hammerhead was seen swimming nearby. Those sharks are a proven "man-eater" species in tropical waters, sometimes in large schools, but are unusual in the northeast. Fortunately we rarely see bull sharks, tigers, reef sharks or white tips either.

Mako sharks and threshers are found locally, and I'm grateful, because they're delicious. The only shark of size I ever caught was a 9 ft blue shark approx 20 miles off BI, a species known for having a very unpleasant taste (unless one likes the flavor and aroma of ammonia.) All of the aforementioned are potentially lethal to swimmers, but in truth we are more of a threat to them than vice versa. So much so that some are now protected species.

I was asked about the shark 'risk' in our area recently. I'm hardly an expert but there are no records of attacks on humans at or near Beavertail to my knowledge. The slick rocks and barnacles are more dangerous, in terms of actual injuries, than the occasional shark. We see ambulance crews tending to fishermen & visitors injured on the ledges every year. Anyone who swims around the point had better be good at it too, or risk getting smashed into those waiting rocks. That's one reason diving off rocks is not permitted, and signs are posted to get the message across.

But I am digressing here, so back to sharks... They are a marvel of nature and are virtually unchanged, evolutionarily speaking, for millions of years. They are highly efficient in their activities, especially catching and eating meals. Fortunately for them their diet is usually fish, sea turtles or certain cute ocean mammals rather than us. Or we might be even more of a menace than we already are. Because we sure know how to deal with predators. Just ask any tigers (the mammals, not the sharks) which species they fear the most. There are nearly 7.7 billion of us on the planet.

BD





The Two Towers

With no disrespect to J. R. R. Tolkien, we have two of the best towers around right here on Jamestown. No Orcs or dragons be found here, but the views are just as riveting as anything on Middle Earth. Beavertail tower climbs are conducted 11 times each season and we plan to continue them as long as visitors are interested. Which probably means forever, or at least for the foreseeable future. I have described them in considerable detail in various issues, so I thought it only fair to give some space to another landmark, whose promotions have made mention of us many times.

There is an historic windmill on Conanicut Island, on appropriately named Windmill Hill. From the summit, views of the Newport Pell Bridge, Jamestown Golf Course, Great Creek and surrounding meadows & pasture lands are spectacular. Perhaps not as well known as our light station, and not often referred to as a Tower, I nonetheless think of it as such. It is impossible to miss if you travel the island on North Road south of Route 138. The so-called 'smock mill' was built in 1787 after destruction of the original mill by the British forces in the Revolutionary War. It operated until 1896, grinding a local variety of corn into "white cornmeal." Anyone who has tried Rhode Island Johnnycakes has tasted the modern version of that grain. I remember them well as a staple in my mother's kitchen, at least once each week. They have a totally unique taste and resemble a salty, crunchy pancake, but they're definitely NOT pancakes. It was love at first bite.

Anyway the windmill is now staffed by the Jamestown Historical Society and is open to visitors "each weekend from mid June until mid October." The level of technology was pretty rudimentary at the time of construction, but the craftsmanship is amazing given the tools then available. The grindstones, one of which revolves above the other stationary stone, each weigh approx 3500 pounds. Refurbishing them was done by hand! There is some very technical, and tedious, advanced math involving fluid mechanics describing the conversion of kinetic energy (from wind captured by the sails) being transferred into angular motion (rotating the huge shaft which spins the top stone) but I don't have enough room for that here. Besides which it's the sort of stuff best aimed at curing insomnia.

Rest assured that a guided tour is a memory you won't forget. It will leave you with a feeling of reverence for the living history inside, one you can't help but take away with you. Just as I recall the time I was led up the mill stairs when I was around eight, almost 60 years ago. I had a chance to refresh those memories when I guided tours one Saturday this past July.

This other 'tower' is not directly affiliated with BLMA, but we each have similar goals, those being the provision of a venue both fun and educational. You owe it to yourself to stop by both of these beautifully maintained historic landmarks in the upcoming season. Bilbo Baggins will surely smile as you walk through the doorway. Even Don Quixote may deign to nod acknowledgement from atop his horse. (The rooster in the yard may or may not strut over and say Hi, or peck at your car fenders.) But you will have no doubt in your mind it was time well spent.

BD

Museum Archives

At BLMA we maintain storage of archives and assorted objects collected or donated since our foundation in 1993. The upper floor of the Assistant Keeper's building used to be living areas for family members. Now the rooms are full of publications, correspondence, blueprints, framed photos, assorted art objects, holiday display items and maintenance supplies.

Archives are kept in a variety of storage arrays: on library shelves, in file cabinets, on tables and even on the floor. Some items likely will never be used again but for legal reasons need to be kept indefinitely. A collection of blueprints could be useful at any time, and we never know when they might save a lot of time just by being within reach.

Photos, lighthouse & ship models and small art objects were donated as possible displays, with the understanding they could never be sold, but we simply do not have room to place them around the museum. We wish they could be available for viewing by visitors but that's not possible at this point. Our reference materials and lighthouse publications are useful for historic research and topical info. I've been fortunate to have them handy as a basis for several newsletter articles.

A public library manager would doubtless find our storage arrangements a real challenge (or a little too informal?) but we know where things are, so it works. And sometimes I find something unexpected that leads me in a new direction entirely. Beavertail is an amazing place that never gets old, it just grows on you.

BD

Beavertail's Backyard Antenna



Visitors to our museum often ask what the tall tower is in back of the buildings. When the Brenton Reef Texas Tower (which replaced the Lightship) located SE of Beavertail Light was dismantled in 1989 its Radio Direction Finder system which transmitted the signal "N" in Morse code was moved on shore. The signal was part of a chain of RDF low frequency 300-400 khz transmitters, which included Nantucket, Buzzards Bay Tower, Pt. Judith, Beavertail and Montauk Pt. The signals for the group were on one frequency (310 khz) and the navigator would have to listen for the specific code as the sequence of the transmitting station code was recognized.

During that interval he would rotate his radio direction antenna on his receiver to observe a null on his signal strength meter, which then pointed to the geographic location of the transmitter. We have a marine RDF receiver in the "Richard Sullivan Room" that is typical of those used to acquire the signal.

These RDF transmitting stations are gone except for a few used as beacons for a GPS "differential" signal, which provides a correction to a GPS satellite signal and improves accuracy. No Differential GPS transmitters are located in RI. Chatham MA, Montauk, NY and Sandy Hook, NY are in range.

VK



BLMA Docent of the Year Award..... Sheila Joyce

Our docents make the museum. They are the impression left with visitors. This year our youngest Docent, Sheila Joyce is the recipient of the "Docent of the Year Award" selected by the BLMA Board. Sheila's not only the first face visitors see as they enter the museum, she's always quick with a greeting, answering questions and singlehandedly manages the gift shop during her shift. Knowledgeable and informative, now in her last year of High School, she likes working at the lighthouse as much as we like her.



VK



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
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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

First Name 2nd Name Last Name
Address
City, State Zip



Holiday Hours

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

Sunday December 2, from 1-4pm
Refreshments -- Gift Shop Open

The Giftshop Holiday Schedule

Saturday December 1, 1-4pm
Saturday December 8, 1-4pm
Sunday December 9, 1-4pm

If you would like to schedule a tour of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum please call (401) 423-3270, or email us at info@BeavertailLight.org.

Group Tours & Events

To arrange Lighthouse tours for school or senior groups please contact Mrs. Linda Warner at:
info@beavertail.org

Weddings and private events on the Lighthouse grounds are not allowed by the U.S. Coast Guard.

For scheduling special events, including weddings at Beavertail State Park contact the RI Dept. of Environmental Management (DEM) at 401.884.2010.