



The Lighthouse Log

Winter 2022

The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Winter 2022 President's Message

Hello Everyone,

It is now time to put 2021 behind us and reflect on all the good things we enjoyed and shared with those we love and those whose friendships we cherish. Although Covid is still with us, we had many exciting things happening at the museum this past year, and we ended the year on a high note.

BLMA was delighted to host two events on October 7th at the Pavilion at Fort Getty, and you can read more about them further in the newsletter.

We opened the Museum and Gift Shop to visitors for the first two weekends in December and had our Annual Open House event on Sunday, December 5th. It was a fantastic event with lots of Christmas goodies and beverages enjoyed by all who

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stopped by. And to top it off (literally), Santa arrived in the old Jamestown Fire Truck to climb the ladder and place our Christmas wreath at the top of the Tower. You can see pictures further in this issue.

We continue to maintain and improve the museum and grounds. BLMA is completing new brick walkways around the museum as part of our Courtyard project. We hope to complete that project in the spring. We are also working on a new Master Plan for the museum and grounds as we integrate with the State's Master Plan for the entire park.

Our membership drive is underway, so please go to our website and renew your BLMA membership if you have not renewed yet. And thank you to everyone who donated to us during Giving Tuesday. It was our most successful one yet!

As we look ahead to the promise of a New Year, here's hoping that you and your loved ones enjoyed a wonderful Christmas holiday and have a joyous New Year.

Best wishes,
Diane Bakley

Site Transfer Status

On October 19, the partnership of the RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), the Town of Jamestown, and BLMA applied to the National Park Service (NPS) to transfer the Beavertail site property to their ownership. Over 50 pages plus photographs were submitted responding to the application requirements as to qualifications, the status of the property, and the partnership's ability to maintain the property. BLMA contributed 80 percent of the application content.

It was proposed and agreed that RIDEM should own the property. The Town of Jamestown will provide support, and BLMA will maintain the historic buildings, operate the museum, and continue its educational exhibitions and displays for visitor information.

The NPS is studying the partnership application and those from other organizations if any. The NPS has made no announcements to date.

Recent Events



On October 7, BLMA held two events at the Fort Getty Pavilion. The first was our Docent Appreciation Event held to say thank you to our many volunteers for all the services they provided to make our season successful. Snacks, beverages, and a delicious cake baked by our Docent Coordinator Nancy Beye were enjoyed by all.

Our second event was BLMA's Annual Meeting. We were so pleased to have Trudy Coxe, CEO and Executive Director of the Preservation Society of Newport County, as our guest speaker.

Her topic was *Lighthouses and Mansions:*

Meeting Complex Preservation Challenges Head On. She highlighted the many restoration efforts undertaken by the Preservation Society and how both organizations face similar challenges. It was a fascinating presentation that was enjoyed by everyone who attended.



Lighthouse Wisdom

“I can think of no other edifice constructed by man as altruistic as a lighthouse. They were built only to serve.” – **George Bernard Shaw**

Fog Signal Building



Docent Arn Lisnoff patching up some holes prior to painting.

In 2014, BLMA undertook a significant preservation project recoating the yellow brick building with a parge coat, replacing broken window blocks, installing two replica trumpet horns, and restoring the building with its original features.

However, the Fog Signal Building, used as an Aquarium by RIDEM, has had a tough life over the past ten years. The 83-year-old building constructed after the Great Hurricane of 1938 was stripped of sections of copper roof twice after gale-force winds, once (2018) from the NE and two years later (2020) from West winds.

Replacing the roof on two occasions was an expensive repair costing over \$100,000. The RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission helped fund the repairs with an emergency matching grant along with BLMA reserves and donations.

Without gutters and downspouts, the building had stains and smudges, which required the painting of the entire building. This past October, a BLMA team made up of Leo Orsi, Dave Smith, Varoujan Karentz, and Arn Lisnoff took on that job.

Site Improvements

Leo Orsi, one of our Directors and the new Building and Grounds Manager, and Director Joe Martino have plans for several building improvements. Projects planned for the winter months include installing an emergency generator capable of providing continuous heat in the Keeper and Assistant Keepers' houses and, more importantly, electrical power to keep both basement sump pumps operational. BLMA will install the generator behind the Oil Storage Building. This change will prevent bursting water pipes and basement flooding.

The Courtyard Project, which was put on hold due to Covid-19 and contractor delays, is proceeding. BLMA will replace sidewalk bricks as necessary and install a firm base under the brickwork for safety and aesthetic purposes.

New Exhibits

BLMA members Ursula Parenteau, Varoujan Karentz, and David Smith are working on new exhibits this winter. They are replacing older hallway storyboards. One display will recognize a heroic, decorated WW II sailor stationed at Beavertail Lighthouse. Another exhibit that will interest visitors poses the question: Which was America's first lighthouse? Beavertail or Boston light?

Improvements continue in upgrading and adding new content in our touch screen displays.

Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Archive

Several years ago, the board of BLMA expressed interest in inventorying and cataloging the vast store of artifacts that the Museum has collected over the years. I researched and found an open-source software system called Omeka that would allow us to use museum standard criteria and vocabulary to catalog our collections and present them as online exhibits.

In the spring of 2021, we received an inquiry from a student at Endicott College asking if we would be interested in taking on an intern for the summer of 2021. We saw this as a perfect opportunity to put serious work into the archives project.



BLMA intern, Victoria Schultz (whom you met in a previous issue of the Lighthouse Log), joined us in July and worked throughout the summer inventorying the items in the Museum, photographing them, and entering them into the archives database.

As Victoria worked from room to room recording our collections, it became increasingly apparent that we had many opportunities to build online exhibits around groups of items. We first tackled the group of wooden lighthouse models on display at the Museum in the Richard Sullivan Room.

We knew that Robert I. Dennis built these models. But who was Robert Dennis, and why did he build the models? We discovered that Robert Dennis' daughter Mary was once a docent at Beavertail Lighthouse, and she shared information about her father, his life in the Coast Guard and the Navy, and why he built the models. Mary Dennis was gracious enough to sit for an interview with Victoria Schultz. And now we are happy to share these discoveries with you at <https://beavertailight.org/archives/>. Look for the "Hand Made Lighthouse Models" exhibit.

We have also built online exhibits around some of our videos and slide show presentations, most of which were prepared by longtime board member Varoujan Karentz, with subjects such as "The Great Hurricane of 1938" and "Beavertail during World War II." You can view these in the archives as well. Later this winter, we will have completed an online exhibit about the life of Beavertail Keeper Dominic Turillo. Dominic and his wife raised their family of 11 children while he was Assistant Keeper and then Keeper at Beavertail. Also in the works is a video recorded by Ron Bugenske, Assistant Beavertail Keeper, from 1962 through 1965. This exhibit is currently being transcribed and should be available soon.

We still have boxes and file cabinets full of material to sort through and will be sharing our discoveries with you. Look for emails announcing new exhibits or visit the archives at <https://beavertailight.org/archives> and click on *Browse Exhibits*.

BLMA Vice President David Smith

Keepers: Silas Gardner Shaw 1858 - 1862, and 1863 - 1869

In early February 1864, as the Civil War was grinding on, fourteen-year-old Emily Ann Shaw's family received word that her father, Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper, Silas G. Shaw's brother Henry was dead. It must have been heartbreaking for Emily to see her father so grieved. But, in some way, it must have been a relief too.

Two years earlier, Emily Ann and her family were forced to leave Beavertail Lighthouse under a cloud of suspicion. The US Lighthouse Board removed her father and his Assistant for no apparent reason. Emily probably heard the rumors spreading around Jamestown; her father was removed because the Federal Government was concerned that it would be too risky to leave him in charge of such an important lighthouse. After all, in February of 1862, Silas' brother, Confederate Colonel Henry Muchmore Shaw, was preparing to battle General Ambrose E. Burnside and his expeditionary forces at Roanoke Island in North Carolina.



*Emily Ann Shaw, ca. 1864
Donated by the author to
the Jamestown Historical Society*

Emily knew that her Shaw grandparents had moved their family from Newport, Rhode Island to North Carolina's outer banks when her father and his older brother were just boys. She also knew that her grandmother died shortly after the move and that her father ended up back in Newport to live with an elder sister, while Uncle Henry stayed in North Carolina with her grandfather.

Had her father Silas anticipated a civil war when he took the Lighthouse position at Beavertail in 1858? Family legend says he did. If a military draft did come up soon, being a Lighthouse Keeper was considered government service, and he would be exempt from fighting against his brother. It's not known if the family legend is true, but brother Henry, then a North Carolina Congressman, had debated "the Kansas Question" in Congress just eight months earlier. The Kansas Question is one of the key drivers of the Civil War. Henry's views were rather extreme, and Emily had likely overheard her parents discussing Henry's talk of secession even before the election of Abraham Lincoln.

By April of 1861, several states had already seceded from the Union, and with the Battle at Fort Sumter, additional southern states joined in. On May 20, 1861, her father's brother signed the North Carolina Ordinance of Secession. Henry resigned his position as a U.S. Congressman and accepted a commission as an officer of the North Carolina 8th Infantry Regiment. At the battle of Roanoke Island, Colonel Henry M. Shaw was fighting against the

Rhode Island Fourth and Fifth regiments whose ranks would include former friends and neighbors, no doubt.

It is no wonder that the US Lighthouse Board removed Silas from Beavertail Lighthouse at that time. As much as he loved his brother, Emily knew that her father would never do anything to harm the lighthouse or those depending on it.

Henry was captured at Roanoke Island by Burnside's forces but was soon released and returned to fight at subsequent battles when the North Carolina Eighth reorganized.

By the summer of 1863, there was talk of an upcoming draft in Rhode Island. What agony Emily and her family must have felt knowing that Beavertail could no longer shield her father from having to fight against his brother.

President Abraham Lincoln felt anguish over the possibility of family members having to fight each other in the war, so it is not surprising that he was involved in Silas' reinstatement at Beavertail. How wonderful it must have been for Emily and her family to come back to Beavertail now that they were entrusted with the care of the lighthouse once again.

On February 1, 1864, at Batchelder's Creek, NC, Colonel Henry M. Shaw was shot from his horse in the pre-dawn hours. The ball struck Shaw in his cheek and traversed his head, killing him instantly.

Life went on for the Shaw family at Beavertail. Emily Ann's mother became the Assistant Keeper that same year, probably due to the shortage of men. The Civil War would grind on for another year, finally ending in April of 1865. Emily's parents, Silas and Ann, remained as Keepers at Beavertail for four years after the Civil War ended.



*Confederate Colonel Henry Muchmore Shaw,
brother of Silas G. Shaw
Donated by the author to the North Carolina
Museum of History*

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast

Brenton Point and Reef (Part 3)

On Saturday, January 1, 1842, the merchant schooner ANTOINETTE on a voyage from Turk's Island in the West Indies to New York City, had the misfortune to run ashore on the southwest point of Newport Island (Brenton Point).

Captain Cates related that when in the vicinity of Fire Island, NY, his sails were split in a gale, forcing him to go with the wind to Newport, RI, where he could procure additional sails and continue to his destination. The schooner carried 6,600 bushels of salt in her cargo hold, a significant ingredient for food preservation in the days before refrigeration. Efforts were made to pull the vessel off the rocky shore and, if that failed, to strip her of cargo and rigging if possible. By Thursday, she had been stripped and empty barrels placed in her hull (to help her float if leaking when pulled off), but the weather intensified, and the remains of the ANTOINETTE went to pieces where she lay. A few months after the loss of the ANTOINETTE, a fishing schooner came to grief as she entered the bay. The schooner REINDEER was carrying 15 tons of ballast and 80 barrels of mackerel as she sailed inbound on a foggy evening. She was a Gloucester vessel owned by James Mansfield and others on that fateful day, June 13, 1842. The fishing schooner struck on Brenton Reef, and the crew immediately abandoned her the same night in their small boat, saving nothing but what they had on. The following morning, the captain returned to the scene to board the wreck but could not find her. Since no one else had reported seeing her, many assumed that she fell over on her side and sunk in deep water. So much for salvage.



The next vessel to be totally lost on Brenton Reef was the schooner MOZELLE which ran ashore in a storm on January 1, 1854. Captain John Rich was in command of the coastal merchant on a voyage from Boston, MA to Virginia and, when faced with stormy weather, decided to divert from her course and bring her into Narragansett Bay for shelter. She struck on the inner reef between the outermost rocks and Brenton Point, where she came to a complete halt as her keel gripped the rocky seafloor. The schooner became the target of each successive wave moving shoreward. To save themselves, the four-person crew climbed into the rigging and awaited daylight, hoping that someone would spot the distressed crew from the shore and rescue them. A series of particularly violent waves caused the schooner to sway wildly, and soon her masts were level with the tops of the waves driving the crewmen from the rigging in a last-ditch effort to save themselves. In short order, subsequent waves smashed the hull to bits. One of the crew almost made it to the rocky shore, but, like his shipmates, the sea claimed his life. All four bodies arrived on the shore to be decently interred by the local inhabitants.

Almost two years passed before a similar wreck took place once again on the rocks off Brenton Point. On December 29, 1855, the 141-ton brig SARAH ELLEN found herself in peril. She was carrying a load of plaster and apples from Portland, ME to Philadelphia, PA, when, like others before her, she ran into a snowstorm and quickly sought shelter in Narragansett Bay. Her master's name was Doyle, and he and his crew managed to make it into their small boat before the storm destroyed the vessel. They headed for Beavertail, probably due to the wind direction and sea conditions, and landed safely there. The nine-year-old brig, built in Falmouth, ME, in 1846 was destroyed by the storm almost immediately. The captain returned to the scene to see if he could salvage anything from the wreck, but the loss was total.

Another schooner, this one out of Dennis, MA named LONSDALE, ended her days in almost the exact location as the MOZELLE had five years earlier. When a storm struck, captain and owner Elnathan Crowell was bringing 1,800 bags of linseed from Boston, MA to New York City on March 30, 1859. Crowell's schooner was eleven years old, built in Bristol in 1848; she measured 84' x 24' x 6' and displaced 140 tons.

Although it was a stormy night when the vessel ran aground, the captain and crew got safely ashore and later the following day returned to assess the damage and remove whatever items they could save from the vessel. By noon, their salvage efforts were almost completed when the sea state increased, and the wind shifted to the southwest and blew a full gale causing the salvage crew to depart for the safety of the Brenton lightship hastily. The vessel carried insurance to the amount of about \$400 and the sales at auction of the salvaged materials brought \$417 of which \$163 went to the salvagers themselves for their efforts. The sailing days for the LONSDALE were over.

In the next edition of the Lighthouse Log, the stories of other unfortunate vessels to have left their bones in this area will be presented.

Santa Visits Beavertail

On December 6, at the BLMA Christmas Open House at Beavertail Lighthouse, the Jamestown Fire Department helped Santa decorate the top of the lighthouse tower with a beautiful Christmas wreath. The museum was decorated for the holidays and refreshments were enjoyed by all.



Santa photos courtesy of BLMA Board of Directors member Leo N. Orsi, Jr.





BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
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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.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 and Museum are closed for the winter season.

BLMA plans to reopen the Tower and Museum in late May. Please see the Spring 2022 Lighthouse Log or our website for details on the reopening of the Tower and Museum.

To contact the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum please call (401) 423-3270, or email us at info@BeavertailLight.org.

Group Tours & Events

We will announce any updates and/or changes to the schedule 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 (RIDEM) at 401.884.2010.