

250<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

# The Lighthouse Log

A publication of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association

## THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*It is with great enthusiasm and pleasure that I announce a diverse selection of special events to celebrate 250 years of a light burning at Beavertail. Our kick-off event will take place on Saturday, May 15<sup>th</sup>. The annual cleanup and volunteer orientation will take place at the lighthouse from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. on this day, and your participation would be a great help! This event is open to the general public, so please come on down and help us get ready for opening day!*

*See you at the Light!*

Eric M. Armour, President

Two very beautiful logos were designed for this special year, and it is our plan to use both of them in various ways, as the year progresses,

The following logo was designed and presented to the BLMA by Sandy and Larry Dozier, new members of the Museum Association. Larry is the computer 'guru' at the Jamestown Press.



Josy Wright, president of Conanicut Art Association designed the logo below and it too will be used in various ways to mark the events of our anniversary year.



You can be sure, we'll be seeing a great deal of both of these logos and we are more than pleased to have them.

Many thanks are due to Josie, Larry and Sandy, three very talented people for giving us two expressive ways to highlight this very important year. The Board of Directors, on behalf of our membership extends many thanks for the time and talent that has been so freely given. ☺

At its recent meeting, The Board of Directors finalized some of the plans in progress for the 250<sup>th</sup> year celebration and are pleased to present a calendar of events.

Highly emphasized is the need for volunteers, the backbone of our whole Museum effort. If YOU are interested in helping, come on down to the light for orientation on Museum procedures and then pitch in to get us ready for Spring and the big year.



◇ **Saturday May 15**

9:00 a.m. Volunteer Orientation

11:00 a.m. Spring Clean Up!

◇ **Monday - May 31 - 9:30 a.m.**

Memorial Day Parade - come and march proudly with us!!

◇ **Saturday - June 19<sup>th</sup> 9:00 a.m. -**  
Memorial Service for Lighthouse Keepers

◇ **Friday - July 2 (rain date July 5<sup>th</sup>) at dusk. -** Fireworks at the Point.

◇ **Saturday - August 14 (rain date 15<sup>th</sup>)**  
Stamp Cancellation at 9:00 a.m.

Family Day - Noon to 4:00 p.m.

◇ **Tuesday - September 14<sup>th</sup>**  
B.L.M.A Annual Meeting  
(Specifics TBA)

◇ **Saturday - October 16<sup>th</sup>**  
Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon  
(Specifics TBA)

Richard Sullivan has agreed to take on the duties of the Volunteer Coordinator and is calling people who have indicated an interest in spending some part of their summer at one of the most beautiful spots in the world. Beautiful and ever-changing vistas, cooling breezes, friendly faces - what more could we ask? Give Richard a call, won't you, and say you'll help out. (782-8316). We're sure you'll be glad you did.

**Museum will be open weekends and holidays Noon - 3:00 p.m. from**

**5/30/99 - 6/13/99 and 9/11/99 - 10/11/99**

**Museum will open daily from**  
**10:00 am - 4:00 pm**  
**6/19/99 - 9/6/99**



Sue Warsawski reported to the Board that she has been hard at work looking for suitable items for the Gift Shop at the Museum and has been successful in finding new and interesting items - Shirts designed for the 250<sup>th</sup>; new replicas of Beavertail Lighthouse and new books. Added to the extensive

variety of stock already on hand, we should have a diverse and interesting Gift Shop come opening day.

This is an exciting time for Beavertail Lighthouse enthusiasts and ideas flow from everywhere on ways to celebrate it. The questionnaire which was included in the last Lighthouse Log, produced some great thoughts, all of which have been considered by the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee - Jim Munro and Richard Sullivan, co-chairs. Thanks to all who took the time return it to us - it has been very helpful. ☺

A friendly reminder about as yet unpaid dues has brought in a respectable number of responses, but if yours are still not paid, won't you please consider sending your check soon? We have included a dues schedule with this newsletter for your convenience. (If you have already sent in your check please feel free to pass the application on to someone you know who has not yet joined our association). We'll soon be facing some hefty maintenance expense and sincerely thank you in advance for your early response. One very high ticket item will be the painting of the exterior of all of the buildings. ●

Beavertail Lighthouse will mark 250 years in 1999 but it's only been 10 years since the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association took up the business of lighthouse keeping; and, although compared to the early days it is more like light housekeeping than lighthouse keeping, there is still plenty to keep us all busy around the point. We hope that many of you will want to spend a glorious morning at Beavertail, and while there will pitch in an help out with the cleanup inside and out, around 11:00 a.m. on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May. ●

**The Holiday Open House**, organized by Ann Bucher, Anna Harrison-Auld and Linda Warner was an afternoon to delight in.

Storms have raged, hurricanes ravaged, people have been awed by the power of the seas, and daring rescues have taken place, and that of course is what lighthouses are all about. But lighthouse families had occasion to celebrate many happy, peaceful times as well,



to be sure. The recreation of Holiday Open House was surely representative of those long gone days of the past.

To step through the door on a windy, wintry day, was to step back into time - a time more elegant because of its quiet simplicity and lack of hoopla and glitz.

The "Keeper" (Hugh Bucher) was there in official uniform - to greet his visitors; hostesses were there, smiling and gracious; the traditional cookies and desserts were there, tasting as wonderfully sweet and comforting as they have since time immemorial; the guests were there to greet one another and to enjoy the warmth and tradition of holiday spirit radiating peace on earth, good will toward men.

Holiday greens nestled decoratively on the sills and ledges of the windows, decked out with festive red and gold ribbons and the tables were laden with punch, hot cider, coffee and goodies to suit every taste. It was a wonderful holiday celebration, delightfully presented and we hope it will be repeated!

Door prizes were awarded to those who held the lucky tickets and the winners were Eileen Higgins, Mary McCann, Carol Gorton, Mr. Winton, Diane Faria, Marion Pierce, Charlotte Richardson, Laura Fiteau, Peg Breneiser and Peter Groenkaer, a visitor from Denmark. Peter won a Beavertail cap and blinker button and couldn't have been more delighted, as you can see...

Peter Groenkaer, sporting his hat and blinking light and says he very much enjoyed his visit to Beavertail Lighthouse and the hospitality he found there. He hopes that one day he'll be able to come back again. ●

**FROM OUR HISTORY FILES:** The following article written by Roger Marshall appeared in the Jamestown Press, 1992 issue of the Summer Guide

### BEAVERTAIL LIGHT STILL SIGNALS MARINERS

Situated on the southernmost tip of Conanicut Island, Beavertail State Park offers scenic views of Newport, Block Island and Point Judith. Go there on a windy day and you'll be awed by the power of the waves crashing on the rocks. But it is the lighthouse dominating the very tip of the island that has had the greatest effect on the ocean state.

Imagine yourself here on a dark windswept night two and a half centuries ago. The shoreline is dark except for a solitary light. Newport Light as it was called then, lasted four years before it was burned to the ground. It was first built in 1749 by Peter Harrison who also designed and constructed the Redwood Library and Touro Synagogue in Newport. This light was a wooden tower 24 feet across the base and 69 feet high. A fire kept burning at the top provided the only light. In the very best of conditions this light was visible for about seven or eight miles.

But this was probably not the first beacon to be kept burning here. Evidence suggests that a beacon (contemporary accounts give the range of a typical beacon to be between five and seven miles), was ordered by Jamestown's Town Council and was first lit here about 1712. If this is true, then the Newport Light at Beavertail may have been the first operating light in North America.

The Newport light was essential to shipping in the early part of the seventeenth century. There was no Interstate 95 and the journey from New York to Boston overland could take three weeks to a month, so shipping became the preferred method of traveling. Most ships traveling up and down the coast put in at Newport, which was one of the largest cities on the east coast at that time. Plus, Newport merchants controlled much of the triangular trade, as it was known; rum to Africa, slaves to America and sugar to New England.



The second tower was built of brick and stone and was 64 feet high. Interestingly, it is the base of this tower that forms the circular base for the sound signal. This tower was said to be poorly constructed in a survey made only a few years after it was built. This light lasted into the Revolutionary War period, when it was burned by the British upon their departure from Newport.

It was then restored and operated until 1854 when a new light was built with funds raised by a tax imposed on shipping entering the bay.

The light has an impressive list of firsts. It was the first light to be operated by hydrogen gas. Until this time the keeper had to carry several buckets of whale oil up the tower every day to keep the 15 lamps burning during the night. But in 1792 an English engineer was the first to light his house using the hydrogen gas.

Being a seafaring port, merchants in Newport learned of the process and David Melville of Newport figured out to make coal gas. In 1817, he was allowed to install a gas light in the Beavertail light tower. A merchant on Block Island reported that he could see the light which much brighter than the Point Judith light. Unfortunately for David Melville and mariners, the whale oil lobby forced him to remove his gear from the tower after a one year trial.

The light has only been operated by one female keeper. That happened in 1844 when Robert Weeden died suddenly and his wife Damaris continued to run the light.

In 1851, it acquired a new foghorn invented by Celadon Daboll of New London. The contraption had a vibrating reed inside a long trumpet. The signal was sounded by an air compressor driven by a horse. This was changed a few years later to a 5-inch steam whistle and then to another variant of the Daboll horn. Many different fog signals were tested at the light the following years.

The current tower dates from 1854 when \$14,500 was appropriated for its construction. It was one of the first to have a third order Fresnel lens imported from France. (The first

Fresnel lens in America was installed in New York's Navesink light. These lenses were made of many pieces of glass and were incredibly complex to assemble. But, as long as the keeper remembered to clean the glass, it increased the visibility of the light tremendously. The current lighthouse keeper's house was added in 1898 and now serves as the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum.

In 1939, the Bureau of Lighthouses was abolished and care of the light passed over to the Coast Guard. At this time the fourth order Fresnel lens was refurbished and light converted to a 240,000 candle power electric light. The fog horn was also modified to be powered by electrically driven air compressors.

In the early 1970s the light was controlled by a keeper who stood his watch at the light, but was part of the Castle Hill Coast Guard detachment. The fog signal was automated in 1988 and the light now runs continuously.

*Roger Marshall, Jamestown*

### A Parting Shot...

Actual radio conversation released by the US Chief of Naval Operations.

#1: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision.

#2: Recommend you divert **YOUR** course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

#1: This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert **YOUR** course.

#2: NO! I say again, divert **YOUR** course!

#1: **THIS IS A US AIRCRAFT CARRIER. WE ARE A LARGE WARSHIP. DIVERT YOUR COURSE NOW!!!**

#2: **THIS is Puget Sound Lighthouse! It's your call...**