



The Lighthouse Log

Summer 2017

The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Message From The Editor



With great sadness, we must report the passing of long time board member George Warner. His absence is keenly felt by anyone privileged to have known him. We dedicate this issue to George, and the tower will be renamed in his memory during memorial services on August 19.

President Suzi Andrews describes board members as “self-starters.” We fill a particular role but credits are shared among the group. So many achievements were accomplished recently it’s hard to keep up: the DCB-24 light acquisition, an unprecedented fundraising appeal and the Heritage Harbor exhibit. In a year of modest achievements any one would impress, but we have been blessed with all of them.

For pure significance the 2017 fundraising appeal must be ranked first. Through the incredible response to the Appeal, the significance you attach to the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum has been proven again and again. The campaign to raise \$500,000 stands at \$335,000, which equates to almost twice that thanks to Jim Buttrick’s matching contributions. Your thoughtful generosity will enable vital rehabilitation and enhancements of our historic facilities. Remedial efforts must be completed as soon as possible to head off even more expensive repair work, and are already underway. The contractor selection process is complex even for modest projects. (Where state grants are involved stringent guidelines include historic structure experience and formal hiring criteria.) Work to be funded from our private campaign efforts does not need to meet all the state requirements, but we still must carefully screen highly-qualified companies.

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There are two 48" flat screen displays in the Oil House, thanks to the Heritage Harbor grant. Software loaded into the displays allows for a totally unique educational and entertainment venue. Visitors can see in amazing clarity and detail the optical workings of Fresnel lenses, and actually build or deconstruct a lens in exploded views showing their internal components. Technical data is presented as a visual delight, a far cry from a dry tutorial about optical physics. We are extremely pleased with the results of a lot of hard work by involved board members, and confident you will enjoy it immensely.

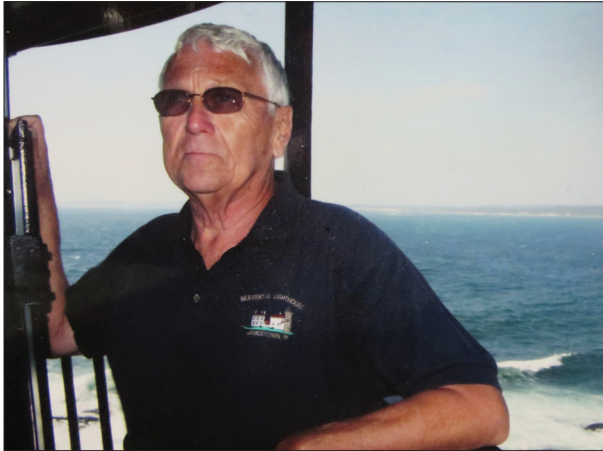
The US Coast Guard came through for us on June 15th, presenting the former DBC-24 model beacon light assembly for display. They initially planned to keep the light assembly as a source for spare parts, as they are scarce. Nonetheless we prevailed and our request was approved. For almost 26 years this light operated under their control. It was a welcome beacon to many thousands of ships for all that time. The light, drive motor and gear box were serviced as needed over time. Ultimately the beacon showed its age in Autumn 2016 when it ceased functioning. A final attempt at repairs was made but was unsuccessful. After an extended delay a new light assembly was located which again operates 24/7/366. You can actually see the old DCB-24 up close in the Oil House, owing to the persistence and patient persuasion by board members Suzi Andrews and Varoujan Katentz, plus other volunteers. We extend our thanks, again, to the officers and technical crew of the USCG for this extravagant addition to the Beavertail Museum.

We have 9 new docents on board, who joined returning staff to attend the museum. The gift shop is now able to process credit and debit cards as mentioned previously. Our docents were brought up to speed on a new modem and card readers. Mary Heures is coordinating their scheduling this year, and has done a great job.

We began the 2017 season two days early, opening our doors to visitors on Saturday May 27 as opposed to Memorial Day itself, as was customary in the past. Tower climbs are conducted as usual by docent Richard Chellis and yours truly. We look forward to this special feature and talked about it off season many times during our "winter walks" around the park. We would love to see you up on the observation gallery. Tower climbs occur alternating weekends throughout the season until Columbus Day.

Warm regards,

Bob Dutson



George Warner

It is with great sorrow that we report the passing of George Warner this past May. As a longtime member of BLMA, past President and Board member, George presided and guided the expansion of the museum from 3 rooms in the Assistant Keeper House into what we see today. Also, coupled with his double duty as a docent and a leader, he also was Beavertail's 'fix it' man, always present with a tool in hand. Wry yet humorous, his knowledge and historic clarity was extended to BLMA members and visitors alike. We will all miss him. A memorial will be held August 19 at 4:30pm at St. Matthew Church.

- Bob Dutson



Fog Signals

The many Fresnel lenses installed worldwide, some still in use today, are beautiful and highly precise mechanisms. They were a huge improvement, increasing the effective range of older style lenses by several orders. But no matter how bright or reliable, they were essentially useless in heavy fog. Listening for the sound of surf breaking on a rugged shore, which could seem to originate in many directions, was better than nothing but not by much. So to appease our second most frequently used sense a whole plethora of audible devices were invented. Bells, cannon, whistles, "reed trumpets", diaphones and sirens were tried with mixed success. Huge fog bells occasionally collapsed their support structures, and smaller versions might require manual hammering every 15 seconds for hours until keepers essentially collapsed themselves. Cannons were expensive AND dangerous to load quickly in heavy fog, and the sound produced was too brief to pinpoint. Some devices produced a reliable, easily located sound but were so irritating that nearby residents screamed out loud themselves. Until the introduction of the current electric "horn" now in use at Beavertail, diaphones were used extensively. They produced the very deep resonating blast that ship captains loved, but kept keepers and family members awake many a night. The trumpet-shaped diaphone was constructed of 3 layers of material, which lasted for extended periods, but sooner or later needed replacement. The repair bill was staggering! So, today we have a very reliable and cost-effective, albeit bland, sound system in place. Anyone feeling inclined to invent a new, melodious, budget-friendly mechanism is encouraged to do so. I will make it a point to congratulate and thank you personally!

- Bob Dutson



BLMA Fundraising Appeal

“Your Gift Today Will Have Twice The Impact”

At this time, BLMA board members and docents alike wish to thank all those who have contributed to our appeal. Your generosity directed to the fundraising appeal to date is in fact overwhelming, and words alone cannot express our gratitude. To date we are at \$ 335,000 including donations and matched funds, and optimistic in receiving an additional \$150,000 in pledged funding, which after doubling, would bring the total to \$635,000! (Qualifying donations are matched by our benefactor Jim Buttrick.) His vision made the whole campaign possible, and your response to our appeal makes it work!!

We are well along in “Phase 2” of the effort. We have already reached out to various organizations and notable foundations via letter to request assistance during the remainder of our appeal. A fund raising event was held June 15, at the Dunes Club in Narragansett RI. More recently we ran very well received publicity efforts via newspaper, radio and network TV programming, which featured our tireless campaign manager Nicole Contino. These media events have generated widespread public awareness of our campaign. The response to these combined efforts was more enthusiastic than we could ever have expected. I can’t recall how many times people have congratulated me on the professionalism in these efforts (and all I do is report them!) As a consequence our shared vision of attaining vital funding to maintain and restore our historic landmark, which has come to mean so much to so many, is no longer an impossible dream.

Still, we have a long road ahead for the remainder of 2017. Won’t you consider a contribution at this time? We hope that you can join us at this time in funding the vital upgrades and building restorations at Beavertail. Suggested matched gift levels are detailed below. And please remember during the few remaining months of 2017, every dollar you give continues to be doubled when Jim Buttrick matches your generosity!

- Bob Dutson

Suggested matched gifts:

\$50 becomes \$100!

\$250 becomes \$500!

\$___ Any amount will be doubled!!

View From The Tower

Every year we conduct lighthouse tower climbs on alternate weekends for the entire season. Weather permitting we begin Monday of Memorial Day and continue right through Columbus Day. Small groups of 8-10 assemble at the base of the tower in the “control room”, then ascend the spiral stairs to the tower gallery. The rebuilt gallery gives a 360-degree panorama of the east and west bay passages, north up over Beavertail Park & Conanicut Island, and south out over the ocean. Guests are treated to unforgettable vistas of the Newport and Narragansett resort areas to the east and west, several other nearby lighthouses and historic Block Island to the south. Visible east of Block Island are the 5 huge wind powered generators in the recently constructed generating “farm.” There are bird’s eye views of scores of sail and power boats, other visitors fishing from the rocky ledges in front of the lighthouse, and seagulls swooping above & below you next to the gallery. It is arguably the best view of the bay and surrounding shore areas in the state.

Docent Richard Chellis is one of two guides stationed on the gallery to indicate points of interest. He once lived at the lighthouse with his family when it was still attended. He gives a unique perspective of that experience, and is a very interesting guide. I am also present to greet visitors at the top, trying to learn from him while pretending to appear as knowledgeable of the sights and local history as he is. We all have an enjoyable time in the end. Weather permitting we are open from either 12PM - 3PM or 1PM - 4PM on the Saturday or Sunday of the weekends scheduled. The schedule appears on the final page of this issue and in our website. Join us for a view you will remember forever!

- Bob Dutson

Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association Matching Gift Campaign Pledge Form

In consideration of the gifts of others, I/we pledge a gift to the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association Matching Gift Campaign in the amount of _____.

Benefactor Levels of Giving:

- ☐ **Able Franklin Society** (\$25,000 plus) Abel Franklin was the first keeper of Beavertail Light. This included standing outside and hand-carrying lanterns to warn ships off the rocks.
- ☐ **Joseph Henry Society** (\$10,000 +) Joseph Henry was one of the most influential American scientists of the 19th century and a 26-year member of the U.S. Lighthouse Board. He conducted research on sound transmission and oversaw testing of fog-signaling device at Beavertail Lighthouse. Professor Henry may be best known as the nation's first director of Smithsonian Institution.
- ☐ **David Melville Society** (\$5,000 +) David Melville was a Newport pewterer and inventor who created the first gas-powered lighting system to be tested at a U.S. lighthouse: Beavertail, in 1817.
- ☐ **Demaris Weeden Society** (\$2,500 +) Demaris Weeden Society" who was the first woman Keeper at Beavertail from 1848 to 1857.
- ☐ **Peter Harrison Society** (\$1,000+) Peter Harrison was a prominent Newport architect who designed the first two light towers of Beavertail Lighthouse. He designed several notable buildings in the colonies, including the Redwood Library, The Market in Newport (now the Museum of Newport History), the Touro Synagogue and King's Chapel in Boston, MA.
- ☐ **Edward Donahue Society** (\$500+) Edward Donahue served 33 years as the longest keeper at Beavertail Lighthouse.

It is my/our intent to pay this pledge in 2016 or 2017 in payments as follows:

Date _____ Payment Amount _____ Date _____ Payment Amount _____
Date _____ Payment Amount _____ Date _____ Payment Amount _____

- ☐ I/We would like our name(s) to be listed as: _____ OR
- ☐ I/We would like to make this gift in honor of: _____ OR
- ☐ We would like our gift to remain anonymous.

Signature _____ Date _____

Please complete the following for our records:

Name: _____
Address: _____
Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Please mail completed forms to: BLMA, PO Box 83, Jamestown, RI 02835

The BLMA is a charity recognized as tax-exempt by the IRS under Section 501(c) (3). Your donation to BLMA is tax-deductible.

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast - Castle Hill (Part 3)

This is the final segment of the discussion of documented vessels which have been totally lost at Castle Hill and the surrounding waters. In the first two parts of this discussion, details of the earliest eight wrecks here have been presented. This final chapter of the story includes four more wrecks, including the most famous of all, that are known to have left their bones here.

On April 19, 1891, the three-masted ship *LYDIA SKOLFIELD*, registering 1,264 tons and sailing out of New Orleans for Providence, with 7,000 barrels of cotton seed oil, came to grief while approaching Narragansett Bay. After nineteen days at sea, the *SKOLFIELD* was fogbound as she approached her destination. Under the command



of Captain Thomas Masson, the 187-foot long ship piled up on "The Washbowl" (which we know as Butterball Rock) off Ragged Point, Castle Hill. Unlike most of the wrecks which have occurred here, this one took place at mid-morning suggesting that the fog was unusually thick. A patrolman from the Life Saving Station spotted the vessel after she was hard ashore but the ship was not in peril, it was simply fatally stuck on the rocks. The rest of the story is about what was deemed an epic salvage effort. The value of the ship and its cargo was estimated at \$130,000. After three-months of dedicated effort, the salvagers were rewarded with approximately \$117,486 of saved cargo and materials. This was deemed to be the single most successful salvage effort in this area at the time. Despite the salvage effort, what remains of the *LYDIA SKOLFIELD* is worth a visit (if you are a diver) and there are numerous small artifacts to be found.

Four years after the wreck of the *SKOLFIELD*, a much smaller vessel, the 83-foot long, 115-ton *EVA L. LEONARD*, with 200 tons of coal cargo ran ashore on Ragged Point. Her master, Captain Phillip Moore was enroute from Hoboken, NJ for Newport. The thirty-year old vessel was running ahead of a lively gale when the snow reduced visibility to nearly zero. A miscalculation brought her ashore on the extreme southerly point of Castle Hill. The Life Savers from Price's Neck responded to the scene and quickly determined that they could not launch a surfboat in the existing sea so they set up their breeches buoy and landed the captain and his crew. The crew was reported as "used up" due to their exposure to the cold weather but was happy to be alive. Between January 13, 1895, the date of the stranding, and February 8th, several loads of coal were removed from the stranded vessel and she was stripped of sails and rigging but the remainder of the vessel was abandoned where she lay.

On December 22, 1902, the schooner barge *RED WING* was inbound from New York City headed to Providence with a cargo of 1,400 tons of gas coal. The 781-ton vessel, measuring 192 feet in length, was under tow by the tug *RATTLER* of the McWilliams Line when she sprung a leak in a storm and foundered off Castle Hill. Like most barges, she carried a crew and they were saved though the details of that rescue were not locally reported. The *RED WING* had served for almost thirty years and it was the opinion of the owners that she was "an old tub" so aside from the lost cargo, there was not a great deal of concern about the loss of the vessel.

Two decades passed before another vessel would be lost in the waters around Castle Hill. The date was October 7, 1927 and the vessel was a barge named *COLMAR* which was registered as a petroleum carrier owned by the New England Oil Refining Company. Her home port was Fall River, MA and she was enroute from that port with a cargo of 270 tons of sulphuric acid said to be packed in carboys. [a carboy is a rigid container, used for transporting liquids, often water or chemicals, and having a typical capacity of 5 to 16 US gallons]. The *COLMAR* measured 107 feet in length and was registered at 244 tons. She was built in Noank, CT in 1897 and was thirty years old at the time of her loss. There were two men aboard the barge at the time of her sinking but they were removed from her as soon as it was evident that she would soon be lost. It was said that they barely made it to the deck of the towing steamer, named *MERRIMACK* before the barge sank.

There are other vessels which met with disaster in the vicinity of Castle Hill and surely some may have been lost but those remain to be discovered as the study of the maritime history of the state of Rhode Island continues.

- Jim Jenney

Dead Humpback Washes Up at Beavertail State Park



A dead humpback whale washed up at the park Friday, June 16th. The whale was found already dead and bloated with gas on the Western side of Conanicut Island (Jamestown) by park rangers and visitors at around 11am. The whale was 31 feet long, a juvenile male, aged between 2 and 5 years old. When it washed up it had no evidence of any lesions from a boat strike or predatory attack. The previous night, a pod of humpbacks that is suspected to be the family of the dead whale was spotted from Narragansett Beach in the very shallow waters of the West Passage, where larger species of whales are not often seen due to excessive fishing and shipping noise. The pod had continually been sighted in Narragansett Bay throughout the week that it's dead pod-member spent washed up, which is not atypical of cetaceans who are capable of mourning. The photo included with this article was provided by a visitor to our museum who viewed the whale up close.

Friday, June 23, the Humpback was removed by Safe Sea and Rhode Island DEM and Mystic Aquarium came to conduct a Necropsy. It was severely decomposed at this point, so Mystic might not be able to establish cause of death from the samples they took. An update on a possible cause of death was requested via phone call to the Mystic Aquarium but the call was not returned. Content in this article was provided by Emily Gamage, a DEM employee at the aquarium on site, and is greatly appreciated.

- Bob Dutson

Charles Dickens at Beavertail?

Mr. Dickens could have 'swung round' to our landmark in the 1840's or late 1860's had he taken the time. He visited America before and after the Civil War, but apparently had more important business pending in New York promoting his latest works. He may have been simply too busy to visit or perhaps afraid for his own safety, after making some very unflattering remarks about this country in a novel. But had he done so (and herein I will treat his imaginary visit as if it had actually transpired) he might have summed up a pleasant summer day thusly: "Our four-horse cabriolet struggled to gain purchase of an endless rutted track, our driver perched atop the conveyance all this while swearing heartily, urging his unruly steeds onward. After coursing two hours or more through clinging mud and fieldstone, following a hasty disembarkation at the charming Boston Neck ferry landing, we came inevitably in sight of our destination. How proudly this "Beaver-tail" light station greeted us, piercing a powder blue sky with a backdrop of fleece clouds. Grey-gulls winged round the spire, hailing our band of weary travelers, bidding us welcome. Our praiseworthy and honorable driver, obviously intoxicated like most of the uncouth locals, reined in his horses and fell fast asleep. Alighting from the aging carriage we stood, transfixed, espying a clearer view of the tower. Soon followed a wonderful "picnic" but inevitably, too quickly, our now conscious but irritable driver proclaimed we must return. But of course, like the esteemed Mr. Dickens, I write merely of fantasy for your amusement and wonder.

- Bob Dutson



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 83
Jamestown, Rhode Island 02835

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

Beavertail Lighthouse
Matching Gift Campaign 2017

\$1,000,000
\$800,000
\$600,000
\$400,000
\$200,000

Identified potential donations
Donations as of April 30, 2017

Donate now and your donation will be doubled

Help her shine for generations

beavertailight.org
Donate: Beavertailight.org/donate
Mail: BLMA, PO Box 83, Jamestown, RI 02835



Museum Hours

The Museum is open 7 days a week from June 17, 2017 thru September 3, 2017 - 10:30AM to 4:30PM

For a complete schedule and Tower Opening Dates please see Visitor Information.

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.