



The Lighthouse Log

Summer 2021

The Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Summer 2021 President's Message

Dear Members,

Hello everyone! It is summertime and, with the lifting of pandemic restrictions, our lives have returned to a certain level of normality. Since our last newsletter, a lot has been happening at Beavertail.

Thanks to our diligent board members who worked on the reopening committee, we were able to open as planned on Memorial Day Weekend. We even had a "soft" opening to test the waters the Saturday before. And we had our first Tower opening on Memorial Day. Ocean State Job Lot generously donated ten boxes of hand sanitizers and ten boxes of hand wipes to help with our reopening. Many docents have signed up again, and one of our Board members updated our docent manual.

We open daily starting July 6th from 1:30-4:30 PM. Plus, we went to two weekend shifts starting July 3rd.

We are always looking to have more docents join us. If you are interested in volunteering, please email us at info@beavertailight.org.

As so many of you heard or read in the news, on May 7th, the US Coast Guard notified us that Beavertail Lighthouse is now surplus inventory. Once a property is declared surplus, a process begins whereby eligible organizations can apply to become the new owner. They are releasing Watch Hill Lighthouse as well. You can read more about this elsewhere in the newsletter.

Continued on next page.

Continued from previous page.

I am excited to announce that we have two new Board members, Leo N. Orsi, Jr. and Nancy Beye, who joined us recently. Nancy is also our Docent Coordinator. I know they will add a lot of value to our organization.

We were incredibly pleased to receive a Community Grant award from the Rhode Island Foundation, which allowed us to purchase new Point of Sale (POS) software for our Gift Shop computer. The new software is a helpful upgrade to our POS system.

Victoria Schultz, an intern from Endicott College, is working diligently this summer at Beavertail, archiving our historical artifacts. You can learn more about Victoria below.

Final approvals for establishing the Courtyard area were received. Unfortunately, BLMA had to reschedule this project for the fall due to conflicts with the contractor's schedule and the museum's opening.

We are happy to be welcoming all our friends back to Beavertail. Enjoy the beautiful summer days.

Best regards,
Diane



In the Spotlight.... Intern, Victoria Schultz

Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association is excited to welcome Victoria Schultz as our first intern at Beavertail Lighthouse! Victoria's primary goal as an intern is to photograph and catalog the artifacts that BLMA has acquired over the years and to enter them into a database. The database will capture the provenance of each artifact, how it was acquired and whether it is original to the lighthouse. Victoria will also be recording the period from which the artifact comes. Victoria looks forward to this part of the job because there is so much history surrounding Jamestown and the vicinity. She is interested in learning more about Beavertail's past and why it is significant to American history.

Victoria is from North Kingstown, RI, and she loves the beach and being anywhere near the ocean. She also enjoys spending time with her family and friends, and her hobbies include drawing and creating art on the app, Procreate. She also enjoys golf.

Victoria is currently working on her Bachelor's degree at Endicott College in Beverly, MA, majoring in history. She plans to earn her Master's degree in the future. She hasn't settled on the profession that she would like to follow yet, but interning at Beavertail is a way for Victoria to explore the possibilities of an occupation focusing on history.

The task of archiving Beavertail's artifacts might seem a little daunting, especially since Beavertail is the third oldest lighthouse station in the United States, dating back to 1749. Victoria needn't worry as she will work with Varoujan Karentz and Linda Warner to fill in the history of each artifact. Varoujan and Linda are two of BLMA's most knowledgeable board members regarding Beavertail Lighthouse History.

BLMA aims to have the photographs and information about each artifact available in a database to the general public through the BLMA website in the future. The database will be an excellent educational tool and will help generate interest in the lighthouse and its artifacts.

BLMA is thankful to have Victoria's help with this endeavor!



BLMA Intern Victoria Schultz

Good Home Needed! Transfer of the Lighthouse Property

The National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 provided a mechanism for the disposition and preservation of historic lighthouses and light stations if it was determined that the US Coast Guard no longer needed the properties. In 2005, the Coast Guard declared that it no longer needed the Beavertail Lighthouse property, so under the Act it is now being made available at no cost to eligible entities defined as federal agencies, state or local agencies, non-profit corporations, educational agencies or community development organizations for educational, park, recreational, cultural or historic preservation purposes.

Sixteen years later, formal notice was received that indeed the site property would be made available to a qualified entity. Those interested were told to contact the U.S. General Service Administration whereas GSA would make recommendations to the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) to send applications to qualified organizations.

The delay in listing Beavertail as excess property was caused by a combination of things. Lead contamination in the ground site needed to be analyzed and identified, and appropriation of funds needed to be approved by Congress. The lead contamination mitigation was completed in early 2020, where 160 tons of soil were removed and replaced.

BLMA has been following the process of other lighthouses and preparing a response for years, using the NPS guidelines. Recognizing that the site located at the southern end of Beavertail State Park is managed by RIDEM's Parks and Recreation Division, BLMA concurred that the property should be owned by the state. The Town of Jamestown over the years held various licenses as did BLMA from the U.S. Coast Guard to maintain the buildings. In March of this year, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) partnership comprising the RIDEM, BLMA, and the town of Jamestown was agreed upon. A letter of interest has been submitted by RIDEM and awaits the NPS Application, which will have to be submitted within 90 days of receipt.



Painting Courtesy of Nelly Romero

Lighthouse Wisdom

“The isolation spins its mysterious cocoon, focusing the mind on one place, one time, one rhythm - the turning of the light. The island knows no other human voices, no other footprints. On the Offshore Lights you can live any story you want to tell yourself, and no one will say you're wrong: not the seagulls, not the prisms, not the wind.”

M. L. Stedman - The Light Between Oceans

Women Keepers: Demaris Weeden

Demarious A. (Weeden) Weeden, or Demaris as she is more commonly known, became Beavertail Lighthouse's first and only female Head Keeper. She assumed the position upon her husband Robert H. Weeden's death in 1848. Robert had been the Keeper at Dutch Island Lighthouse for about 15 months before becoming the Keeper at Beavertail just four years earlier. Interestingly, Demaris and Robert were first cousins as they share the same paternal grandparents.

According to the 1850 Federal Census in Jamestown, RI, she lived at the lighthouse with seven of her twelve children and her elderly mother, Mary. Two sons were living on a nearby farm as laborers. Son, William Pitt Weeden, aged 30, is listed as blind in all public records after 1850. Demaris certainly had her hands full. Perhaps Demaris' assignment as Lighthouse Keeper after Roberts' death was a form of government benevolence considering her many dependents.

The Census record shows no occupation for Demaris at all, while all the men recorded have their professions listed. Amusingly, at least the 1865 state census gives her half an occupation-here she is listed as Housekeeper; that's as close a title as Demaris was likely to get as she had left the lighthouse service by that time. At least, like most women Keepers of the day, Demaris' salary was commensurate with that of her male counterparts-she was paid \$350 per annum.

At the time, there was no official Assistant Keeper but, one or more of Damaris' sons performed the lighthouse duties while she was Keeper- she had four of the right age to help (Robert and George aged 22, Walter 17 and Daniel 16.) The family certainly knew how to run a lighthouse. If nothing else, Demaris was certainly the "Supervisor" of the lighthouse "staff" and she alone was responsible for maintaining the light and keeping it functional. Three pre-teen daughters, Mary, Jane and Isabella, helped with household chores no doubt. John Francis, Demaris' youngest son, was only eight years old in 1850, but he likely helped out with the lighthouse chores if his future occupation is any indication.

Lighthouse authorities built the current granite tower and brick Keeper's dwelling during Demaris' tenure. They also installed a third-order Fresnel lens in the new tower.

By December 1857, Demaris was replaced by Joshua B. Rathbun, then Silas G. Shaw as Keeper of Beavertail Lighthouse. Shaw's brother, a North Carolina Congressman turned Confederate Colonel, had just given a speech on the "Kansas Question" in Congress a few months earlier. Perhaps, as family legend suggests, Silas saw the possibility of a civil war looming on the horizon when he took the government position at Beavertail. Demaris' son Daniel Webster would be swept up in the war that did materialize a few years later; he ended up in Company G of the 4th Rhode Island Infantry fighting against Silas Shaw's brother at Roanoke Island. After leaving the Lighthouse Service and Beavertail, Demaris is found living in Newport with several of her younger children, William, and John, her youngest. John was a mariner at this time.



Unidentified Woman and Child in Front of the
Sabine Point Lighthouse-USCG-1917

Demaris died before the 1875 census, as she is no longer recorded; By this time, John is an Assistant Keeper living at the Nayatt Point Lighthouse with his family and brother William. Shortly after, John begins a remarkable 36 year tenure as the Head Keeper at the Sabin Point Lighthouse, a Napoleonic III-styled house located on a granite base not much larger than the house itself, situated in the middle of the Providence River. Still, brother William is living with John and his family. Not the safest location for a person disabled by blindness. By 1880, William must have passed away as he is no longer found with his brother John. Instead, we find another William, John's 1-year-old son. It's said that John had a hand in saving many stranded sailors

over the years and that he amassed artifacts from numerous shipwrecks and exhibited them in his home. Perhaps these artifacts helped him remember why his job as Keeper was so important, and maybe he also remembered that both his parents lent a good part of their lives to this noble profession. CV

Beavertail is Everywhere this Summer



US Coast Guard Technician, Rocky Recio, from Bristol ANT, repairing the fog signal.

Beavertail Light Station is all over the news this summer. It was highlighted in the Boston Globe newspaper in late May, when the announcement was made that the site would be accessed by the Coast Guard.

A Globe reporting team arrived on site along with a photographer; they were hosted by the BLMA board with a two-hour tour through the building's museum and the light tower. Coincidentally a member of the Bristol Aids to Navigation Team arrived to repair the fog signal and was photographed and included in the newspaper article.

More recently, Beavertail was also featured in SO Rhode Island Magazine, and South County Life Magazine.

Improvements at Beavertail State Park

Visitors at Beavertail will see some new improvements at the State Park. DEM has added new signs and replaced old ones, widened trails and opened up some wooded areas. They are also in the process developing new plans for parking areas. In the interim, fences have been installed around worn grass areas which have been hydro seeded. Studies on solutions to repair washouts and pedestrian paths in the park are in progress.

Beavertail Birdhouse Update



If you read the Spring 2021 edition of the Lighthouse Log featuring the birdhouse made by former Beavertail Lighthouse docent, Art Schloth. You will be happy to hear that the first "Lighthouse Keeper" has moved into the model Lighthouse.

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast Brenton Point and Reef (Part 1)

Situated at the eastern point of the main entrance channel into Narragansett Bay is the southwestern point of Aquidneck Island, better known locally as Brenton Point. About ½ mile offshore is a group of rocks known as Brenton Reef. Like Beavertail Point on the western side of the channel, and lying as far offshore as it does, this reef creates a major obstacle to be avoided by vessels entering the approach to Newport. Over the years, numerous vessels have *discovered* the reef by accident and generally to their peril. The lighthouse at Castle Hill marks the immediate channel entrance itself but lies almost a mile to the north of this treacherous reef. This area easily ranks within the top five most dangerous sites for mariners in Rhode Island. What follows is a discussion of more than two dozen totally lost vessels in this area. There are most certainly others but consider these to be the highlights.



February of 1772 was a cold month. So cold, in fact, that floating ice was a concern to mariners even along the southern New England coast. On February 24, the sloop MARY ANN, Captain Buckley (or Buchland) master, sailed into Saybrook, CT, for a short rest. The master and pilot went ashore and left the mate, Samuel Cotton, and a 14-year-old lad in charge of the vessel. Without warning, floating ice caused the anchor line to part and set the sloop adrift into Long Island Sound. The mate decided he should make sail and, given the wind direction, headed the small vessel for Newport, R.I. At about 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the 26th, the vessel drove ashore on Brenton Reef, immediately putting the lives of the seaman and the lad in peril. The vessel almost immediately bilged and would not move, leaving the two to suffer the cold night ahead alone. In the morning, with little other option, the mate swam to shore with a promise to bring help back to the would-be seafaring boy. While away from the sloop, another boat saw the plight of the stranded sloop and heaved to so assistance could be sent. Unfortunately, the youngster had succumbed to exposure to the elements. The bottom of the sloop had been beaten out, and most of the cargo ruined. She lay there, a wreck, until completely broken up by the relentless action of the sea. No record of any salvage was found.

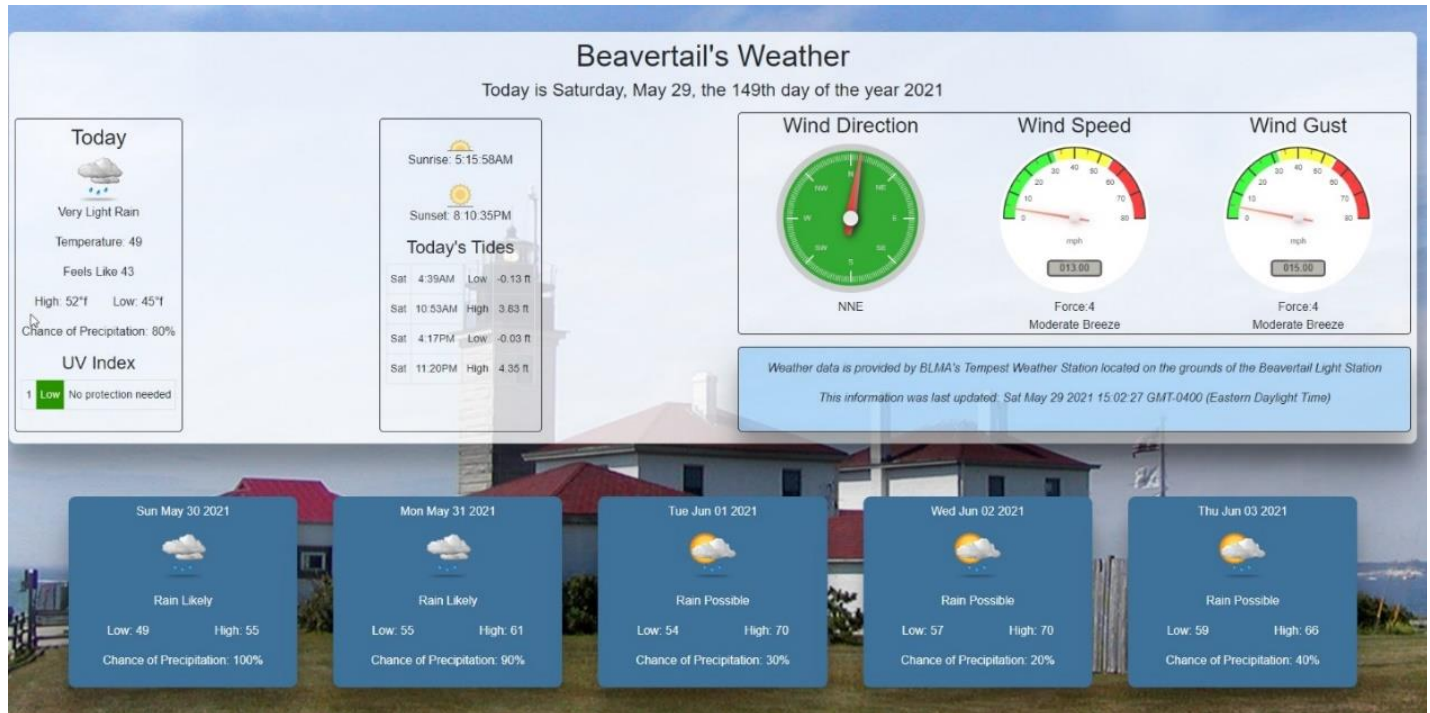
The next reported total wreck on Brenton Reef appeared in the news on April 22, 1809. Although said to be the schooner TRAVELLER, research has determined that she was a sloop of the same name. Under the command of Captain Caleb Perkins, she was on a trip from Plymouth, NC, with a cargo of 3,000-4,000 bushels of corn. The TRAVELLER displaced 76 tons and measured 62' x 19' x 7'. She was eight years old at the time of loss, April 17, 1809. New London, CT, her destination on this trip, was also her home port. The cause of the stranding was not stated, but her fate was sealed as soon as she struck firmly on the reef. Less than a week after the incident, a notice of an auction of "*sundry articles saved from the wreck*" appeared in the Providence American. How much was saved or how much they earned at the auction is not stated, but the crew survived the stranding. A year and a half later, one of the most disastrous groundings (in terms of loss of life) occurred at Brenton Reef on December 24, 1810. Interestingly, if not for local customs, the loss

of life would have been much smaller. The custom was that when a vessel approached its destination, particularly around a holiday, it would fire off its cannons as a salute to the local townspeople. In Newport, after this wreck and loss of life, that custom would all but disappear. The vessel was the brig MINERVA, a trading vessel on a voyage from Havana, Cuba to Bristol, RI, with a cargo of rum, wine, iron, and 30 casks of gunpowder. Her master's name was Angel Cifuentes, and after sixteen days at sea, he and his men were ready for some good old "R&R" (rest and relaxation). After stranding in a remote location from the town, the crew tried to attract the attention of the locals by firing their cannon. The locals misinterpreted the cannon fire as a welcoming salute and sent no one to see what was the matter. The captain, mate, supercargo, and seven hands attempted to make shore on the remnants of the brig's quarterdeck but were all drowned. The remaining crew, consisting of the boatswain and nine men, succeeded in reaching the shore on scattered pieces of wreckage. The violent action of the waves broke the MINERVA to pieces on the reef.

In the next segment of this story, you will see that the reef continued to claim vessels on a regular basis over the years.

New Museum Display

In addition to weather data at Beavertail Lighthouse being available on our website (<https://beavertailight.org/tempest/>) at any time from the TEMPEST wireless weather system, a new display (see below) is also located inside the museum. The display designed by BLMA Vice President, Dave Smith, provides up to weather forecast information in addition to live wind speed, gust speed, and wind direction.



Museum Hours

July & August 2021

Saturdays & Sundays 10:30 AM - 4:30 PM

Monday July 5th (Fourth of July Celebrated) 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Weekdays starting July 6th, 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM

September 2021

September 1st, 2nd & 3rd (Wed, Thu, Fri) 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM

September 4th, 5th & 6th (Sat, Sun, Monday Labor Day) 10:30 AM - 4:30 PM

Saturdays & Sundays after Labor Day 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Weekdays after Labor Day Closed

October 2021

Saturdays & Sundays 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Monday October 11th (Columbus Day) - 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Weekdays Closed

Schedules are based on the availability of staff and may change. Please check updates or changes to the schedule on our website at [Beavertailight.org](https://beavertailight.org) before visiting.



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 83
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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

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 is open from 1:30 -4:00 PM

July 10 & 24

August 7 & 21

September 6 (Labor Day), 11 & 25

October 11 (Columbus Day)

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

Group Tours & Events

The Beavertail Lighthouse Museum is now open! Please, see page 7 for hours.

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 (DEM) at 401.884.2010.