



The Lighthouse Log

Fall 2024

Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Fall 2024 President's Message

Greetings,

My name is Nancy Beye, and I am honored to serve as the newly elected President of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association. As part of my first official role, I'm excited to share some highlights from this past summer at the lighthouse.

Despite 2024 being one of the wettest years in Rhode Island's history, visitors from around the globe continued to explore our beautiful museum. It never ceases to amaze us how far people will come to experience Beavertail's charm and history.

One of the highlights of the summer was our biweekly tower climbs, which have once again proven to be a resounding success. The tower climbs wouldn't have been possible without the incredible dedication of our volunteer docents, whose passion

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and commitment truly make the lighthouse experience special. We are deeply grateful for all they do. In addition to the climbs, our docents led engaging children's activities on the lawn, and we hosted weekly yoga classes and several Sound Baths, all of which were a huge hit with visitors.

As we look ahead, we have just a few more weekend days before we close for the season, with the exception of four days in December, including a special visit from the jolly old elf himself!

If you haven't had a chance to visit yet, we hope you'll stop by before the season ends. And if you visit in late September, you may even be lucky enough to witness the magical Monarch butterfly migration as they make their way through Beavertail on their journey to Mexico.

We look forward to seeing you at the lighthouse soon!

Warmest regards,
Nancy

Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association Annual Meeting



On September 19, BLMA held its Annual meeting, where the organization selected new officers to lead BLMA forward. Nancy Beye is the new President, Mary Hamilton is the Vice President, and Karen O'Toole and Ross Williams are our newest Board Members. Alex Popovych is the new Advisory Board member. Thank you to all our outgoing officers who have served BLMA so well these past few years.

Speaker Daniel Harrington gave a fantastic presentation on the Larchmont disaster, which some call the "Titanic of Rhode Island." On February 11, 1907, a bitterly cold night, the steamer *Larchmont* and the schooner *Harry Knowlton* collided in Block Island Sound. The Larchmont immediately started to sink and took the lives of nearly 150 men, women, and children onboard.

Summer Sound Baths at Beavertail a Success



Several Beavertail Lighthouse Sound Bath events through the Summer and early Fall were well attended. Petra Napolitano and Allison Schumann were phenomenal in leading the Sound Bath events. The events are free; all donations benefit the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association.

BLMA Directors Visit Watch Hill and Pomham Rocks Lighthouses

Several BLMA Directors recently visited two Lighthouse Societies to share inspiration and exchange ideas. This visit was part of our ongoing efforts to foster collaboration and innovation within the lighthouse preservation community.

By connecting with fellow enthusiasts and experts, our directors aim to gather new insights and best practices they can implement in our museum. Additionally, these visits provide an opportunity to discuss projects, educational programs, and community engagement strategies that can enhance the visitor experience and promote the rich history of Rhode Island's lighthouses.

On July 18th, they visited Watch Hill Lighthouse in Westerly, RI, near the Connecticut border. Watch Hill Lighthouse stands on a spit of land jutting into the Long Island Sound. Watch Hill Lighthouse has been around since 1745, but the current tower was built the same year as the present Beavertail Lighthouse tower in 1856. The Watch Hill Lighthouse is much like a smaller version of Beavertail Lighthouse. The house and tower were built in the same style and materials as Beavertail Lighthouse. The tower at Watch Hill is just slightly shorter. Ann Johnson, President of the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association, gave BLMA Directors a lighthouse tour. The WHLK Association received ownership of Watch Hill Lighthouse from the GSA around the same time Beavertail ownership was transferred.

On August 14th, a group of BLMA Directors sailed out to Pomham Rocks Lighthouse for a visit. Pomham Rocks Lighthouse is only accessible to the public and Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse (FPRL) members through escorted, guided boat tours provided by the FPRL.



Interestingly, the Captain of the vessel that delivered the Directors to the Lighthouse was Dennis Tardiff, who is the current Chairman of the Board of Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse. Dennis was also the last Lighthouse Keeper at Pomham Rocks.

Dennis served as Keeper from 1971 until the lighthouse was decommissioned in June of 1974. He retired as a Master Chief Machinery Technician after twenty-five years of service in the US Coast Guard and came back to Pomham Rocks as a volunteer in 2016.

FPRL Board Member Judianne Point treated BLMA Directors to a private tour of the Pomham Rocks Lighthouse Museum and the lighthouse tower.

Keepers: Daniel Z. Duncan: for 43 Years a Lighthouse Tender



In the Laurel Grove South Cemetery located in Savannah, Georgia, not far from the Savannah River and old Fort Jackson, stands the headstone of Daniel Zechariah Duncan, who died in February of 1920. Emblazoned with a large Lighthouse, beacon shining, his epitaph reads, "For 43 years a Lighthouse Tender. A devoted husband and an affectionate father."

Laurel Grove South was built in 1850 on the lower wetlands of the former Springfield Plantation. Its enormous moss-draped cypress trees and Victorian-styled monuments give the cemetery a gothic ambience. In its earliest years, before the abolition of slavery, the cemetery became the final resting place for more free persons of color than any other in the Southeast.

Little is known of Daniel Z. Duncan's early life and there are many unanswered questions about him. He was born in 1841 in Georgetown, South Carolina. He may have been one of the enslaved people on a nearby rice plantation or Daniel's family could have been free people of color—there were several families of the same name nearby. As it stands, on September 30, 1863, Daniel enlisted with the Union Navy at Point Royal, one of

the sea islands between Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina. The Navy stationed Daniel on the *USS John Adams* as the officer's cook.

Built in 1799, the frigate *USS John Adams* participated in the Union blockade of South Carolina's ports and the raid on Combahee Ferry that Harriet Tubman, the abolitionist and former slave, planned and executed with Union Colonel James Montgomery. This raid liberated over 750 enslaved people there. Was Daniel one of these people? Possibly. The federal government educated many of these formerly enslaved persons at Port Royal, and Daniel could read and write, skills necessary for any Keeper working for the federal government.

According to his widow Sarah Cornelia's Civil War pension application, Daniel also served on the vessels *Wabash*, *Valparaiso*, and *Mercury*. Other sources show that Daniel's work

history includes working as a fireman on the steamer *Wisteria* and as an Assistant Inspection Officer at the Navy Yard.

Daniel was in the Charleston area in the early 1880s with his father, Z. L. Duncan. Records of the U. S. Freedman's Bank, Charleston branch, show that Daniel Z. Duncan was a member and Zachariah L. Duncan was a longtime member and Trustee at the institution.

By July of 1883, Daniel's occupation is listed as Bouy Tender. Several sources mention that Daniel served at Jones Island. Jones Island had three range lights; perhaps he started his lighthouse service here. Unfortunately, Daniel's Lighthouse service is not fully documented as not all of his 43 years of service

are accounted for. The scant information available shows that from at least 1888 until 1908, Daniel was the Keeper at the Fort Jackson Range lighthouse on the Savannah River. Range lights are comprised of two or more towers, one tower in the fore and one or more in the rear. The towers serve as reference points one against the other to help guide river traffic in the dark of night.

In 1893, Keeper Duncan reported feeling an earthquake, which caused the rattling of windows and tin. He said that the undulatory motion of the quake, as he was bending over, had very nearly thrown him over from the motion. Earthquakes were common in the area, and two were reported at the nearby Elba Island Range lighthouse in 1886.



*Lighthouse Keeper
Daniel Zechariah Duncan*



USS John Adams

Daniel served as the 1st Assistant Keeper at the Elba Island Range Lights alongside Keeper George W. Martus from 1908 until 1914, when the Fort Jackson Lighthouse position was eliminated. Martus' sister Florence was known as Savannah's "waving girl." It's said that Florence had waved to every single vessel that passed by the lights as they sailed to and from Savannah's harbor on the Savannah river for 35 years until her brother retired as the Keeper there. She and her brother share the same cemetery stone, also depicting a lighthouse, in the Laurel Grove North cemetery where many of Savannah's white townsfolk buried their dead.

In 1896, Daniel purchased a cemetery plot at Laurel Grove South, a place of prominence and significance to many African Americans who lived in Savannah in that period. The cemetery includes the graves of many of Savannah's prominent black educators, civic/community leaders, masons, politicians, entrepreneurs, and religious leaders. Daniel Z. Duncan would be buried there in 1920. CV

The Lighthouse

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow-1849



The rocky ledge runs far into the sea, and on its outer point, some miles away, the Lighthouse lifts its massive masonry, a pillar of fire by night, of cloud by day.

Even at this distance I can see the tides, upheaving, break unheard along its base, a speechless wrath, that rises and subsides in the white lip and tremor of the face.

And as the evening darkens, lo! how bright, through the deep purple of the twilight air, beams forth the sudden radiance of its light with strange, unearthly splendor in the glare!

Not one alone; from each projecting cape and perilous reef along the ocean's verge, starts into life a dim, gigantic shape, holding its lantern o'er the restless surge. Like the great giant Christopher, it stands upon the brink of the tempestuous wave, wading far out among the rocks and sands, the night-o'ertaken mariner to save.

And the great ships sail outward and return, bending and bowing o'er the billowy swells, and ever joyful, as they see it burn, they wave their silent welcomes and farewells.

They come forth from the darkness, and their sails gleam for a moment only in the blaze, and eager faces, as the light unveils, gaze at the tower, and vanish while they gaze. The mariner remembers when a child, on his first voyage, he saw it fade and sink; and when, returning from adventures wild, he saw it rise again o'er ocean's brink. Steadfast, serene, immovable, the same year after year, through all the silent night burns on forevermore that quenchless flame, shines on that inextinguishable light! It sees the ocean to its bosom clasp the rocks and sea-sand with the kiss of peace; It sees the wild winds lift it in their grasp, and hold it up, and shake it like a fleece.

The startled waves leap over it; the storm smites it with all the scourges of the rain, and steadily against its solid form press the great shoulders of the hurricane. The sea-bird wheeling round it, with the din of wings and winds and solitary cries, blinded and maddened by the light within, dashes himself against the glare, and dies.

A new Prometheus, chained upon the rock, still grasping in his hand the fire of Jove, it does not hear the cry, nor heed the shock, but hails the mariner with words of love.

"Sail on!" it says, "sail on, ye stately ships! And with your floating bridge the ocean span; be mine to guard this light from all eclipse, be yours to bring man nearer unto man!"

Saving the Beavertail Lighthouse Tower

In 1976, the US Coast Guard began the automation of navigation aids throughout the country, replacing Lighthouse Keepers at lighthouses on the Atlantic, Pacific, and Great Lakes with electronic systems of lens lights and fog signals. In New England, from New York to Maine, the Bristol "Aids to Navigation Team" (ANT) undertook the responsibility of maintaining the new automatic electronic systems. At the same time, from 1976-1977, the two Keeper houses at Beavertail Light Station provided temporary housing for Coast Guard personnel and their families.

The present granite tower was constructed in 1856, with its focal plane sitting 64 ft above the water. Twenty-seven (27) course layers of granite from a Westerly, Rhode Island quarry comprised the tower plus the two decks housing the lens and its rotation mechanism. At the same time, the Coast Guard was also renovating Watch Hill Lighthouse, located at the Southwest end of Rhode Island. A similar tower with a slight reduction to 45 ft height was built. Both Beavertail and Watch Hill's interiors remained cylindrical, with interiors brick lined with cast-iron spiral stair cases.

Beavertail tower, except during its early 1900 period, exhibited the upper half of its tower, painted white, which improved its visible navigation profile. The light was electrified in 1931. For reasons not documented, the condition of the building in 2005 was deplorable and abandoned. All three tower windows were broken and shuttered with plywood. The negligence of the windows was minor compared to the lack of maintenance, allowing moisture to seep into the mortared granite seams, which froze and expanded them. Spaces 1 to 2 inches wide were opened in the upper granite layers. In addition, eighty percent of the iron works above the granite quoins, including railings, doors, and cast-iron floor panels, were corroded, and so hazardous that they required replacement. Two to four inches of water continuously accumulated at the bottom of the tower. It was not until 2006 that a BLMA Master Plan was conceived by Richard Sullivan, Varoujan Karentz, and then BLMA President George Warner. The plan included not only the restoration of the mortar but also the replication and replacement of all the corroded external cast iron catwalks, railings, hatches, and doors.

BLMA's first approach to Champlin Foundation (Rhode Island's primary financial supporter of capital non-profit projects) ended with a reply that "lighthouses are not funded by Champlin Foundation." A second letter highlighted the historic value of Beavertail Light Station and suggested that a visit to the site would be beneficial. The Champlin Office responded with a notation stating that their visit would be "brief, limited to 1/2 hour, no coffee or gifts." The visit by the Champlin Foundation's Director and staff expanded to 2 hours and a request for a detailed proposal.

Contracting company ABCORE Inc., a Narragansett-based contractor specializing in historic restoration projects, under the direction of Keith Lescarbeau (its owner), was selected to undertake the restoration of all the external structures, including brickwork,



Expansion of the Granite Quoins from Frozen Exposures

ironwork, drains, and parge applications. An Italian mason who examined the tower in its dilapidated condition and criticized the 1856 masonry did the Masonry work, promising that his particular mortar formula would resemble that of Italy's Rome Colosseum built in 70-80 AD. Abcore would eventually receive the Preserve Rhode Island Rhody Award for restoring Beavertail Lighthouse.

Ultimately, Champlin Foundation ended up funding a \$227,000 gift to Beavertail Lighthouse to restore the Light Tower to its former glory.

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast

Point Judith (Part 2)

Less than six months after the destruction of HMS SYREN in 1777, the British suffered another loss, this one not of natural causes but, once again, in the waters around Point Judith. From another study done for the Rhode Island Historical Society, the following excerpt offers details regarding the loss of the American frigate COLUMBUS, "March 24, 1778 – Lord Howe in the EAGLE, of 64-guns, sailed out of the [Newport] harbor today for the Delaware; ... On the 28th the LARK, frigate, stationed off Greenwich, perceived a vessel coming down and made the signal whereupon the MAIDSTONE and SPHYNX put to sea to intercept her; the rebel vessel came past the SOMERSET lying in Narragansett Passage, who gave her many shot; outside the two frigates were ready for her so she was obliged to run onshore inside Point Judith. The wind dying down, our ships were not able to approach, so the rebels were able to get out her stores and bring some guns up to protect her. As the wind came up in the afternoon, the frigates worked up and burned her. She proved to be the COLUMBUS, a Continental frigate of 36 guns. The rebels saved all the powder on board but the ship was entirely destroyed. There were no other losses during the Revolution and, in fact, it was 27 years before the next total loss would be reported near the point. As reported in the Connecticut Gazette of September 18, 1805, "On Saturday the 14th inst., the sloop ELIZA, from Nantucket, bound to Guilford, was cast away on Point Judith. The vessel and cargo, which consisted of salt, was entirely lost."



Although there were no totally lost vessels on Point Judith over the next few years, there had long been seen the need for a lighthouse to be erected on the point. Unfortunately, for the 245-ton ship INDIA POINT, the first lighting of that lighthouse would be on December 28, 1809, the night following the loss of this 86' long vessel that was built in Providence in 1803, and made her home port New Bedford, MA. The Rhode Island American reported, "The ship INDIA POINT, of and from New Bedford, for New-York, in ballast, went ashore on Wednesday night last, on Point Judith, near the light house and bilged."

The establishment of the light at Point Judith was a good idea and for two years following the demise of the INDIA POINT, the area was free of losses. On December 17, 1811, Captain Thomas Hastings found himself in trouble in a winter gale off the point. The 15-year-old sloop CAROLINE, belonging to Chauncy Cooly of Connecticut, was northbound from Hartford for Providence with an undisclosed cargo. The vessel measured 45' x 17' x 5' and was a 35-ton vessel. The Providence Gazette of December 28th reported: "The sloop CAROLINE, from Hartford for this port, was drove ashore on Point Judith, in the gale of the 17th inst. And lost, with most of her cargo."

Just over seven years later disaster would strike again, this time caused by fog. The Rhode Island Republican reported the loss as follows: "The brig MARY, Martin, from Havana bound to Bristol, with 270 hhds (*hogsheads*) molasses, owned by Captain Thomas Church, of Bristol, went ashore on Point Judith, in the thick fog on Wednesday morning last. We learn that she afterwards bilged—but since the wind and sea have moderated, lighters have been employed to save as much of the property as possible." The stranding took place on February 10, 1819 and although some of the cargo was saved, the vessel was lost.

Another sloop, this one the EXPRESS from Providence, RI, came to grief near Point Judith on November 6, 1823. Unlike the prior wrecks at this location, this was the first vessel to be lost, in part, due to the nature of her cargo. According to the Newport Mercury of November 8th "Sloop EXPRESS, Humphrey, was run ashore yesterday afternoon, near Point-Judith. She was loaded with lime, which had taken fire and was bound to Charleston, having several passengers for that port, some of whom returned in the CONNECTICUT, last evening." The sloop was built in Newport in 1808. She measured 64' x 20' x 8' and displaced 99 tons. She was owned by Jonathan Adams & Sam'l Humphreys. Her home port was Providence, R.I.

The Newport Mercury was the source of information for the loss of the schooner NEW HOPE. The report was found in the edition of April 28, 1827 and provided the following details of the loss, "The schooner NEW HOPE of Yarmouth, (Mass.) with stone for Fort Adams, went on the rocks at Point Judith, on Tuesday night last, in the gale, and soon after went to pieces. The crew were saved, but lost all their clothes, & c."

The log of totally lost shipwrecks will continue in the next segment of this series.



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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

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.



Museum & Tower Climb Schedule

In the fall the Museum will be open from 10:30 AM to 4:30 PM weekends starting on September 7th through October 12th and also on Columbus Day October 14th.

The Tower will be open for climbing from 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM (unless otherwise noted) on Columbus Day October 14th.

Please note: Tower Climbing is weather dependent; if uncertain, call 401-423-3270.

Group Tours & Events

We will announce any updates and/or changes to the schedule on our website at Beavertailight.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.