



The Lighthouse Log

Winter 2025

Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Winter 2025 President's Message



Greetings,

As the year winds down, it's a bittersweet time for all of us at the lighthouse. This season was another successful chapter, bringing together a diverse group of fascinating visitors from around the world. Sharing Beavertail's rich history with them is always a joy, and their admiration for what we do reminds us why we cherish our time here.

With September behind us, we've transitioned into a quieter schedule, bracing for the long winter ahead. But there's a bright spot on the horizon—our much-anticipated annual open house which takes place each December.

Each year, a dedicated team of volunteers transforms the museum's interior with festive decorations to welcome guests. BLMA reserves the first two weekends of December for museum visits, with the highlight being our open house on the first

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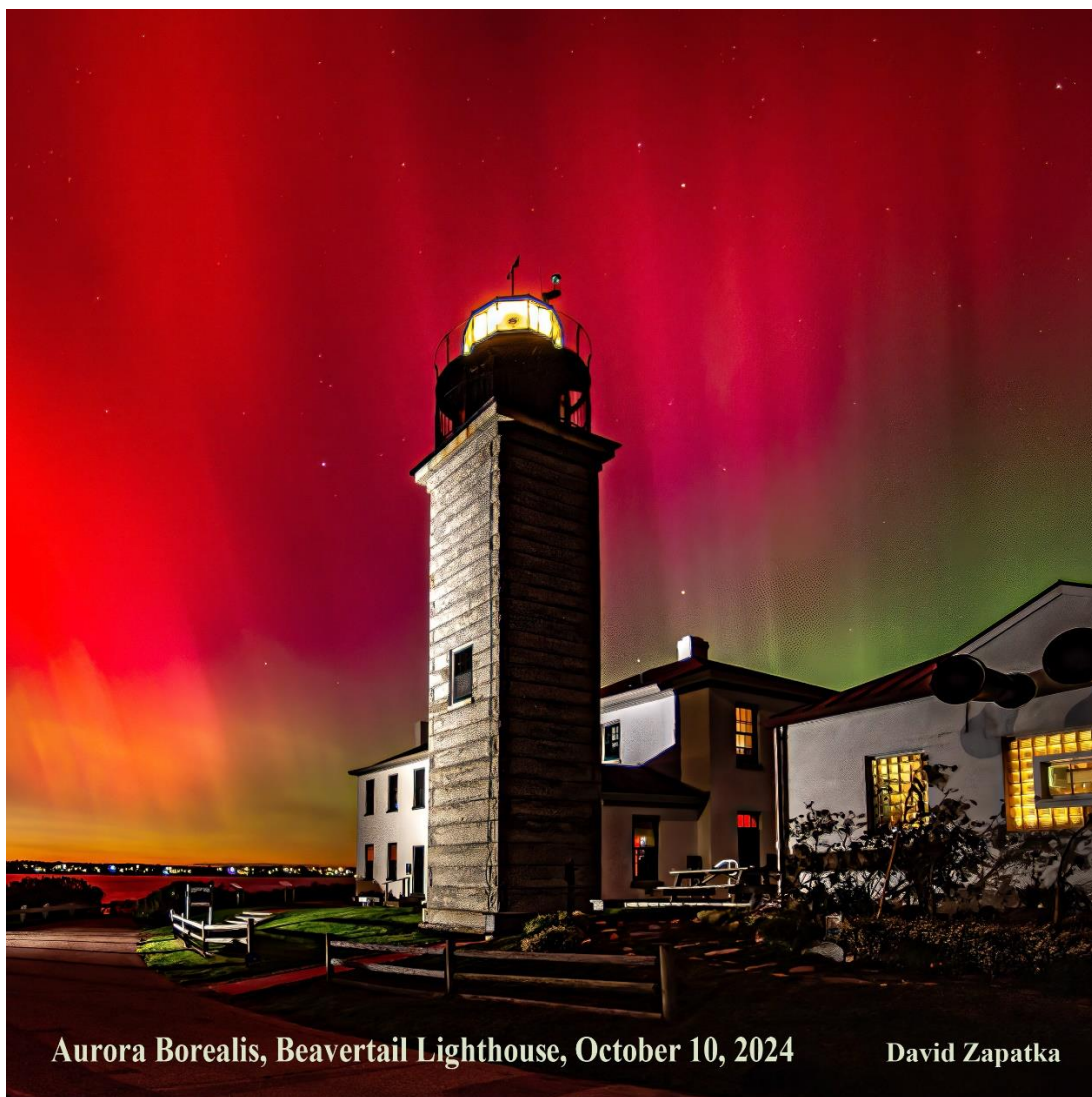
Sunday of the month. A cherished tradition, the Jamestown Fire Department Santa arrives in an antique fire truck, ascending the aerial ladder to place a wreath on the lighthouse tower. This event draws many locals and even caught the attention of a local TV station!

Inside the museum, our “Santa,” Bob Langton, takes the reins, spreading holiday cheer while guests enjoy refreshments lovingly provided by volunteers. The gift shop is also a favorite stop for many, adding to the festive spirit.

After the holidays, we’ll briefly pause before diving into preparations for next season. Wishing you a healthy and safe winter. We look forward to seeing you again in the spring!

Warm regards,
Nancy

Aurora Borealis Seen at Beavertail Point



The northern lights, also called aurora borealis, displayed in a rainbow of colors at Beavertail Lighthouse on October 10th, shortly after sunset. A special thank you to David Zapatka for sharing this lovely image of the lighthouse tower amidst the beautiful glow.

Santa Visits Beavertail Lighthouse



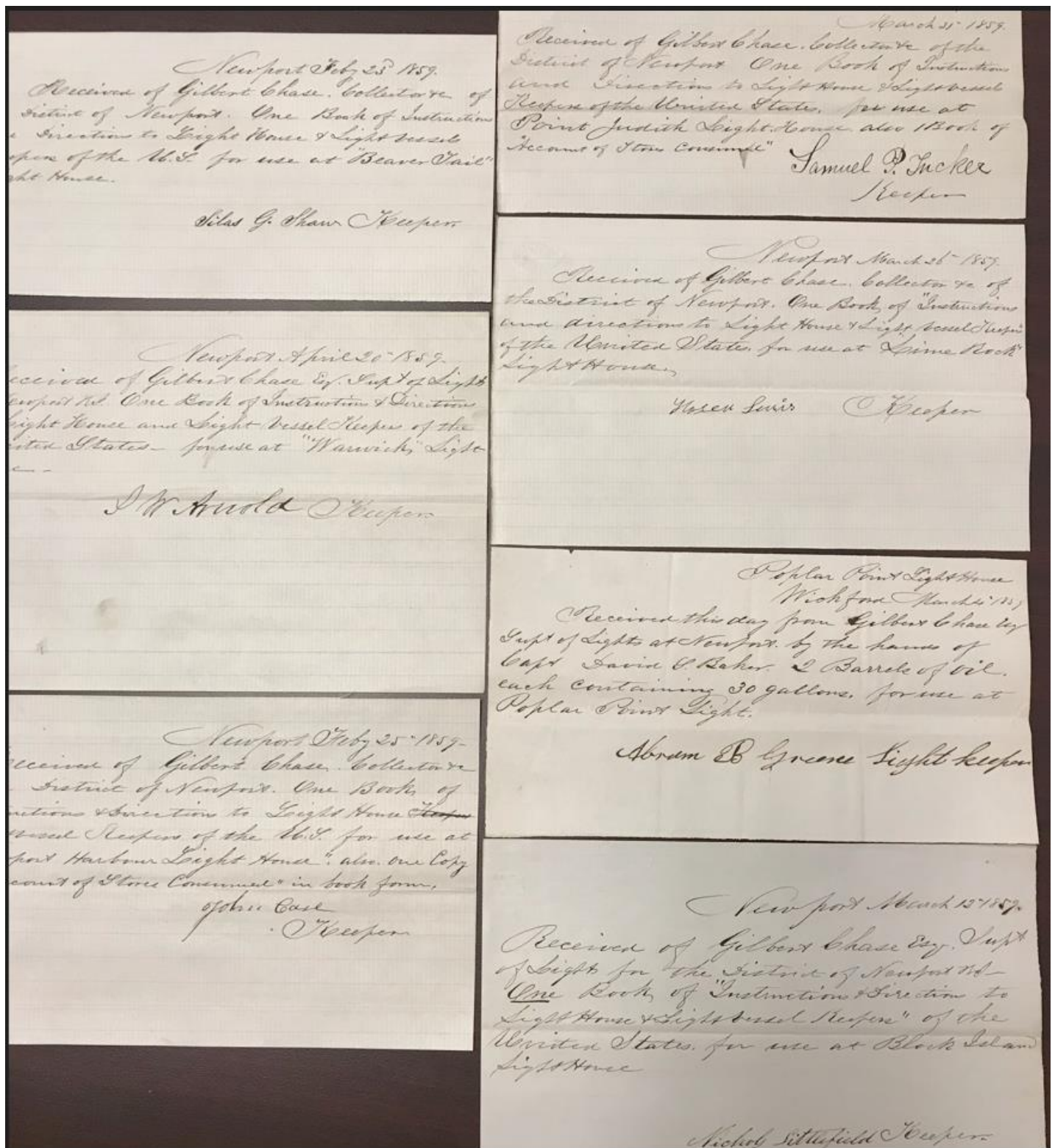
The BLMA Directors outdid themselves this time as Santa visited the lighthouse on Sunday, December 8, a beautiful, cold, windy day during our Open House. A special thank you to board member Bob Langton, who played the part of a very authentic-looking Santa.

Santa then spent the afternoon in the museum greeting visitors and reading a holiday story to the kids. Many people shopped in the gift shop and enjoyed the delicious goodies made especially for this event.

Lighthouse Wisdom

“Once the Lighthouse is seen, the rest of the sea is ignored.”- Terri Guillemets

Blast from the Past



Beavertail Lighthouse Correspondence, Courtesy of the National Archives, Waltham, MA. RG26 Newport, General Records 1792-1870

In modern times, managers would likely send out an email blast to a large group of employees giving them instructions on how to perform their jobs, but back in 1859, each Lighthouse Keeper was sent a handwritten note from the Newport Collector, Gilbert Chase, along with the *Instructions & Directions to Lighthouse and Lightvessel Keepers Manual*.

From the dates on the letters, we can see that this process spanned months and required Keepers to respond that they received the instructions manual. Represented are Silas G. Shaw-Beavertail Lighthouse, Samuel P. Tucker-Point Judith Lighthouse, Stephen W. Arnold-Warwick Neck Light, John Case-Newport Harbor (Goat Island) Lighthouse, Nicholas Littlefield-Block Island (North) Lighthouse, Abram B. Greene-Poplar Point Lighthouse (apparently received oil but not the manual), and Hosea Lewis, father of the famed female Keeper Ida Lewis-Lime Rock Lighthouse.

Accident at Beavertail! 1868?

This story was published by Lighthouse Log Editor Cheryl Vislay's great-grandmother Emily Dunham Hall in her 1938 book "Random Scenes for Nancy" about her grandparents, Lighthouse Keepers Silas G. Shaw and wife Ann. The Rhode Island Department of State and Regents Board chose the book "Random Scenes for Nancy" as one of many to represent the history of Rhode Island, specifically Newport and Providence at Rhode Island public schools to celebrate America's bi-centennial year, 1976.

Nowhere in the published work does Emily mention the name Beavertail or the word lighthouse. Still, the description of the waves rising above the cliffs to the road in front of the house, and the jagged rocks surrounding it, fishing off Bonnet Point just across the bay, and descriptions of the underwater causeway at Mackerel Cove places this story at Beavertail. Because Emily used aliases for her family members' names and Silas and Ann had five sons, it is impossible to know which son and the exact date this event occurred. Since son Joseph Shaw, as an adult, went into the fishing business with his father Silas, I assumed that it would be a young Joseph accompanying his father on this fateful day.

Born in 1862, Joseph would have been about six years old in 1868- the family left Beavertail in 1869.

This conversation occurred between 10-year-old Emily and her grandmother Ann Shaw; Emily called her grandparents Fardi and Munny.

"Munny, and now you have time to tell me just one more story, about Fardi sewing up Uncle Joey's head!"
"My pities, that puts me in mind of Father! An' he'll be here directly, an' you makin' me late—well, one time, I forget whether it was evenin' or mornin', anyway it was arfter a storm an' the big waves was washin' right up onto the road, clear up to the old house, an' that set up high on a cliff, you know, an' the causeway at Mackerel Cove was under water, so you couldn't get anywheres without a bo't.

"I disremember what Father was about, but like as not he was makin' his bo't farst, so it wouldn't wash away—he'd just come in from Bonnet Point with a mess of tautog—an' Joseph was playin' around on the wet rocks, when all to once he slipped an' fell, right on top of his head, right onto a jagged rock, cuttin' a great gash so his brains bulged out.

Father see him about the time I did, an' he run an' picked him up, quick, before a big wave should come an' wash him away. "An' he brought him in, white as a ghost— they was both white—an' I thought the boy was dead, an' I guess Father saw that I wasn't far from it, myself, for he said, "Buck up, now, Mother, no time to drivle, get me a silver spoon, a big needle, some white thread, an' that bottle of rum on the closet shelf! Step lively, an' don't fret, we'll fix Joey in a minute."

"So, I managed to get the things he wanted, an' he put Joey, still unconscious, on the kitchen table, an' he took the silver spoon an' pressed those brains back just as gentle as a woman, an' a sight steadier than I could have, anyway. An' then he took the needle an' linen thread an' dipped them in the rum, an' he sewed that scalp up, six stitches he took. Then he washed the wound all off with salt water, an' Joseph come out all right! But Father was white as a ghost, an' had to have a little noggin of rum, to steady himself, but he come out right as reason, too, in a few minutes.



Editor Cheryl Vislay adapted this illustration from a photo of her husband and son re-enacting the accident at Beavertail Lighthouse.

The Flag

After my oldest brother passed a few years ago, I was given my Dad's military flag. Dad had served in the Army during World War II in Europe. He didn't speak of it much, but I know he spent time in England and France before being sent home for medical reasons. Dad had enlisted a little older than most, leaving behind a wife and three kids at home. Later, he and Mom would raise nine children together. When the flag was given to me in the display case, I brought it home, not knowing what to do with it. But something kept nagging at me. I wanted to see the flag flying proudly and freely. I asked several friends, including some in Jamestown, if they had any ideas. We thought maybe we could fly it on the Jamestown dock on holidays such as Veteran's Day or the 4th of July, but I understood only resident families could do that. I later found out that wasn't true.

On 9/11 this year, I was visiting Jamestown. As I was in New York City on 9/11, I do a little something each year in memory of the fallen on that day. When I asked around how many volunteer firefighters worked in the department, a woman said she would ask a friend who would know the answer. She came back with the answer, and I donated. Later that same day, I went to a local spot for a drink. I started having a conversation with the nice man sitting next to me. He mentioned that a woman had donated to the Jamestown Fire Department that day. I smiled and said, that was me. Turns out he was the person who gave the local woman the information I needed. It was Tommy. I'm still unsure how, but in our conversation, my Dad's flag came up. I told Tommy I was searching for a place to fly his flag. I was shocked when he told me he was a caretaker at Beavertail Lighthouse and would be happy to fly the flag there. Meeting Tommy in that way felt like destiny.

I couldn't believe that my father's flag would proudly fly in Jamestown at Beavertail. For me there was no venue more appropriate. As a child, my oldest brother was in the Navy and stayed in Jamestown. I remember driving there with my parents to drop him off after spending time at home in Natick, MA. To me, Jamestown was so beautiful. Later in life, I met my closest friends sailing around Jamestown and Beavertail. It is my favorite place in the world, and they are still my best friends. Tommy allowed my friend Cleo Anderson of Jamestown and I to raise my Dad's flag on a beautiful Saturday morning. Unfortunately, there was not much wind that day, so Dad's flag could only flutter a bit. But still, it was very emotional, and we got some lovely pictures.

Cleo and I returned the following day to see if we could get better pictures. It was still pretty calm. As Cleo and I waited for the wind to pick up, I told her the flag flies in honor of my Dad but also for my two brothers, Charles and Burton MacGregor, who served in the military, and for Gene Sokolowski, a dear friend who had served in Vietnam. I spent many happy years sailing around Jamestown and Beavertail on Gene and his wife Barb's boat and Cleo and her husband Jack's boat. As we waited for the wind to pick up, I kept saying, "Come on boys, blow us a kiss." Just as we were ready to leave, the wind came up, and we got some beautiful pictures of the flag and the lighthouse. Just then, four fighter jets flew over, heading for the Gillette stadium. Seeing those jets fly over Beavertail Lighthouse with Dad's flag flying below on that sparkling fall day was magical!

I am grateful for my Dad and all those who serve. I am especially grateful to Tommy for giving me these beautiful memories. And I know my Dad, brothers, and friend are so happy to be there looking over that gorgeous bay!

Judy MacGregor



Sunset at Beavertail Lighthouse WJAR Skycam



A special thank you to BLMA Director Bob Langton for checking the WJAR Skycam and getting this great shot of the November 7th Sunset. As Bob mentioned, "This is another way to take in the beauty of Beavertail 24/7 even if you can't be there."

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast

Point Judith (Part 3)

On August 4, 1844, fifteen years after the loss of the NEW HOPE, the sloop CHAMPION became a victim to the rocks near the lighthouse at Point Judith. The New York Spectator provided the following report, “*ASHORE – A sloop was seen ashore on the east side of Point Judith, 4th inst., close to the light, with all sail set; she had bilged, and the sea breaking over her. She is described as a large sloop, painted bronze color, with a white rail, white masthead and topmast. It is supposed she went on in a fog and had been there but a short time when seen at 7 A.M. Her boat was hauled up on the beach, and a number of persons nearby. We learn from a slip from the Newport Rhode Islander, that the above vessel is named the CHAMPION, of Falmouth, Captain Chadwick, from _____, bound to New York, and is loaded with salt.*” Except for her sails and rigging, this American merchant vessel ended her days here, a total loss.



Nine years passed before another vessel completed her final voyage near the lighthouse at Point Judith. The date was October 3, 1853, when the schooner VIRGINIA ran ashore at 3 a.m. near the lighthouse. The cause of the disaster was not determined or not reported.

This account came not from the newspapers but from a periodical magazine called The Sailor's Magazine and Naval Journal, which stated, “*Schooner VIRGINIA, from Alexandria for Fall River, went ashore about 3 o'clock on Monday morning on the rocks on the southwest part of Point Judith, near the light house, and is reported to have bilged and will be lost.*” This report did not find details of her size, origin, or ownership.

On July 15, 1857, just under four years after the loss of the VIRGINIA, came the loss of the American schooner CHARLES PITMAN which had sailed from Port Ewin, NY, well up the Hudson River. The Newport Daily News of the 17th reported, “*Schooner CHARLES PITMAN, Marvel, from Port Ewin for Fall River, loaded with coal for the Pocasset Manufacturing Company, of that place, went ashore on Point Judith last night in a dense fog. The vessel and cargo will probably be saved. T. & J. Coggeshall are rendering the necessary assistance.*” Despite the optimistic prediction that T. & J. Coggeshall would save the schooner, the vessel did not survive this event, leaving her bones among many others at this location.

There was only a single reported totally lost vessel at Point Judith during the Civil War, and its loss had nothing to do with the war...unless you consider the ongoing battle that sailors had with the fog. The 100-ton schooner was named VICTOR, but there was some confusion over her pedigree. She was either the 10-year-old vessel of that name owned in Dennis, MA, by her master, Captain Sears, or she was built in Boston in 1838 and measured 167 tons. On this voyage, she was traveling from Quincy, MA, headed toward Sandy Hook with a cargo of granite. She ended her days and was abandoned ashore on the east side of Point Judith. Probably due to the ratio of effort vs value of the cargo, no reported salvage was performed.

The diminutive 47-ton centerboard sloop GEN. KOSSUTH was the next to end her days off Point Judith, this time just ¼ mile south from the point. On September 25, 1865, Captain Edward C. Coe was heading for Providence, RI, from Eaton's Neck, Long Island, with 80 tons of moulding sand. The 55-foot-long sloop who called Madison, CT, her home port was built in Lyme, CT in 1845. As a twenty-year-old, she had probably already been relegated to carrying a cargo of less value and was indeed counting the days till the end of her career. Perhaps reflecting that age, her owner had no insurance on the vessel. The captain surmised that the foundering resulted from a leak in her centerboard box, a not-uncommon failure of that design. Any hope of saving the vessel was quickly abandoned.

Just over a year after the loss of the KOSSUTH, on Christmas Eve of 1866, the bark C.B. HAMILTON's final voyage ended. The HAMILTON was a 257-ton bark owned by Joseph Hull and others in Portland. She measured 100' x 24' x 11'. She was traveling from New York City to her home port, in ballast, when she ran aground 200 yards off the beach and about 1 mile west from Point Judith. Seeing the imminent peril for all aboard, Captain Sheppard ordered the ship's boat to ready for their escape, but immediately as he lowered it into the waves, the storm dashed it against the bark and splintered it to pieces. But not giving up hope, one of Sheppard's officers found an empty barrel to which he tied a rope and threw it into the raging sea. The barrel made its way to land, and gathering spectators located a small boat, which they tied to the rope so it could be pulled out to the wreck. This boat saved all aboard the bark, but the vessel's fate was sealed. She would sail no more.



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
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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

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 2025 Lighthouse Log or our website for details on the reopening of the Tower and Museum.

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.