



The Lighthouse Log

Summer 2010

**BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION**

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A Message from BLMA President

Undoubtedly June was the busiest month ever for BLMA. DEM's Great Outdoors Pursuit brought hundreds of families to the Light Station for the first time. All sorts of outdoor activities, including BLMA's t-shirt designing contest and scavenger hunt kept the kids and parents busy. The overcast day did not deter families from climbing to the light tower catwalk and enjoying the somewhat limited view.

Seventy-five artists found vantage points to create unique images of the light station during the three days of Paint Beavertail devoted to painting. A silent auction of work submitted highlighted the event for art lovers. Several photos in the gallery capture the "artist's eye" at work.

The first year of the Capital Campaign came to a close at the end of July. Gifts included \$10,000 from the town of Jamestown in support of our efforts, with an additional \$15,000 being talked about. Contributions from our members were a significant factor in our successful first year. A donation envelope is enclosed for your use as we begin the second year of fund raising.

Our Shipwreck Historian Jim Jenney continues his research and production of shipwreck and marine disaster narrative sheets. The comprehensiveness of the data collection is unique in R.I. Several BLMA members met with R.I. Historical Society staff to discuss the project. More inside.

Lanette Macarouso has been working with a researcher at the National Archives, unearthing 19th century records

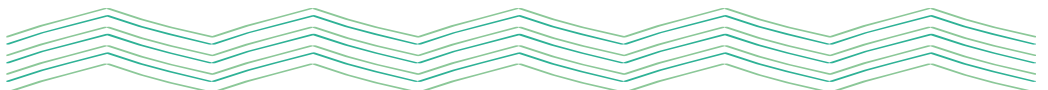
about Beavertail Light Station that will add greatly to our knowledge of illumination and fog signal research. It is becoming increasingly clear that the Station played a major role in the advancement of 19th and early 20th century lighthouse technology.

I am pleased to announce that the BLMA has received a preservation award from the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission and Preserve Rhode Island. To be presented during a ceremony in October at the Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum, the Rhody Award is in honor of our ongoing preservation work, particularly the accomplishments in 2009 involving the two houses and the tower.

If you have not done so, please send your email address to Linda Warner at mailmum@aol.com. We want to notify all members of events and activities in a timely manner.

Finally, as my term as President winds down, I want to make a suggestion. The national treasure that we know as Beavertail provides thousands of visitors, regardless of life circumstances, an experience that is both enriching and renewing. If it has been a while since you have driven out Beavertail Road, take a ride this fall. Examine closely the restoration work both completed and underway. Take a walk. Enjoy the aesthetics of the new Clivus toilets. Seek a new vantage point for viewing what has been familiar to you. Experience again the delight of discovery.

– RES



Practice Makes Perfect

The phrase “practice makes perfect” is defined as “the act of engaging in an activity again and again for the purpose of improving or mastering it”. Military forces are well known for following this course with the goal of minimizing the loss of men in battle. But sometimes things don’t work out exactly as planned as in the story of the day that the fishing steamer **WILLIAM A. WELLS** had a run in with the soldiers of the One Hundred and Ninth and One Hundred and Tenth Coast Artillery Companies at Fort Greble who were busy having what they called sub-calibre practice.

The 68-ton steamer was outbound in the West Passage on a fishing trip with 22 men aboard when its presence conflicted with routine artillery practice from the diminutive fort on Dutch Island. The newspaper account details the story best. *Fishing steamer WILLIAM A. WELLS, of Macomber and Nickerson’s fleet, was struck by a stray shell from Fort Greble Thursday afternoon while proceeding down the west passage, but is still afloat. The worst of it is that it was a mortar shell and came right down through the deck and the iron water tank, and finally rested in the substantial structure of oak above the keel which is called a keelson and which on these big fishing steamers is no slight affair. Luckily it was a sub-calibre shell which was fired. Had it been one of the 850-pound shells regularly fired from the mortars that keelson would not have stopped it and the WELLS would probably have needed to be beached on the Narragansett shore.*

It was about 3:20 to 3:30, the WELLS was steaming close to the shore, perhaps a mile and a quarter below Fort Greble, the towing target was about a quarter of a mile off her port beam, and about abeam, when the shot struck. Some of the men say they heard a whistling or shrieking as it came over the port quarter. It hit the forward house just port of the middle line and just forward of the big hatchway. It was coming straight down in the angle at which it was fired, which was quite high, and went through

woodwork forward so much

Also

the of the house like pasteboard. it went through the top and bot-

tom of the big iron tank, and sank to rest in the keelson. An examination showed that the water was running out of the tank and it was disconnected from the other, which is on the starboard side. An examination showed the shaft sticking in the keelson; and it was removed. It is three inches in diameter and about a foot long and weighs 18 pounds. It was not an explosive shell, else this story would have been different.

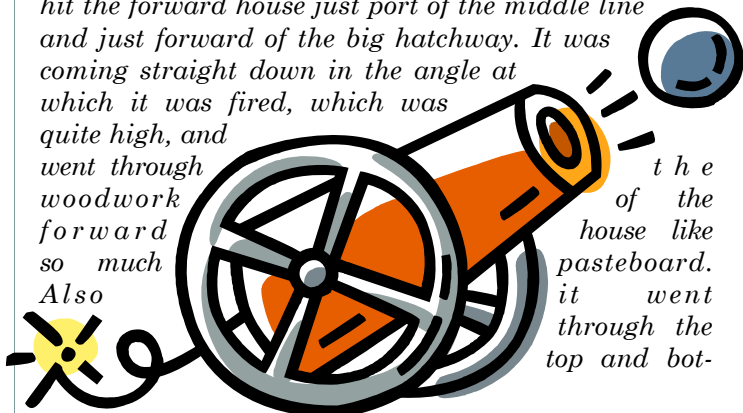
The WELLS returned to Newport and Captain Frank Macomber, who was on board, made a protest at the custom house. This morning one of the men from Fort Greble came over and learned what damage had been done. Repairs will be made by the Newport Shipyard, but the repairing of the iron tank will be something of a job. So far as can be remembered, this is the first vessel to be hit by the target practice, except a “touch” which the SWARTOUT received once while towing a target. As the captain of the WELLS stated today, he had often gone past while target practice was on and always found that it was so conducted that his craft was in no danger. The shot which struck the WELLS was reported as “lost” by the plotters at

Fort Greble. No splash was seen and there was nothing to show where the shell had fallen until the report that the fishing steamer had been hit was received. At the time the shot struck the steamer most of the crew of 22 were forward of the deck house, some in the rigging and some on the deck. No one was close to the line of the shell which struck the steamer on the side nearest the fort and had not reached the middle line of the steamer until it struck the keelson. Many times, especially when the rapid-fire gun target practice was on people out in boats, especially fishermen, have felt a trifle shaky about where the shots were going to fall, but no one was ever in danger before this. There is probably more chance of variation in firing sub-calibre than the full sized shells as the latter must go truer. Just so is there more danger with the small guns than from the big ones. The shell, none the worse for wear, is on exhibition in the wheelhouse of the WELLS. No charge is made for the show.

We can only speculate on just how long Captain Macomber had the shell “on display” in his wheelhouse or how many times the story of this “near miss” was retold by each of the members of the crew, but it is likely that the story outlived the incident by many a year. It was truly a trip to remember.

– JFJ

“So far as can be remembered, this is the first vessel to be hit . . .”



Beavertail Oil House

Erected in 1909, the oil house at Beavertail Light Station was used to store fuels for the beacon at a safe distance from the Keepers' residences. It served that purpose until 1931 when the light station was converted to energy from electrical sources. The structure continued in use, however, as a location for the emergency fog signal compressor. When the lighthouse was automated in 1977 and there was no longer a requirement for active duty U.S. Coast Guard light keepers, the oil house fell into disuse. The emergency generator was removed from the building and the structure became a repository for surplus items and equipment.

Subsequently, the building received minimum attention other than a roof replacement. Although the brickwork ensured a long structural life, the wood trim and doors reflected the lack of maintenance.

Varoujan Karentz, a visionary member of the BLMA Board of Directors, recognized the situation and determined to resolve it. He saw not what was there, but what the building could be: a mini museum about the history of illumination at Beavertail and other exhibit topics of educational and historic interest. Varoujan submitted a proposal to the Newport Restoration Foundation requesting funding to renovate the building. Because of numerous competing grant requests from other organizations, the Foundation was able to accom-



Oil House restoration is well underway thanks to BLMA volunteers headed up by Guy Archambault. Keith Lescarbeau, President of Abcore Restoration has provided guidance. Pictured above are Don O'Laughlin, Charlie Osenton, Wenxian and Richard Calabro.

modate a portion of the grant request. It was decided that the sum accorded was sufficient to purchase necessary materials provided that volunteers performed the labor.

The answer to the call for volunteers was most gratifying. A cadre of seven to nine dedicated individuals have appeared weekly to donate their talents and energies to refurbishing the building. Thus far they have completed the following: emptied the building of its contents of broken tools, equipment, used oil, bicycles, assorted "junk" (it required four pick up truckloads to the transfer station); pressure

washed the building interior and exterior; chipped, wire brushed, and primed the exterior; wire brushed, sanded, and primed exterior brickwork; wire brushed, sanded, primed and painted exterior wood trim; replaced rotted trim; built new entry doors; and replaced some wiring.

The volunteers have been working diligently since mid-July. With their continued industry, work is expected to be completed by the end of September. The job could never be completed without them.

— GA

QUOTE OF THE MONTH (OR PERHAPS THE YEAR)

"I'm telling you this, you cannot restore a lighthouse with bake sales"

Scott L. Hollman, owner Granite Island Light Station, Lake Superior as reported in the Boston Globe.



Fund Raising Activities

Capital Campaign Completes a SUCCESSFUL YEAR !

Over \$72,000 was raised during the first year of the Capital Campaign, with members contributing a substantial portion. Donor generosity allowed for meeting the \$50,000 match required for the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission grant. In addition, dehumidifiers and sump pumps were purchased and in-

stalled. The Donor List for the first year will be published in the fall newsletter.

Several fund raising events are being planned for the near future, including wine and cheese gatherings and tower openings for invited guests, including town council officials.

Enclosed with this newsletter is an envelope designed for your use

in responding to this second year request for support. We have a number of major expenses facing us, including heating system and electrical upgrades for both houses and exhibit development for the oil house space. Pledges are most welcome. As a reminder, your gifts are tax deductible
– RES

“Paint Beavertail” Wrap-up ... *on a personal note*

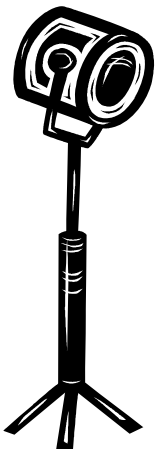


Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association and the Conanicut Island Art Association partnered to host a open air art event, “Paint Beavertail-Thru the Artists’ Eyes,” June 24-27 at Beavertail.

Over seventy-five artists helped capture and share the beauty of the light station complex and surrounding area. Their talents were remarkable and the completed works of art added vibrancy to the keeper’s house. Art lovers enjoyed the silent auction culminating the four day event and compliments were in abundance. A team effort made this first-time event a wonderful success.

Thanks for all your help, Joan Vessella, Co-Chair

THE SPOTLIGHT SHINES ON ...



John & Teddy Leyon have served as a docent team since the mid 1990s—John in the Gift Shop and Teddy in the front room. Currently, John is a Director, serves on the Ad Hoc Facilities Committee and Chairs the Nominating Committee. Teddy does a wonderful job presenting light-house history and technology to museum visitors

John had a career with the Bell System and subsidiaries. Teddy was an at home mom when their two daughters were young. Subsequently she had a career in real estate and consulting. They enjoy singing in choirs and choruses, and just about anything historical.

Sadly, this wonderful couple will soon be leaving us for year round residence in Florida. They will be visiting grandchildren in R.I. on vacation trips north and promise to stop by and say hello. I know you join me in wishing them the best with this new chapter of life.

– RES

New-found Chapters of our Lighthouse Story Now Under Study

Washington DC based researcher hired by BLMA

This summer, the BLMA hired noted Washington, DC-based lighthouse researcher and author Candace Clifford to search for records maintained by the National Archives on roughly 200+ years of the 19th and early-20th century history of Beavertail Lighthouse. Ms. Clifford's search has given us hundreds of pages of new knowledge.

These letters, purchase records, log entries, administrative correspondence, and other documents provide BLMA program developers resources for telling our story. The mostly hand-written records include correspondence about studies of light- and sound-transmission, the lamps and fuels proposed or in use here at various times, building construction and repair projects – including the construction of the 1856 tower and its light and fog signal machinery (at a total cost of \$14,500), and discussions on plans, problems, and solutions. Also described are Narragansett Bay events prompting investigations and changes in staffing and equipment. References to other Rhode Island lighthouses are here, too, since navigational aids of all kinds deployed from Maine to New Jersey were managed by the Third District of the US Treasury Department's Lighthouse Board (1852-1910), afterwards called the Lighthouse Service (1910 to 1938). Also included are letters of Stephen Pleasanton, the penny-conscious but dynamic Chief Superintendent of Lights for the US Treasury from 1820 until 1852. The files include communications from suppliers, inventors, administrators, keepers and many others involved with our lighthouse and others.

Ms. Clifford searched hundreds of individual records and bound volumes, photographing each document containing the name "Beavertail" and fitting in

with categories of information we sought. She has been researching US lighthouses for more than ten years, and has written or co-written several books, including *Mind the Light, Katie; The History of Thirty-Three Female Lighthouse Keepers*, which is available in the BLMA Gift Shop.

As for working with the documents in this collection, it's a bit like reading through all the links downloaded through a massive Google search – but the difference is that the hundreds of pages are all hand-written! Many of them are in exquisite handwriting, but many are also faded, blurred, and require steps to decipher them.

Once in focus, each communication seems to lend at least one useful detail. The collective story emerging is rendered by a cast of persons speaking to us from an age of nation-building endeavors that express both a 'can-do' spirit, and a pleasing courteousness. Some of the messages are brief while others extend elegant and forceful arguments. The most interesting story lines arise from flurries of letters and responses detailing actions carried out as recommended by the authority figure detailing a key problem.

Because this documentation was required by the government, protected through the centuries, and now found, we have terrific content from which to create new chapters in lighthouse history. Soon we will be planning exhibits for the oil house being renovated the volunteers led by Guy Archambault. We will draw information about the lamps and fuels partially from this newly acquired collection of ours.

I look forward to working with my BLMA associates to make the most of these facts and insights.

– LM



Shipwrecks of Narragansett Bay

The BLMA shipwreck project of identifying shipwrecks and marine disasters in Narragansett Bay is continuing on a weekly update basis.

Our historian James Jenney averages 2 to 3 completed data sheets per week. Conanicut Island and its surrounding waters now have over 125 ship incidents recorded. Each marine disaster is researched from multiple sources including a variety of newspapers, government records, reference books and ships logs. Jenney compiles the data along with a chart location of the incident and a photograph or sketch of the vessel (s) involved in addition to the vessels



Jim Jenney, Varoujan Karentz, and Richard Sullivan met recently with Karen Eberhart, Special Collections Curator, RI Historical Society, to discuss progress of the Shipwreck and Maritime Disasters project and explore data display options.

particulars and cause of the incident on a "Wreck Data Sheet". The work is now concentrating around the Newport area.

BLMA's Wreck Data Sheet files now numbers over 350 incidents and continues to grow. The archive today is probably the most extensive detailed collection of marine wrecks and disasters existing in Rhode Island. We hope that someday when the museum is expanded into the Keepers Building, a computer display retrieval system will be installed and allow visitors and researchers to examine the individual data sheets. The RI Historical Society has also recognized the works value and requested the collection also be archived at their Providence library location.

– VK

"Paint Beavertail" Photo Gallery



Painters created many different works of art over the course of a beautiful 4 days in June.



T-Shirt Design Contest

On June 13th the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) sponsored a "Great Outdoors Pursuit" at Beavertail State Park. As part of the program, BLMA organized a t-shirt design competition for children of elementary school age.

A total of 145 entries were received and a panel of six judges selected thirteen children for awards. Brittany Shippee was the Grand Prize winner.

Awards were made on June 27th at the Paint Beavertail event. In Addition to the Grand Prize there were two runners-up and 10 honorable mentions. The winning design is available on shirts being sold this season in the Gift Shop

Dorrie Linn, Chair of the design committee was very pleased with the response of the children and parents. She expressed her gratitude for the assistance given by BLMA volunteers and friends throughout all phases of the project.

- RES



Every child who completed an entry in the T-Shirt Contest received a memento of the occasion. Here, Dorrie Linn, Chair of the T-Shirt Design Contest committee is making a presentation. In the background is Steven Wright, Superintendent of Parks & Recreation, DEM.

Lighthouses are rapidly disappearing all around the world, and with them goes an invaluable link to our past. Your membership will help a great deal to keep Beavertail Lighthouse, the third oldest in the United States, from following that sad pathway. Please talk to your friends, neighbors, and family members and urge them to join all of us who are thoroughly convinced that Beavertail Lighthouse is most worthy of our efforts to save it. Thank you in advance for sharing this membership application!



WE OFFER THE FOLLOWING MEMBERSHIPS with ANNUAL DUES:

Please check one

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Life | \$ 300 | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Life | \$ 200 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor | \$ 100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family | \$ 40 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$ 25 | | |

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ email _____

Please contact me about helping with BLMA projects and services.

Please make your checks payable to: **BLMA**
 P.O. Box 83, Jamestown, RI 02835

BLMA is a 501 (c) (3) non profit organization



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

FYI

Saturday, September 25th is Smithsonian Magazine Museum Day



This is a national event in which Jamestown will be well represented. The museum tower will be open from 11:00 am to 3:00pm.

The Jamestown Historical Society will have the Windmill, Museum and the Conanicut Meeting House open for visitors as well. Make a day of it!



A reminder that the Annual Meeting will be held on **Tuesday, September 21**, at 7pm in the Community Room of the Jamestown Library. Please plan on attending. Our guest speaker Mary-Ellen Wilczynski, Real Property/Planning Branch, U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineering Unit, Providence, RI will bring us up to date on what is happening with lighthouses in the northeast region. Refreshments will follow. See you there!