



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

The Lighthouse Log

FALL 2012

The quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Message From The President

At the BLMA Annual Meeting it was voted to expend funds to stabilize the foundation of the 1749 Tower. Additional goals for the coming year are gaining approval from the US Coast Guard, RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission and RI DEM of the architectural plans to expand the museum operation into the Keeper's Quarters. Additionally, identifying possible sources and programs for gaining funds for more preservation

work and museum expansion. Finally and perhaps most importantly, attracting additional docents to complement the outstanding group that continue to allow operation of the current museum.

Thank you to all who support BLMA through annual dues and/or volunteering time on special projects or as docents. — SM



The photographer interrupted a conversation between Stewart Morgan and Ed Sanderson at the Annual Meeting.

Annual Meeting a Success

The 2012 Annual Meeting was held September 18th at the library. A good number of members were in attendance. Stewart Warner was elected President and Suzi Andrews, Vice President. New Board member elected was Linda Warner. The complete list of officers and board members is on page 1.

Ed Sanderson, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, spoke about the preponderance of Rhode Island's historical structures adjacent to the Rt. 95 of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, Narragansett Bay.

This artery running 28 miles inland served as the thoroughfare for transportation from colonial times to the height of the jewelry, machine tool, steam engine and precision tool industries at the beginning of the twentieth century making the Greater Providence area one of the wealthiest urban areas in the world. Guiding the tremendous volume of maritime traffic were the many lighthouses erected during the 19th century in Narragansett Bay and environs.

He described the many efforts at preservation and restoration that have taken place in the past 75 years and the number of "firsts" and "oldest" designations to be found. For example, Newport

has the largest collection of restored 18th century structures in the country.

Wonderful pastries and an assortment of beverages have been a hallmark of the informal reception following the meeting for years. This year was no exception. — RES ■



Site Acquisition Status

The transfer of the Beavertail Light Station from U.S. Government ownership to RIDEM/BLMA under the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 is still on hold. The process requires the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) to declare the property "excess" turning it over to the General Services Administration (GSA) for disposal. Then through another process the National Park Service (NPS) will select a new owner. This year 12 lighthouses located along the Atlantic coast and in the Great Lakes have been transferred to private owners.

BLMA for the past 6 years has been prepared to apply for ownership on behalf of RIDEM meeting NPS requirements as the site steward for its future

preservation. However, the issue of lead paint soil contamination and the cost of its removal is holding up USCG action. Three years ago soil samples were collected at Beavertail and a few low level "hot spots" were identified and designated for removal. Funding for the removal effort, which is a USCG responsibility was delayed and Beavertail was placed on a priority list following Baker's Island Light in Massachusetts.

We have been informed work has commenced at Baker's Island and we are awaiting further information from the USCG hopeful that funding also was secured for Beavertail. — VK ■

2012 Grants

This year BLMA applied for three grants, two for preservation and a third a combination for preservation and education projects.

The two matching fund preservation grants were unfortunately not funded. They were to repair the exterior of the fog signal building and replace

missing stones of the 1749 original lighthouse foundation. BLMA will continue to look for funding help for these two projects. The 1749 foundation needs immediate attention and BLMA will apply its matching funds to protect further deterioration of this 1749 artifact (see article on the 1749 Foundation elsewhere in this newsletter).

An extensive grant application was submitted for restoration and preservation of the light tower interior and the preparation to expand the museum into the Keeper building. It includes the acquisition of interactive visitor displays for use in the expanded museum. — VK ■

1749 Foundation

In 2008 a non evasive underground radar survey was funded by the National Trust for Historic Places to determine the exact construction of the Peter Harrison designed lighthouse foundation. In addition two other detailed engineering studies were conducted by Victor Calabretta and James Wermuth on how best to repair and preserve the deteriorating artifact.

Although grant funding for the restoration of the original stone and mortar foundation was not secured, BLMA has allocated its designated matching funds to undertake immediate actions to prevent further loss of the stones. Complete restoration will be deferred until more funding is raised.

At the present time a large cavity void exists threatening further stone losses on the south west side of the

foundation, caused primarily from expansion of ice dislodging stones coupled with storm wave action. The base of the threatened area is exposed loose shale. Remedial action is to remove the loose shale, construct a concrete base pinned to the bed rock below and replace the missing stone work. All the missing stones from other locations

on the octagonal shaped foundation and loose mortar will be replaced and repointed.

Contractor David Lamontagne who has done exemplary work previously for BLMA has been engaged to perform the work this fall. — VK



There Are, Of Course, Two Sides to Every Story

The USS CAPELLA, a 4000 ton naval cargo vessel, rested quietly at anchor in the protected waters off the east side of Conanicut Island. Although it was just a few months after the United States had entered the war with Germany and Japan, the vessel was as unthreatened as could be possible given that it was April 9, 1942, just four months after the surprise attack in Hawaii. But this was not Pearl Harbor and the vessel was safe, or so those aboard thought. At the same time and almost six miles farther up the bay, Lt. Charles Mills, Jr., in command of PT-59, was busy training men for the task of attacking enemy ships with the Mark 8 torpedo. This should have been the same as any other training session but events were about to occur that would make this a “bad day” for both vessels.

According to local news which was said to have been taken from the official Navy report, a torpedo was accidentally released from the training craft due to a “defective firing circuit”. In reality, it was later revealed that the cause of the release of the torpedo was “human error” when one of the trainees accidentally turned the firing switch key to the firing position, effectively launching the weapon from the torpedo boat. Mills, it was said, was below checking on navigational charts before setting up his run on the designated torpedo testing range. As soon as he became aware of the premature launch, he rushed to the deck and watched, in disbelief, as the torpedo sped off southward down the bay. He was hopeful that the torpedo’s tendency for problems would, in this case, be the one thing that would save his embarrassment (to say nothing of his career opportunities). But such was not to be the case and although the unsuspecting cargo ship was anchored more than five and a half miles away, the weapon sped on with unerring accuracy toward it.

Local Jamestown residents reported hearing a small explosion and then a larger one, both at around 6:30 p.m. The men aboard the CAPELLA were as surprised, or perhaps more surprised, than those aboard the PT boat. There was no lookout on the

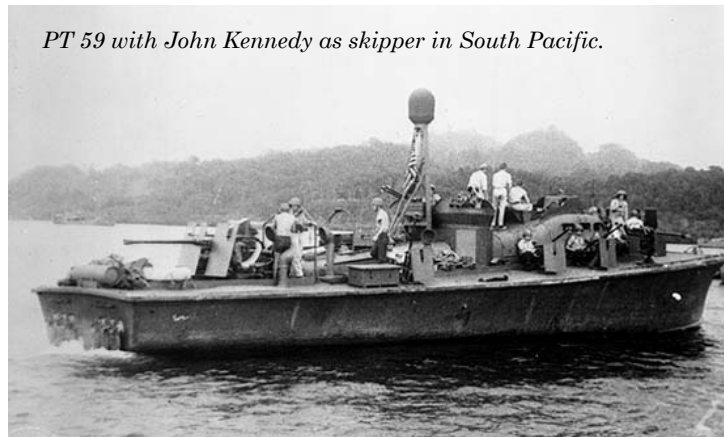
alert for a speeding torpedo, planned or otherwise, to threaten their ship. There was no need for that in the protected waters of Narragansett Bay, right? However, luck was with those aboard the cargo carrying vessel as even though the torpedo struck their vessel with uncanny accuracy, no hands were killed in the “attack”. Eight men were taken to the Naval Hospital with injuries but none of them were reported to be in a serious condition.

Meanwhile, back on the PT-59, Lt. Mills made the correct decision after the accidental torpedo launch and headed his vessel at full speed chasing the determined weapon, not in hopes of catching it, but in the hope of retrieving it when its energy was spent. There was nothing that could be done to stop it but there were, perhaps, steps that could be taken once the striking occurred to assist those aboard the unplanned target ship. Almost immediately after the CAPELLA was struck, the motor torpedo boat arrived on scene and there was no question as to what action would be appropriate. Despite the

difference in size, the navy lieutenant brought his vessel up to the stricken cargo vessel and proceeded to push her toward the shore. His rational was, of course, that should the vessel sink, it would be better if she was in the shallow water close to shore rather than in the deeper water where she was anchored,

some three-quarters of a mile southwest from Gould Island. Other naval vessels quickly joined in the effort and that quick action met with success.

Overall, although the incident was not one which cast a shining light on the use of torpedo boats and the training taking place within the confines of Narragansett Bay, the incident ended without a great brouhaha, probably because in the Spring of 1942 there were many other vessels being torpedoed off the eastern seaboard of the United States. It is also interesting to note that although this was the largest vessel ever to be torpedoed by accident in Narragansett Bay, it was by no means the only one... but those are other stories. — JFJ



PT 59 with John Kennedy as skipper in South Pacific.

Master Plan Continues to Unfold

The “Master Plan for the Future” prepared by Newport Collaborative Architects in cooperation with a BLMA committee serves as the blueprint for ongoing activities. Distributed to a number of constituencies in October, 2006. The Plan provides recommendations and options for the buildings and grounds. It does not address educational programs, exhibits or community outreach. The completion of updates to the heating and electrical systems for both houses last winter set the stage for museum and gift shop expansion.

Consistent with the Master Plan the Board decided last winter to expand into the Keeper House. Plans call for the creation of a second floor apartment, removal of the current kitchen and creating a doorway between the two houses in the area of the map board in the current gift shop. The Master Plan describes the two car garage as the location of the Gift Shop. Current plans are for a transitional gift shop in the front room of the Keeper house. This move will provide substantially more sorely needed space for an expanded shop with the point of sales feature being installed this fall and winter.

Plans for the changes to the Keeper House have been drawn by architect Peter Borgmeister, reviewed by the

BLMA Board and sent for review to the Coast Guard, DEM and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission. Once approval is received, bids will be solicited and work will commence..

An ad hoc Exhibits Committee chaired by Suzi Andrews has been meeting to discuss the topic of new and expanded exhibits. The group is considering a number of topics, building on current exhibits that are

popular with visitors. Concurrently an inventory of materials owned by BLMA and members is being compiled.

The ad hoc group has been discussing the possible roles of a consultant to assist with the planning of space use. Several have been identified and will be invited to meet with the committee and encouraged to submit a proposal. — RES ■



Ad hoc Exhibits Committee meeting, Suzi Andrews, Varoujan Karentz, Warren O'Sullivan Stewart Morgan. George Warner and Richard Sullivan are absent from picture.

The Spotlight Shines On....



Newly elected President, Stewart Morgan, has not let any grass grow under his feet since joining the Board two years ago. Not only has he been actively involved in the upgrades to the two houses, he initiated and oversaw the renewing of the walls and floors in the museum this past spring. The last newsletter described the process in some detail.

“Stew” graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and spent four years

on active duty including a tour as CO of a loran station in the south pacific. He spent several years with the McDonald Douglas aerospace program before embarking on a career having global assignments in the international medical devices field.

“Stew” and Martha have two children and three grand children. He enjoys his winter vacation in Hawaii and can be seen regularly riding his bike from one end of the island to the other. — RES ■



Linda patiently explains the light tower policy of 4 feet must not be taken too literally.



Stewart Margan reviews architectural plans for Keeper House with Board members Betty Gully, Joan Vessella and Linda Warner.

Lighthouses are rapidly disappearing all around the world, and with them goes an invaluable link to our past. Your financial support will help a great deal to keep Beavertail Lighthouse, the third oldest in the United States, from following that sad path. 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! Your renewal letter will arrive later this year. Please share this with a friend or neighbor.



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Mark your calendars and save the date!

Holiday Open House

December 2nd, 1:00 pm—3:00 pm

