



The Lighthouse Log

Fall 2013

The quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Message From The President

BMA has gained valuable insights during the first season of operating an expanded museum and over the winter months will work on any required changes. Next season will be our official opening as all exhibits should be done and others updated. Progress would not have been possible without many volunteer hours being spent. To those people thank you for your time and effort.

Approximately 30,000 to 32,000 guests came to the museum this year, enjoyed the exhibits and purchased items in our expanded gift shop. Gift shop profits were up significantly over past years. The daily costs of operating the museum are met primarily by profits from the gift shop and monies from tower openings. We were able to open the tower to guests on six occasions.

There is still lot of work to be done – working with the USCG to move their equipment in the Electrical Room so visitors can access the tower from inside the museum, further investigation in how to control water seepage in the basements, raising money to replace funds used, new exhibits etc.

For BLMA to provide the best museum experience for our guests additional docents are needed. The expanded museum requires three docents per shift, while four would be optimum. This does not include docents needed those days when the tower is open. If anyone has ideas on how to attract additional docents please let the Board know.

SM ■



1749 Foundation Orientation

During the 2013 preparation for pouring a new concrete protective cap over the 2012 reconstructed stone work, an architectural oddity was discovered. It confirms the incredible design capabilities and talent of Peter Harrison, America's first architect who in designed and built the first lighthouse on Beavertail Point in 1749.

The 2012 reconstruction plan included the installation of a decorative "Compass Rose" on the surface of the new concrete protective cap. The Compass Rose is to be centered in the exact center of the octagonal base and the BLMA committee agreed the compass bearing should be aligned with the cardinal point of "True North" rather than "Magnetic North". The octagonal base configuration was discovered in 2008 by "Soils Sight Ltd." from their underground radar imaging project funded by BLMA and the U.S. National Trust for Historic Places.

The contractor David LaMontagne Woodworks Inc. of Oakland, Rhode Island drew a concept plan, measured off each octagonal angle and intersected each with a chalk snap line to opposite angles, thereby finding the center point of the base. A GPS compass was placed at the center point with a "True North" sight line extended to the octagonal rim and marked.

Amazingly the "True North" line fell exactly equidistant from the foundation's North face octagonal angle points. Also the north face itself lies exactly

perpendicular to the True North line. A tribute to Harrison's intention and thought process when designing and building the tower.

To confirm this alignment, a magnetic sight compass (Alidade) was corrected for annual variation (declination) and isogonic year 2013 date correction for Beavertail Point (West-14.5 degrees) . The resulting sighting between the "True North" chalk line and magnetic North of the compass read exactly 14.5 degrees. Several methods were available in the 18th century for determining "True North". It is not known which method was used by Peter Harrison.

VK ■



North Face with "True North" chalk line

Exhibit Update

New exhibits continue to be put in place as they are developed. This is an ongoing activity and will continue during the months when the museum is closed

Interactive Displays

The new touch screen table is a big hit with visitors. Thirty short modules using both Power Point and video format present historic and contemporary topics of interest to visitors of all ages. The powerful computer driven screen had some start up problems needing to be debugged. Our programmers have been addressing the issues and a smoother operation is anticipated next season.

Kiosk Station

In addition to the large screen touch table, a new double station kiosk has been fabricated. Computers and touch screens have been procured. The back-to-back kiosk will display a variety of new information including real time tracking of vessels in local waters, shipwreck data retrieved from the BLMA data base and webcam videos of nearby interests.

Getting affordable internet services at Beavertail has been a perplexing and difficult process over the past three years. It is cost prohibitive for Cox to run a cable out to the light station. The contract fees and installation costs for satellite are too high. Verizon won't update their wire out to the light station for DSL service.

Most promising is obtaining permission for the use of a high gain microwave antenna with existing wifi networks in the area or paying a fee for a commercial wifi network in Newport.

Story Boards

Three large story boards have been created, two of which hang in the Keeper House hallway, highlighting the creation of Beavertail State Park and Military activities during and following World War II. The third board informs visitors about ship pilots who navigate large commercial vessels in and out of Narragansett Bay.

VK ■



Annual Meeting Recap

At the September 21st Annual Meeting the Nominating Committee slate of Stewart Morgan, President Suzi Andrews, Vice President, Joan Vessella, Secretary and Richard Koster, Treasurer was approved by the membership. It was an unusual year with no Directors coming off the Board.

Sarah Gleason, the evening's speaker, provided an historical perspective on the founding of the BLMA and the creation of the two room exhibit in the Assistant Keeper house.

In the early 1980s Sarah, an Educational Specialist with R.I. DEM was asked by the Director Robert Bendick to research local lighthouses with the objective of an exhibit for the Assistant Keeper House. DEM in partnership with the town of Jamestown operated the park, the town having leased for forty years a twenty acre parcel to the state.

Sarah's research was the first comprehensive review of RI lighthouse history. She reported that researching David Melville's early 18th century work provided the impetus for expansion of the exhibit, "The Light Must be Kept Burning: Rhode Island Lighthouses-Past, Present and Future" to the Kindly Lights, Lighthouses of Southern New England. Sarah took a six month leave from DEM to complete the book.

In 1987 Sarah was asked to assume the Directorship of the newly formed R.I. Parks Association, an individual membership organization created by DEM as a means by which individuals with interests in the state parks system could come together to pursue common goals, raise funds and promote greater park use through festivals and other widely publicized events. DEM's network of island parks was very much in the thoughts and plans of Association leadership, with headquarters envisioned at the Light Station.

By 1989 the "The light Must be Kept Burning" exhibit which had traveled to R.I. libraries for a year and a half was placed in the first floor of the recently renovated Assistant Keeper house. The Island Parks Association supported activities in state parks until 1993 when it was dissolved, members creating the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association with Hugh Bucher as President, Linda Warner, Vice President, Marion Pierce, Treasurer and Charlotte Head, Secretary.

Refreshments were available after the presentation.

RES ■

Museum expansion, the latest news

The Electrical Room at the base of the tower has been completely refurbished with new ceiling tiles and light panels, walls painted, electrical conduits painted and floor refinished. A protective shield has been installed in front of the wall mounted electrical boxes which can be easily removed by the Coast Guard for access. Some electrical boxes will have to be relocated by the Coast Guard. Once these boxes are relocated, the original doorway into the Keeper house will be available for use.

The Electrical Room will contain story boards describing the systems required to operate the light with easy visitor access from the Keeper house hallway. The tower will continue to be open to visitors for climbing on a scheduled basis.

WO'S ■



SCHOOL VISITS TO THE MUSEUM

School groups plan visits to the museum both spring and fall. Lighthouses are an integral part of American history and their study enhances the traditional social studies curriculum, particularly at the elementary level.

Linda Warner coordinates the visits. Schools that have visited in prior years often contact Linda directly; others use the website and requests are forwarded to Linda. Currently Linda and George Warner, Varoujan and Rose Karentz meet with the groups and guide the students through the museum. In the past, John and Teddy Leyon frequently guided groups of children through the museum and on the adjoining grounds.

Elementary school children often come with a series of questions to guide their visit and will seek out information from the story boards and other exhibits. Some school groups have constructed lighthouse models based on their visit. The photos that accompany capture moments during a recent visit of students from All Saints Academy, Middletown. The models being viewed were made by 2nd grade students from North Kingstown.

RES ■



The Only Thing We Have to Fear is Fear Itself



Although this famous quote has been attributed to different people at different times, the truth of it cannot be overstated. Long before it's delivery in an inaugural speech by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, these words would prove true in the case of a lost 2,700 ton freighter which was forced into an unenviable situation by fear which, when compounded by errors in judgment, would lead to her ultimate demise. The year was 1918 and the setting was "The Great War." Although the end of the war was approaching, a new weapon was being employed that would forever change the face of maritime battle...the submarine.

For most of the war, German naval forces used submarines with a degree of success to blockade the island country of Great Britain. As the value of this weapon became clear, a new use for them was initiated; they were deployed across the Atlantic Ocean to the eastern seaboard of the United States in an effort to curtail the shipment of war supplies from Britain's most staunch ally. This put American authorities in a quandary since they had no idea of how to defend vessels against this threat. Enter the freighter ONONDAGA, a Clyde Line vessel which was trading between ports on the Atlantic coast of the United States. Just thirteen years old at the time of her final voyage, she had served well and was under the command of one Captain Groggins, a prudent master who was about to become a victim of fear and bad judgment prompted by the circumstances that prevailed.

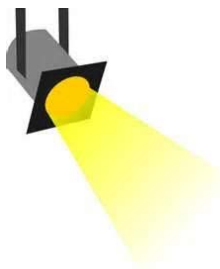
The ONONDAGA departed from Boston headed for Charleston, South Carolina, a trip which was not out of the ordinary for the captain and crew. This time, however, she was directed to sail an unusual course, not the one traditionally followed where she stayed a moderate distance offshore along a route that kept Block Island and Long Island well off her starboard bow. Whether it was due to pressure from her owners or just a strong suggestion from the military forces charged with protecting our coastal shipping from the dreaded U-boats, she was given orders to sail through Nantucket and Vineyard Sounds before heading offshore with strict orders to hug the coast for safety. She passed out of Massachusetts waters without mishap but as she approached Block Island her plans and destiny were about to change. When off Point Judith a Coast Guard patrol boat hailed the freighter and passed along a "request" that she change course and steam inside Block Island, following Block Island Sound to Long Island Sound to avoid waters where there were reports of enemy submarine activity.

This was not an unreasonable request and had it come during daylight hours and during fair weather it would only have been a minor imposition. But it wasn't daytime and the weather was not entirely cooperative. In fact, thick fog prevailed which made the trip even more challenging. A formula for disaster was almost complete but there was one more ingredient to add to the mix. Being unfamiliar with this route, though he was skilled in using coastal charts, Captain Groggins knew it would be wise to engage a local pilot but he quickly learned that none were available. The stage was now set and the captain headed westbound with great care. The master could tell by reviewing his charts that his biggest concern would be in passing "The Race", a narrow passage at the western end of Fisher's Island where fast moving waters created dangerous eddy currents that

he would have to contend with. He never got that far. The combination of the speed of the tidal flow through Block Island Sound and similar distinguishing features between the lighthouse on Watch Hill and that on Race Rock became the critical factors leading to the disaster.

It took the captain considerably more time than expected to run the full length of the southern coast of Rhode Island and when the lookout finally spotted what he thought was the light on Race Rock and adjusted his course to the northwest, he learned only when the ship ran on Watch Hill Reef that he had mistaken the lights. The one spotted was the light at Watch Hill and not at Race Point. This common error, which had happened to many other vessels in the past, would prove fatal. The ship ran on the reef where her bones lay to this day...a testimony to the effect of fear and bad judgment.

JJ ■

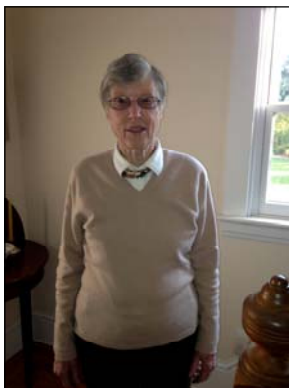


THE SPOTLIGHT SHINES ON . . .

The purpose of this feature has been to highlight BLMA members who make significant contributions to the organization “ behind the scenes”. Anna Templeton-Cotill is one of those individuals. Anna is someone who shows up when things have to be done, whether it be spring cleaning at the museum or filling in as docent on very short notice. When the Capital Campaign was announced Anna was the first to make a major gift.

Anna spent summers as a child at the family summer home, Horsehead. A whooping cough outbreak saw the family move to Beavertail Farm in the mid 1930s. One close playmate was Clayton Chellis, son of Keeper Carl Chellis. They enjoyed bicycling and playing among the fishing cottages and open spaces between the farm and the light station.

Anna’s first husband was on the faculty at St. Georges. She brought two children from that marriage to a marriage with a British Naval officer and a tour of duty in Moscow as Naval Attache. The family left Moscow the day of John Kennedy’s funeral. After spending forty years in England, Anna moved back to the U.S., settling in Jamestown in 1999.



Anna is an avid gardener and enjoys being a benefactor to a number of Jamestown organizations with which she shares values. She has just completed six years of service as a Jamestown representative to the Beavertail State Park Advisory Committee. Anna was a founder of the Dutch Island Lighthouse Society and served for eight years as a Director. Six grandchildren and eight almost nine great grandchildren are close by and are a real pleasure.

When you have a chance, spend some time with Anna. She has some fascinating stories to share.

RES ■



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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

Mark your calendars

ANNUAL HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

December 8th 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm



See the expanded museum at its holiday finest

As always wonderful refreshments

