



The Lighthouse Log

Spring 2014

The quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Published by

iCopy, Kingston

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Message From The President

BLMA has accomplished a great deal over the past 5 or 6 years and there is much more to do. In this edition of the Lighthouse Log there are articles on the brick fund raising project, two outstanding volunteers, repairs to the fog signal house and another of Jim



Jenney's wonderful stories. The commemorative brick project will allow you to become part of the history of Beavertail Lighthouse as the bricks will be those currently at the lighthouse unlike other brick projects where new bricks are used.

I want to thank the US Coast Guard for relocating the electrical equipment in the room at the base of the tower. This allowed us to reopen the old doorway that had been sealed off thus providing inside access to the tower.

Kudos to Richard Sullivan for his outstanding work as editor of the Lighthouse Log

If you have not renewed your membership please do so, if not you may be in jeopardy of not getting the newsletter.

With the expanded museum and tower openings BLMA needs more volunteers and docents. If you have time, please do so. It will be a very rewarding experience. By the end of the summer the nominating committee will be seeking people to serve on the BLMA Board of Directors. If you are interested or know a person you think would be a candidate please contact any current board member.

SM ■

Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Announces a Grand Reopening



The Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association is pleased to announce the Grand Reopening of the Lighthouse museum, June 14th 5:30 to 7:30 pm. Located at the southern tip of Conanicut island, the event celebrates eight years of work at the light station as conceived in a Master Plan funded by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and developed by the Newport Collaborative. Much has been accomplished; some activities remain.

This by invitation only event is designed as a :”thank you” for funding agencies, leaders in the preservation community, leadership in local and state government , contractors, media and benefactors of the light station who have responded with substantial financial support over the years.

Projects completed included restoration of the 1749 foundation and the 1905 oil house, restoration of the 1856 light tower, repairs to both the 1856 and 1898 Keeper and Assistant Keeper Houses, reopening the tower entrance from the Keeper House, new exhibits and story boards as well as the redoing of the original story boards in the Lens Room.

A specially designed kiosk allows the visitor access to the Museum’s unique shipwreck and marine disaster database developed by Shipwreck Historian Jim Jenney. Access to the Automated Information System will be available. Ship information includes real time vessel identification, including name, destination, cargo and flag of registration.

This interactive room has a touch screen table with a variety of programs including World War II at Beavertail, the history of Beavertail State Park and shipping in Narragansett Bay. Several visitors can enjoy different programs at the same time on the table.

The doorway providing access to the tower from the Keeper House has been reopened after being closed for many years. This access will be handy on those inclement days when the tower is scheduled to be open. This schedule can be found at the website www.beavertailight.org.

BLMA members will have the opportunity for an advance visit to usher in the 265th year of lighthouse service. On Memorial Day, May 26 at 12:30 pm, a special opening of the tower and museum will be held for members only. Light refreshments will be available. Be sure to stop by and say “hello”

Pathway to History

Brick Donation Form



Brick donations are a wonderful way to support BLMA while providing an opportunity to honor, memorialize, or recognize family and friends.

The bricks being used for this first phase of activity are the original Harris Pavers that have been in place for many years. The back side will be engraved and put back in place on the walkway up to and around the Assistant Keeper house.

The cost is \$150 for each brick. Please include check made out to Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association. You may also pay using PayPal. This link is found on the BLMA home page...www.beavertailight.org. Regardless of payment method, this form must be returned.

The message can be a maximum of 3 lines, 18 characters per line including spaces

More than one brick-wonderful! Simply reproduce the form

Payment : check for \$ _____ enclosed PayPal amount \$ _____

Please include:

Name

Address

Phone

Mail completed application form to: BLMA
Box 83
Jamestown, R.I. 02835



BEAVERTAIL GETS A FACELIFT

Fog Signal Building to get Facelift

This past fall BLMA was awarded a \$12,975 grant from the Champlin Foundations to undertake major restoration of the 1938/1939 historic Fog Signal Building. Work will be started shortly, but the grant requires our organization to match the funded amount.

The building was abandoned by the Coast Guard in 1971 when both the light and the fog signal were automated. The building has since been used as a aquarium and DEM Naturalist Center and has been popular with young visitors, but deteriorated to an unsightly state. Restoration work will entail repair of cracked mortar , repair and replacement of the glass block windows and their metal frames. The exterior will be parge coated and the red metal roof repainted. Pending available funds we hope to replicate the twin fog signal horn, which protruded from the seaward facing south wall.

Please help us raise the matching funds. Your donation is tax deductible per IRS regulations. Send to:

BLMA Fog Signal Fund
P.O. Box 83
Jamestown, RI

VK ■



Lens Room gets Needed Renewal

After more than 20 years, the lens room of the museum has a new look. The earlier statewide traveling exhibit titled “The Light Must be Kept Burning”, which graced the walls of the museum have been removed and five new story boards including one describing Fresnel lenses have been designed and mounted. Each panel tells a unique story of various Rhode Island lighthouse eras. The earlier theme of presenting “Early” RI lighthouses and how additional RI lighthouses during “The Golden Years” gradually changed to their “Decline” leading to historic “Preservation” of remaining lighthouses was retained. Each new panel displays original images formatted in an attractive 3D overly. The new exhibit ties together Rhode Island’s historic connection of 31 lighthouses, which at one time dominated the waters of Narragansett Bay and RI Sound.

The Fresnel panel explains the remarkable invention, configuration and application of Fresnel’s beehive prism lenses, at one time used in every lighthouse in America including Beavertail’s own 4th order Fresnel lens on display in the same room.

The shipwreck story board previously in the lens room has also been updated with newly found images and moved into the Interactive Display Room. This new story-board highlights shipwreck events, which took place around Conanicut Island over a 250 year period.

VK ■

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Interactive Displays

Our interactive computer touch screen display table installed last summer was a popular addition providing a series of selective education modules for our visitors. This year three additional touch screens have been installed providing greater use of this new technology with broader content. For example, the entire file of BLMA's Jim Jenney shipwreck data base presently numbering over 1600 maritime events will be available for display. We have many thanks to bestow on doctors David Smith and Alex Brincko, who over the winter months resolved technical problems and simplified operation issues by redesigning program interfaces. The educational substance of our museum has increased dramatically enabled by the memory content of the computers and the ability of visitors to easily view retrieved data.

VK ■



Alex Brincko getting the kiosk up and running.

Pathway to History project kicks off

BLMA's newest undertaking is designed to attract all Beaver-tail enthusiasts.

The sale of engraved bricks will be the focus of a major fund raising initiative beginning in May. The vintage Harris Pavers currently in place will be reversed and engraved with the buyer's choice of information. The initial walkway to be done is the entrance walkway from the road to the Assistant Keeper's House. The original bricks are larger than current bricks and will easily take the engraving. Order now to be among the first to leave a permanent legacy at the light station.



Your support not only beautifies the walkways but provides the funds necessary for the ongoing maintenance and repair of the buildings and grounds, a constant agenda item for BLMA. In addition, the development of new exhibits and display media is costly.

Decide on your message (s) fill in the form(s). Choose your payment method and be among the first to have your brick(s) reset on the "Pathway to History".

BJ ■

Occasional Series

From time to time, articles related to lighthouses will be featured.

Brant Point Light

Visitors to beavertail Lighthouse Museum will often ask, when told that they are standing on the site of the third oldest light in the United States, for the location of numbers one and two. Brant Point Light is number two, established in 1746 and Boston Harbor is number one, established in 1716.

A great deal of commerce took place between Boston and Newport in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The journey from Boston south along the east coast of Cape Cod was treacherous in bad weather due to lack of accessible harbors of refuge. Shifting shoals, fog, strong currents and sandbars on the south side of the cape made for hazardous transit under the best of conditions. Nantucket Harbor offered a sanctuary from the stormy weather that often occurred.



Brant Point Lighthouse

Locating the entrance to the harbor was very difficult until the first of what would be nine lights was constructed in 1746. Fires, storm damage and shoddy construction contributed to frequent replacement. One difficulty was lack of elevation for construction. The towers were being built on sand at sea level. It was not until 1856 that a tower was constructed that would survive both fire and the elements.

The local subsistence economy of the 17th and early 18th centuries had been supplemented with on-shore and along-shore whaling. Hunting whales to the horizon was possible with the modest boats being used since the sought after Right Whale floated after being harpooned and could be brought to shore for processing.

As whaling activities ventured further off shore, onboard whale processing techniques were developed. The discovery of the deep water Sperm Whale with a superior oil for illumination resulted in many more ships fitted out for long voyages. By the 1770s Nantucket Harbor was home to 150 vessels and was erecting the third lighthouse. The Revolutionary War reduced the fleet to 30 vessels by its end.

The postwar years saw a rapid increase in the number of ships and ports engaged in whaling. Increasingly, the whaling industry was fishing the Pacific and vessels were taking two, three, and four year trips. The New England whaling center shifted from Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard to New Bedford with its rapidly growing infrastructure necessary to support the growing whaling industry.

Nantucket harbor continued to serve as a harbor of refuge. Whaling was carried out on a reduced scale and a fishing fleet of day boats grew. The 1856 lighthouse and residence has lasted to the present. Built on a substantial granite foundation the building currently houses Coast Guard Station Brant Point. In the 1880s two jetties were constructed to mark and protect the entrance. Lights were placed on each. The current active light is in a structure built in 1901.

In the early 20th century two range towers with fixed white lights were erected as range lights to assist shipboard navigators find the harbor entrance. These towers were the latest in a series of range light navigation aids that had been constructed during the 19th century.



THE SPOTLIGHT SHINES ON . . .

David Smith and Alex Brincko are two of BLMA's newest volunteers. They have been working with the technical aspects of our latest equipment purchases like

ducks taking to water, as they say.

The touch screen table installed last season had a number of start up problems. They worked with the manufacturer to redesign components that were faulty and awkward to use. They have developed procedures to address operating problems remotely. This season the table will provide visitors with the quality experience that was anticipated when it was first installed.



Alex and David with the updated touch table. A labor of love for these guys.

A flat screen television has been adapted for touch screen use and will be mounted on the south wall of the interactive room. This screen will display data sheets from Jim Jenney's Shipwreck and Marine Disaster data base. Currently containing over 2000 records this collection promises to be the most comprehensive in the region.

David Smith graduated from Rhode Island College. He has worked for many years in software sales and product development. His current software product development has to do with school lunch programs around the country. His "partner in crime," Alex has undergraduate and graduate degrees from MIT and has worked for many years as an electrical engineer/marine scientist. Alex spent many years at both Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and the URI Graduate School of Oceanography creating equipment for research. He has had a number of cruises aboard oceanographic research vessels and it was in 1965 during a trip crossing the Indian that Alex did his first computer programming.

Be sure to say "hello" when you meet them. They are wonderful additions to our organization.

RES ■

THE TROUBLE WITH TRADITION



Almost all of us think about traditions in a positive sense. Traditions normally bring us thoughts and memories of good times with close friends or family. But this story is about a tradition which although not the cause of the disaster certainly contributed greatly to its severity.

The year was 1810 and the month was December. A small Spanish brig under the command of Capt. Angel Cifuentar was enroute to Bristol, R.I. from Havana with a cargo of rum, wine, iron, powder and specie, and a crew of sixteen men. Plagued by bad weather as she approached her destination, the vessel had the misfortune to run aground on Brenton Reef at the entrance to Narragansett Bay. This reef was no stranger to vessels and accounted for more than its fair share of losses over the years but this wreck was particularly devastating in its outcome.

The Newport Mercury dated December 29, 1810 offered the following, *"The Spanish brig MINERVA, 16 days from Havana, bound to Bristol, went ashore on Monday evening last about 7 o'clock on Brenton's Reef, near the entrance of this harbor, and in a few hours went to pieces. The Supercargo, Mate and seven men were washed from the quarterdeck of the brig, on which they were endeavoring to reach the shore, and drowned. The remainder of the crew, consisting of the boatswain and nine men, succeeded in reaching the shore on pieces of the wreck. The cargo of the MINERVA consisted of rum, wine, rice and 30 casks powder, which will be nearly all lost. But it's what the account doesn't say that makes this event particularly painful.*

The actual date of the loss was December 24th, Christmas Eve. In the year 1810, it was traditional when a vessel approached its destination on a holiday for those aboard to fire their cannon as a sign of joy and gaiety on their arrival ashore for the holiday. In the case of the MINERVA, the initial stranding, although severe, was not enough by itself to cause her immediate destruction along with the loss of more than half of her crew. When she first ran on the reef, the brig was stable enough so that the members of the crew were able to load and fire her cannon in an attempt to attract attention to their plight.

Their reasoning, although sound, was ill-timed and although many local inhabitants heard the cannon fire they mistook it to be an arriving merchant vessel signaling their happiness to be coming into port for the holiday. Because of that, the Newporters essentially ignored what the crew of the MINERVA hoped would be their call for assistance from the nearby shore. Apparently, the owner of the land immediately inshore from the reef noticed their perilous situation and quickly set off to the town on horseback for assistance. But during the period of his ride to town and the time it took to gather men to come and assist the shipwrecked mariners, the weather grew much worse resulting in the significant loss of life for which this event is remembered.

It is said that after this time the residents of Newport never again followed this tradition nor took the sound of cannon fire for granted. Unfortunately, that action was too late to have a positive effect on the captain and crew of the MINERVA. Whether or not a more timely arrival of assistance from the town would have made a difference is not known but it surely would have increased the chances of the survival of other members of the crew. Three of the bodies of those who perished were recovered, viz., Capt., mate and cook, and were buried nearby, on the Castle Hill Farm. The remains of the others were never recovered. Over the years Brenton Reef has been the site of dozens of vessels unlucky enough, or piloted with insufficient skill, to avoid the ragged rocks that were more than willing to tear the hull of a wooden vessel apart. To this day, the reef is a danger to be avoided during inclement weather by all but those mariners most familiar with the waters at the entrance to Narragansett Bay.



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 at
www.beavertaillight.org

Mark your calendar!



**May 26th Advance museum and tower openings
for members, 12:30—1:00 pm**

**Refreshments, climb the tower, enjoy the new and
refurbished exhibits**

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email address, please notify

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**HELP US
KEEP YOU
INFORMED**