



The Lighthouse Log

Winter 2024

Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Winter 2024 President's Message

Happy New Year Everyone,

I hope that you all enjoyed a wonderful holiday season. We celebrated our 30th year on September 28th at our Annual Meeting at the Senior Center and we were happy to welcome our new Board member, Kate Schweitzer. We had an excellent speaker, David Zapatka, who entertained our audience by discussing lighthouse photos taken at night. You can read more about him further in this newsletter.

Our 2023 membership drive is underway, so please renew your membership with us if you still need to. Information can be found on our website: www.beavertailight.org

You may have seen us at the Holiday Craft Fair at the Lawn School this year. We had a table with information about ordering our new Beavertail charity license plates. Check out our website for ordering information.

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Giving Tuesday was on November 28th this year, and we received \$2,210 in donations. We will again be participating in 401Gives in April. Sponsored by United Way of Rhode Island, this is a way to help various organizations in our state that need continual funding to help serve their communities. We have some fun events planned for 2024, so stay tuned for more information in future newsletters.

We were open for the first two weekends of December, and on December 3rd, we had our Holiday Open House. Bob Langton did Santa duty for us, hanging the wreath at the top of the Tower and entertaining visitors and their children.

We will be busy over the winter, working to keep our exhibits fresh and informative for our visitors next season. We also installed new Point of Sale software in our gift shop to simplify inventory tracking.

That's all for now. Enjoy a lovely winter in Jamestown!

Best wishes,
Diane



Christmas 1894



The below story was published in 1938 by Emily Dunham Hall, a granddaughter of Beavertail Lighthouse Keepers Silas G. and Ann Shaw. Emily called her grandparents Fardi and Munny.

This particular Christmas stands out in my memory. How clearly, I can see it. Fardi was a sick man, but he urged us to go on with our plans—old as he was, with shining bald pate and neatly trimmed beard, he could be heard from his room telling us to go “On with the dance,” and it seemed strange to us children that he should be sick and weak. And Munny, with a “well done” and “my pities,” hovering between bed room and studio, kept asking when the “show was to begin.” And what a gathering there was, that day. Our neighbors, ‘and hosts of relatives, and our own selves, and all talking at the same time a babble of happiness, warmth and cheer inside the old house. Outside, a glistening cold night. At about nine o'clock, I should say, there was a lull in the hubbub and everyone was surprised into complete silence by hearing the strains of a violin " tuning up" coming from the studio, with many squeaks and quavers, both high and low. Then it settled down to a merry tune with an irresistible tempo. There was a grand rush for the studio as everyone grabbed a partner and whirled into the dance. Our pretty little mother had given us a complete surprise with her fiddler from Warwick. It was a joyous time. The open fire snapped and crackled its own accompaniment; and someone started singing. Then a door into the long room opened slowly. What a surprise, to see Munny and Fardi come gliding into the room! Fardi leaning heavily on Munny as they danced with measured step, somewhat haltingly but still with sparkling eye and smile of old. They came slowly and everybody made way for them as they danced. Yes, danced, with steps that were faltering, but still with the same proud bearing of their generation and their kind. The firelight played upon them, accentuating the dark shadows and making a picture for a Rembrandt's brush. The fiddler slowed his tune to suit the aging steps, and the children clapped their hands and danced around in glee. That Fardi and Munny should be joining in again was like old times indeed! “Trip it neatly as you go, Mother, on the light fantastic toe!” At last, they paused. “There!” said Fardi, breathing with difficulty. “Went around once, anyway! When that fiddle began to sing, me an’ Mother had to ‘shake a leg’ once more, just once more, anyway!” Fardi was Elizabethan in all his ways and mannerisms. Again, the merry fiddler struck up his tune. And weak and out of breath, through the door they danced. It closed softly after them. The grownups looked at each other and then away, furtively wiping their eyes, while the children laughed and sang and danced the night through, unconscious, as is their birthright, of life's shadows. A few weeks more and the onetime Beavertail lightkeeper was laid with his fathers in the little cemetery at the end of Farewell Street.

CV

BLMA Open House

On December 3rd, BLMA Directors hosted the annual Open House at Beavertail Lighthouse. The weather did not cooperate, so the Jamestown Fire Department could not help hang the wreath on the lighthouse tower as they usually do. However, Santa (Director Bob Langton) saved the day by climbing the lighthouse tower stairs and hanging the wreath himself. See the lovely cover photo with the wreath shining brightly. Luckily, the local news made it out to the lighthouse and covered the event. BLMA Directors Sandy Paterson, Nancy Beye and Reindeer Rudolph (Joan Vessella) helped Santa entertain the children that came out to the event with a table full of goodies for all to enjoy.



From the BLMA Archives Lighthouse Log Spring 1999

Actual radio conversation released by the US Chief of Naval Operations.

#1: Please divert your course by 15 degrees to avoid a collision.

#2: Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

#1: This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course!

#2: NO! I say again, divert YOUR course!

#1: THIS IS A US AIRCRAFT CARRIER. WE ARE A LARGE WARSHIP. DIVERT YOUR COURSE NOW!!!

#2: This is Puget Sound Lighthouse! It's your call...

BLMA Annual Meeting & 30th Anniversary Celebration



Guest Speaker David Zapatka

*captured more than 190 lighthouses at night under star-filled skies during the new moon phase when nights are darkest. His latest book **USA Stars & Lights: Portraits from the Dark** was published by the USLHS in 2020, and sales proceeds support USA Stars & Lights travels.”*

Plenty of goodies were served during the event, including this delightful cake by our own Nancy Beye to celebrate our 30th Anniversary.

On September 28th, Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association held its Annual Meeting at the Jamestown Senior Center. After conducting a business meeting and the election of new officers, we were pleased to have David Zapatka as our guest speaker. David’s presentation, *USA Stars & Lights*, featured nighttime photographs of lighthouses he has taken over the years, including Beavertail Lighthouse and Plum Beach Lighthouse. David was instrumental in restoring the Plum Beach Lighthouse in North Kingstown, RI. From his website: *His night lighthouse photographic project was adopted in 2018 by the United States Lighthouse Society and is called USA Stars & Lights. As of the summer of 2022, David has visited nineteen states and has similarly*



Winter Wonderland at the Lighthouse

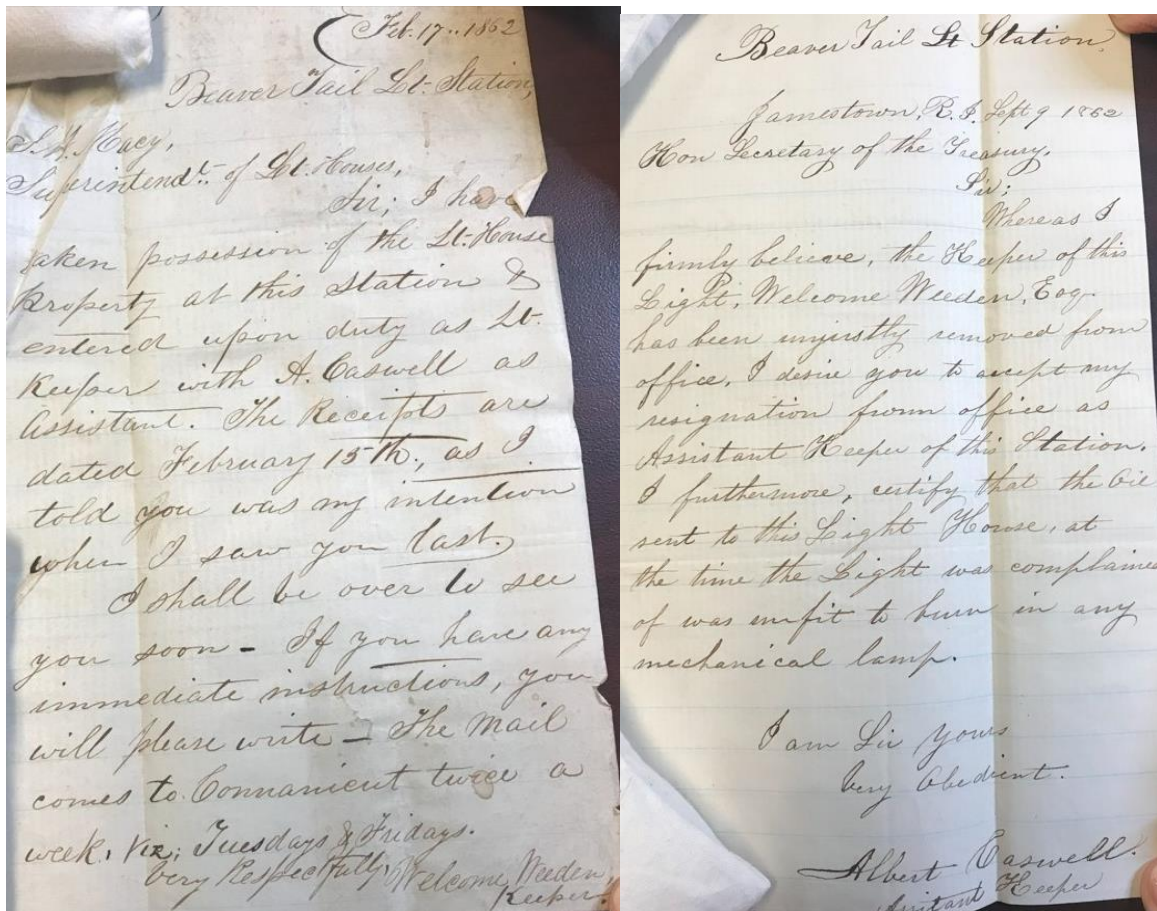


Clockwise from top left: Onne van der Wal, Don Miller, Bob Dutson



Keepers: Welcome Weeden and Albert Caswell

January 1862 – September 1862



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

If you have toured the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum or checked the online BLMA Archives, you may have seen a photo of Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper Peter J. Lee (1862 -1863) and his family. You may have noticed a subscript below the photo stating that Peter Lee applied to be a Keeper to free up a younger man for the Civil War effort. Welcome Weeden was that young man.

According to Jamestown census records, Welcome Weeden and Albert Caswell were local lads, probably friends, in their mid-twenties by 1862. Welcome just a couple of years older than Albert. Welcome was active in politics, becoming a Representative in the State of Rhode Island General Assembly from Jamestown (Republican) by 1860. The young men's "connections" may have helped them obtain these Lighthouse positions. Welcome's father, the late Job Weeden, was the elder brother of former Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper Robert Hazard Weeden (1844-1848.) Albert was the grandson of Philip Caswell Sr., likely the same man who served as Keeper at Beavertail Lighthouse between 1803 and 1816. Albert's father, Captain Philip Caswell, was, for about 40 years, the operator of the sail ferry to Newport. While the Weeden family roots run deep on Conanicut Island, with the earliest being an original proprietor of Jamestown, the Caswell family is descended from three passengers (Richard Warren, George Soule, and Francis Eaton) of the ship Mayflower, which landed in Plymouth in 1620.

Albert's rising entrepreneur father built both a successful drugstore business, Caswell & Massey, which is still in business today, and a real estate company. Both made him rich. Philip Caswell built the first "cottage" at Jamestown for the famous marine artist William Trost Richards, the first of many rich and famous emigres to flock to Jamestown.

Welcome and Albert were assigned to their posts at Beavertail Lighthouse in January 1862. According to the September 13, 1862, Newport Mercury, Abraham Lincoln assigned Welcome Weeden to Beavertail Lighthouse himself (see Lighthouse Log Winter 2022, page 6 for details on the previous Keeper's removal.) Both young men would have a tenure at Beavertail of less than nine months.

Welcome Weeden is often called William D. Weeden in online lighthouse sources, most likely a misreading of his name during transcription. Multiple lighthouse documents, such as the letters above, and legal documents, such as his

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marriage certificate and military records, show that his actual legal name is Welcome, not William.

As we can see from Albert Caswell's resignation letter, lighthouse authorities removed Keeper Weeden due to failing lamps on the lighthouse. Weeden had apparently complained of the oil quality. According to newspaper articles of the day, the quality of lamp oil was an ongoing issue at Beavertail during the Civil War and beyond, as lighthouse authorities removed a later Keeper for openly complaining about the oil quality, which caused the lamps to go out with regularity. The government swapped lard to burn rather than the spermaceti or whale oil usually used to light the lanterns. According to published accounts, Rhode Island Governor William Sprague, who had influence in Washington, was unhappy about reports of the government's shortcomings. After all, they were in the middle of a massive war effort, and supplies needed to maintain the lighthouses took a lower priority than supplies needed for the war effort. Welcome was removed. Albert resigned in protest.

Welcome must have moved his young family to Fall River, Massachusetts, after he left the lighthouse because he enlisted from there into the Massachusetts Infantry on February 14, 1864, Company G 58th. Sadly, his tenure as a soldier was briefer than that as a Lighthouse Keeper. He mustered in on March 26, 1864, and was captured by Confederate forces on May 19, 1864 during the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House. Here, they took Welcome as a prisoner of war to the infamous Andersonville, Georgia, prison camp. Captain Henry Wirz was the Officer in charge at Andersonville, and conditions at the camp were so atrocious that Wirz was the only Officer tried and executed for war crimes during the Civil War because of conditions at the camp.

Welcome Weeden died there of dysentery on or about July 13, 1864. He was buried there in a mass grave with other prisoners in what is now the Andersonville National Cemetery.

In 1865, Welcome's 23-year-old widow, Carrie, again living in Jamestown, filed for a pension for her and her children, aged 3 and 5. This military record and related documents show that the Welcome Weeden who died at the Andersonville prison camp, was the same lad who grew up in Jamestown, Rhode Island, as a neighbor of Albert Caswell.

Albert remained in the Jamestown/Newport area, and he and his children benefitted greatly from his father's success. He died in Newport at age 90 in 1927.

CV

Ancient Water Pipe Replaced



The ancient leaking iron water-line pipe entering Beavertail State Park and the light station grounds estimated 100 years old has finally been replaced. A study had been done which determined that the old line was leaking, but it was more cost effective to replace the line than to try and track down the leak and repair it. A new PVC water line almost a mile long is now connected to the WW II Command Post and the Lighthouse.

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast South Shore of Block Island (Part 5)

Although several vessels were stranded in this area after the loss of the KIENZLE, authorities would not record the next total loss until October 29, 1883, when a small schooner named VESTA found herself in trouble. The 132-ton VESTA was built in Dorchester, New Brunswick, Canada, in 1872 by E. C. Palmer of St. John, New Brunswick, owner. Under the command of Captain J.K. Harper, the vessel was part of the coal trade for which countless vessels were needed at this time. Under the hatch covers, the 85-footer carried a load of bricks and coal from Philadelphia to her home port. The report of the life savers for the incident starts, *“At about 11:30 at night, the patrol of the station saw through rain squalls a vessel stranded on Lewis Point, southwest side of Block Island, one mile from the station”*. The well-trained surfmen sprang into action and brought their surfboat to the beach. A heavy sea was running, and the night was reported as exceedingly dark with rain pouring in torrents, but the surfmen overcame these obstacles. Although the small boat could not reach the side of the wreck, they got close enough to the jib-boom, enabling the crew members to jump into the boat one at a time. By two o'clock in the morning, they had all been rescued and stood on the beach watching their vessel as the waves tore it apart. Within a week, the schooner went completely to pieces with little or no salvage.



On June 6, 1887, one of only two steamships lost on the south side of Block Island came to grief about a mile south of the life-saving station. At 764 tons, this was, at that date, the largest vessel to come to grief in that locale. Her name was ACHILLES, and she was an iron-hulled vessel built in Chester, PA, in 1870 for the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company. As you might expect, she was carrying a cargo of coal, actually 1,027 tons of it, to power the locomotives of the day. Stokely Warrington was in command on a voyage from Philadelphia, PA, to Newburyport, MA, at the time of her loss. Like many before and after, the 195-foot-long steamship was a victim to the persistent fog in the area, the life-saving stations were closed for the summer, and the station's keeper did not learn of the wreck right away. He had to recruit some residents to help with the rescue effort. In good time, the locals rescued the sixteen-man crew from the wreck, which had struck the rocks in a very exposed and challenging location. Ultimately, she became a total loss where she lay.

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Another large coal carrier, this one the four-masted schooner W. H. FREDSON, shared a fate similar to that of the VESTA of 1883. She was caught in the fog at night and ran ashore about ½ mile south of the life-saving station on May 4, 1890. Captain Doane was her commander on a voyage from Philadelphia, PA, to Boston, MA, with 1,000 tons of soft coal. Except for her crew, nothing was saved from this wreck, possibly because of her age. Built in 1866, she was approaching a quarter century of service when lost. Initially, this vessel was built in Russia and, shortly after that, was sold to the United States government, where she became a gunboat. Later, she was reconverted to a merchant vessel but had a most exciting career.

The schooner-barge RELIANCE became another storm statistic on the southwest part of Block Island and very close to the life-saving station on February 20, 1893. She was likely purpose-built, as she was only three years old when she made her final voyage. She measured 186 feet in length by 35 feet in beam, drew 16 feet of water, and registered in at 841 tons. She had a capacity for a considerable amount of coal. When lost, she was carrying 1,450 tons of anthracite coal from Philadelphia, PA, to Boston, MA, for her owners, the Reading Railroad Coal & Iron Company. She was caught in a storm when in a string of similar barges. She was cut loose from the string by men aboard the tug PANTHER and left to drift until she reached the shore helplessly. She carried five persons aboard her, including one woman and a boy. The surf washed four overboard and drowned them just before the vessel ran aground. The final surviving crewman held on as long as he could until the mast he clung to washed overboard. He was never seen again. In a short period, the furious storm took its toll and tore the barge to pieces.



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.



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 2024 Lighthouse Log or our website for details on the reopening of the Tower and Museum.

To contact the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum please call (401) 423-3270, or email us at info@BeavertailLight.org.

Group Tours & Events

We will announce any updates and/or changes to the schedule on our website at BeavertailLight.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.