



The Lighthouse Log

Spring 2024

Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Spring 2024 President's Message

After a mild winter, we are happy to begin preparations for the spring season at Beavertail. Over the winter, our board members were very busy refreshing the museum's contents. We are excited to share some new exhibits and artifacts with you. You can read more about this further in the newsletter.

On Monday, April 1st, this year's edition of 401Gives starts at 6:00 AM and continues until 6:00 PM the following day, April 2nd. This is our third year participating in this statewide initiative powered by the United Way of Rhode Island to help us continue our efforts to preserve and maintain the historical nature of our lighthouse.

This year, we are holding our Docent Breakfast on Saturday, May 11th. We are always looking to expand our group of volunteers, so please contact Nancy Beye at 401-413-0374 or jtownelc@aol.com if you are interested in joining us. It is very fulfilling to volunteer at Beavertail, whether it is greeting visitors in the museum's front room, working in the gift shop, or helping with the Tower climbs. Please also reach out if you have other skills you would like to share as a volunteer. You can meet other volunteers by attending our breakfast, sign up for shifts, and receive training. Stay tuned for more details. Our opening weekend is Saturday, May 18th, and Sunday, May 19th. The rest of our season schedule, including Tower climbs, will be available on our website.

Our new license plate was an enormous success last year. It is gratifying to see so many Beavertail plates on the road. If you do not have one yet and are interested in purchasing a Beavertail charity plate, please visit our website for details on how to order one.

We would like to remind our members that if they have not yet renewed their membership for this year, please do so.

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Our website offers several levels of membership. Plus, a new feature allows members to set up their membership to renew automatically each year at the level they choose. Our membership dues are an essential source of revenue for our organization and enable us to continue our maintenance and preservation efforts.

Regarding the lighthouse's ownership transfer, the deed transferring the property from the General Services Administration to the State of Rhode Island was signed in early January. We look forward to our partnership with the State and hope to provide more information soon.

Finally, we recently learned that the RI PBS series "Our Town" has named Jamestown the subject of the show's 18th installment, which is scheduled to air in September 2024. As part of a documentary, community-building initiative, and fundraising effort, organizations such as Beavertail are invited to volunteer as filmmakers and storytellers to share the unique experiences of their location. Our Board members are learning more about this, so stay tuned for more details.

Enjoy the spring!

Best wishes,
Diane

Meet Our Newest Director

Kathleen A. Schweitzer, "Kate"

"Before retiring a few years ago, I worked on environmental programs with the U.S. Navy and the Coast Guard. Working on lighthouse projects was one of the best parts of my 18 years with the Coast Guard. It was all fascinating, from managing the clean-up of lead-contaminated soil at the Prudence Island and Beavertail lighthouses to participating in the relocation of the Gayhead Light back from the eroding cliffs on Martha's Vineyard.

I'm so glad I can continue, in my retirement, by being involved with lighthouses, especially Beavertail Lighthouse, by volunteering as a board member of the BLMA."



The W. Craig Armington Memorial Scholarship

It's that time of year again! The W. Craig Armington Memorial Scholarship Fund was established by BLMA for high school seniors living in Jamestown, RI, who have been accepted at a college or university and will begin studies in the fall. The student selected will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to be applied toward college tuition, books, or fees related to their course of study. Scholarship applications must be postmarked no later than April 23, 2024. Applications can be downloaded from the website:



<https://www.beavertailight.org/scholarship/ScholarshipApp2024.pdf> Applications are also available at the Jamestown Library.

Restoration Work on Historic Buildings Complete

Recent improvements to the Keeper's building and the Assistant Keeper's building at the lighthouse involved the restoration of the exterior parge coating that had started to blister and peel after many years of enduring the



harsh marine environment. The restoration was an enormous undertaking because workers had to scrape the parge coating by hand in the places where it was blistering. In many areas where the coating had blistered, the old mortar between the exterior brick surface had to be re-pointed because it had also deteriorated. Once all the exterior surfaces had been re-pointed and prepared as necessary, a very high-quality elastomeric parge



coating was applied, which, in some places, required up to three coats. The result was beautifully restored exterior surfaces for both buildings, which will withstand the harsh elements of the marine environment for many years. Special thanks to the *1772 Foundation* and *Preserve Rhode Island Historic Preservation* for a 2023 matching grant award of \$8,450 that helped to fund this restoration project.

Leo N. Orsi, Jr.

Spring Cleaning at the Lighthouse

The Program Development Committee is sprucing up the museum and getting it organized in preparation for a busy summer season. They have spent time reorganizing and moving things around this winter in some of the museum's rooms—it is still a work in progress. Some lighthouse models are now on a new shelf above the RI Lighthouse wall display. Mr. and Mrs. Keeper have moved from the Tower Room to the Richard Sullivan Room, along with a few other "keeper-themed" wall display items.

Director Dave Smith is purchasing new monitors and rebuilding the kiosk in the museum's interactive room. Next month, the Tower Room will be cleaned and updated just in time for visitors to walk through as they prepare to climb the lighthouse tower and take in the impressive views from above.

Ursula Parenteau



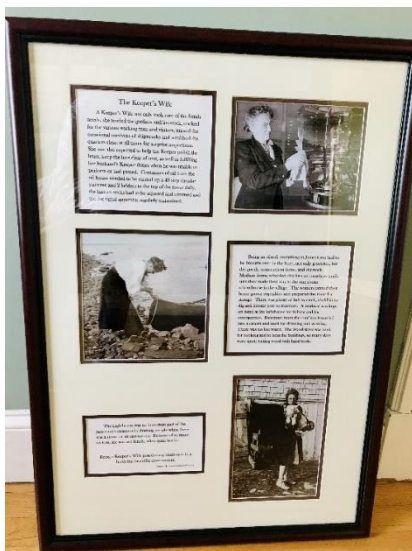
New Museum Displays

A new display in the Richard Sullivan room features the typical duties of a Keeper's wife at the lighthouse. Women often performed the same duties as their men, carrying oil up to the lantern room, trimming wicks, and cleaning the lamps. They also maintained the buildings, fished, nursed shipwreck

victims, and entertained the many visitors to the lighthouse. Many wives assumed their husband's duties if he passed away while in the Keeper's position.

Also, the museum has acquired an American Bell candlestick telephone to place in the cubby in the Theatre room. Most people used this telephone style between the late 1890s and the 1940s.

Candlestick telephones featured a mouthpiece (transmitter) mounted at the top of the stand and a receiver (earphone) that was held to the ear during use. When not in use the receiver rested in the fork of the switch hook protruding to the side of the stand, thereby disconnecting the audio circuit from the telephone network.



Ursula Parenteau

The Light House Leaks as Usual Keeper: George Shearman 1814 – 1829

A Statement of the quantity and quality of Oil Remaining
on Hand at Newport Light House together with the Residue
of the public property in the possession of the Keeper the
31 day of December 1814

quantity	quality	Remarks
192 gallons	Winter Strained	
396 do	Summer Oil	Whole Amount 588 gallons by Estimation
Three	Copper Lamps	Out of use since the Introduction of
one	Sheet Iron stove	Metallic Reflectors
Seven	Wooden Cisterns	Will contain by Estimation 200 gallons each
five	Wooden Butts	
Three	Copper Lamps	
one	Tackle fall & blocks	The articles here embraced were furnished
five	Tin butts	By Winslow Lewis also Cleve Lamps
Two	Spare Lamps	Which are in use
five	Wooden Tracets	
twelve	panes glass 12 by 12	The Light House Leaks as usual
sixteen	panes do 6 by 8	The Lantern and Apparatus in good
Eight	panes putty	Order, the Dwelling House wants
one	Lantern	Repairing very much is not
Six gallons	Spirits Turpentine	Comfortable, a well is wanted very much
Thirty lb	Whitening	Light House James Town 31 December
Twelve	Wick Sticks	1814 -
Two	paint Brushes	George Shearman
Fifteen	gross Wicks	Keeper L. H. James Town
Sixty	Glass Tubes -	
one half	Buff Skin	

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

Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper George Shearman, his son-in-law David Melville, and David's business partner Winslow Lewis sat around a dinner table discussing how best to optimize the lighting of the lamps on lighthouses along New England's coast. Two of the men were former sea Captains, two of the men were inventors, one man, Winslow Lewis, was both. Lewis and Melville had new ideas on how to light the lamps on lighthouses; both had their chance to implement their ideas, but Melville's idea was eventually scrapped.

In 1812, Lewis signed a contract with the federal government to supply all United States lighthouses with his new invention, the Winslow lamp. He had patented his invention in the United States, but many knew the design had been in use in several lighthouses in Great Britain years prior. Winslow's "invention" would help to make Keeper Shearman's life easier. According to Wikipedia, Winslow's lamp only used about a third of the oil and could be seen at twice the distance (about 3 miles) of the prior oil lamps they replaced; this would make carrying the oil up the spiral staircase each night that much easier and make shipping lanes safer at sea.

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Keeper Shearman had more than just the lights to worry about. In the winter of 1814, his report states, "The lantern and apparatus are in good order, but the lighthouse leaks as usual, and the dwelling house wants to be repaired very much-[and] is not comfortable." He also mentions that "A well is wanted very much." Shearman's report lists some of the necessities on hand at the lighthouse: 12 panes of glass, 10 x 12, 8 pounds of putty, 16 panes of 6 x 8 glass, 6 gallons of spirits of turpentine, 60 glass tubes, 3 copper lamps, and 12 wick sticks, amongst other things. We might infer from Keeper Shearman's report that he often replaced the tower glass, and Lewis' new lamps required many new components such as the glass tubes and copper lamps, not used in previous lamp designs.



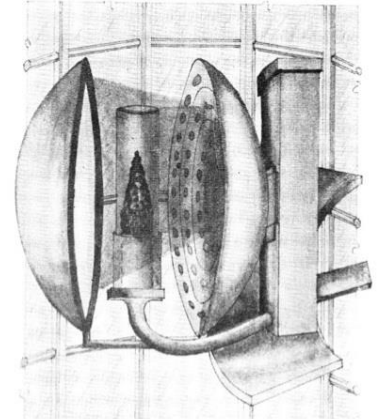
*Winslow Lewis Lens-Archives,
uslhs.org*

Like many Keepers at Beavertail, Shearman started out as a mariner by trade, he styled himself Captain for most of his life. He was a registered member of the Fellowship Club as early as 1794. The Fellowship club was one of the oldest associations in Rhode Island where members were present or past commanders of vessels. Besides a registration fee and membership dues, a member paid a fee into a general fund box for each successful voyage on returning "successful, without being cast away, taken by the enemy, or meeting any misfortune." If the member was lost at sea or had some misfortune, he or his family would receive funds from the society out of the same box. According to federal census records, three of Keeper Shearman's grandsons through his daughter Patience and her husband David Melville were mariners. An occupation that runs for generations with many families from this area.

Shearman's report shows that his service at Beavertail Lighthouse had started by late 1814 rather than 1816 as is commonly reported. Keeper Shearman's report mentions Winslow Lewis, who was himself a retired sea captain, and many of the lamp components needed to keep the lamps operating.

Lewis, a fellow inventor and business partner of David Melville, had a rivalry with Melville that culminated in a patent lawsuit. When Winslow used a design extremely similar to one Melville had shown him earlier to keep the spermaceti oil from congealing in frigid temperatures, Melville filed a lawsuit. Lewis ended up abandoning the patent.

The Lewis lamps would be used on United States lighthouses for the next forty years until they were replaced by the Fresnel lens like the one on display at the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum. George Shearman remained the Keeper at Beavertail Lighthouse until his death in 1829. David Melville was named the Administrator of Captain George Shearman's estate.



*Winslow Lewis Lamp Design-
showing glass tube, reflector and
lens, US Coast Guard*

CV

Attention: Membership Renewal

Now is the time to renew your membership in BLMA if you still need to do so. There are several levels of membership to choose from on our website. By renewing, you will continue receiving our quarterly newsletters, email notifications of special events, and a 10% discount on all items in our gift shop. Last year, we introduced a new feature – the option of choosing automatic renewal each year if you renew online. Please help us continue our mission of preservation and education by renewing your membership. More information is available at www.beavertailight.org.

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast South Shore of Block Island (Part 6)

As the 20th Century arrived, the frequency of casualties along the southern Block Island coast slowed but did not stop. On March 26, 1904, another schooner joined the ranks of the lost. This time, the vessel was southbound and carried the type of cargo that made her more prone than most to disaster – lime. Her name was MABEL HALL, and she sailed under the command of Captain B.D. Averill out of Rockland, ME. On her final voyage, the HALL was carrying a cargo of lime destined for parties in New York City. At 171 gross tons, the schooner measured 92 feet in length by 25 feet in beam and drew 11 feet of water. Like many before her, she became fog-bound off the island, stranding on the rocks. The crew of six escaped in the ship's boat and made it ashore safely, but the hull sunk, and as the cargo was exposed to seawater, a fire soon erupted. After a career that spanned forty years at sea, the fire destroyed the vessel.



Almost twenty years later, on January 8, 1923, another schooner barge loaded with coal ended her career on the rocks at the southwest end of Block Island. This time, it was the PENN of 1,849 tons and built in Bath, ME, in 1913. Reports said, *“a barge with sails set fore-and-aft in a schooner rig came ashore on the Southwest Point.”* As it was the norm for schooner barges to travel under the tow of a steam vessel, it was strange for her to have been at sea under sail on her own.

Nor was any report found concerning a tug that had cast off or, for another reason, lost one of her barges. Though the mystery remains, the stranding of the 264-foot-long barge with a 44-foot beam and drawing 20 feet of water did come ashore. Also, there was no mention of the whereabouts or status of the crew. Local reports dwelled on one aspect of the wreck, stating, *“...it is estimated that 2,200 tons of coal have been mined from the salt water and off the beach at the barge wreck off the west side during the past week. There is still a thousand tons gradually washing up.”* For those Block Islanders, one man's loss was undoubtedly another man's prize.

Three years later, on July 10, 1926, and further down to the southern coast of Block Island, the largest vessel of this group lost on the south shore of Block Island completed its final voyage. The steel-hulled steamship METEOR measured 2,324 gross tons, was 253 feet long, was 43 feet of beam, and drew 24 feet of water. When she ran ashore, she was carrying 3,500 tons of coal, likely destined to fuel the steam engines of other ships. She belonged to the Meteor Steamship Company and was initially built in Toledo, OH, in 1901, presumably for the lake trade. On her current trip, she was northbound from Norfolk, VA, headed for Boston, MA, when she encountered the relentless fog common to these waters. Although she ran ashore firmly, her position and stability led her captain to decide to stay aboard the vessel with his entire crew of 28 men. For the safety of the crew, the Coast Guard cutter ACUSHNET stood by the stranded vessel in case an emergency evacuation was called for. Little did they know that as that plan was devised, Mother Nature had her own plan, and a storm was brewing offshore. Later that night, the ACUSHNET could not stand alongside the wreck and was forced offshore due to this new threat. Ultimately, it would only be the steamer that would suffer as no deckhands were lost, although the night after their stranding had to be a harrowing one. The vessel did not fare as well; the intense wave action ripped out her bottom. She completed her final voyage at this location, less than 150 feet from the shore.

The final recorded lost wreck in this area was an auxiliary schooner named WALTHAM. This one was a fisherman and had been in the business since it launched at East Boothbay, ME, in 1904. She measured 75 feet in length with a beam of 21 feet and a depth of just 9 feet. Her registered tonnage was 82, making her one of the more minor victims here. An interesting conflict developed with this wreck between the salvagers who lived and worked on Block Island and the insurance company, who was determined to save the vessel. So enraged were the local salvors that the vessel was not simply “left for them to pick over the bones” that they put together a “raiding party” and went aboard the stranded schooner with the intent of doing as much damage as possible to thwart the rescue operation. Authorities alleged that the raiders destroyed the majority of the 260 barrels that they put into the hull to ensure that she would float when pulled off. The raiding group also damaged other salvage equipment aboard to convince the insurance company that this was a losing proposition. The initial salvager took the hint and took a payoff from the insurance company, almost equaling the amount he had invested in the effort. The owner hired another salvager from Connecticut, but the local Block Islanders were persistent, and this effort also failed. Many believe that, ultimately, its owner abandoned the vessel where she lay.



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 through May 17, 2024.

BLMA plans to reopen the Tower and Museum in late May. Please see 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.