



The Lighthouse Log

Spring 2026

Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Spring 2026 President's Message

As we welcome the arrival of spring, we also look forward to another exciting season at the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum. After a long winter, it is always a joy to see the grounds come back to life and to prepare for the return of visitors who come to experience the beauty and history of this special place.

I am honored to serve as President of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association and to continue the important work of preserving and sharing our rich maritime heritage. None of this would be possible without the dedication of our volunteers, docents, and board members, whose time and enthusiasm keep the museum vibrant and welcoming.

We look forward to our upcoming docent training and the museum's seasonal reopening. If you are returning or considering volunteering for the first time, join our community. Your involvement plays a vital role in helping us educate and inspire visitors of all ages.

This season, we remain committed to enhancing our exhibits, maintaining the lighthouse grounds, and expanding opportunities for public engagement. We encourage you to visit, bring friends and family, and share in the unique experience that Beavertail offers.

Thank you for your continued support. I look forward to seeing many of you in the months ahead.

Warm regards,

Nancy Beye

President

Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association

Wind, Waves, and Whiteout: Bombogenesis Transforms Beavertail



After a punishing winter, February's bomb cyclone, with its fierce winds, blinding snow, heavy seas, and driving precipitation, left Beavertail's lighthouse tower shimmering like a ghost at the edge of the sea.

The blizzard dumped three feet of snow on the island, and the weather monitor located inside the museum recorded wind gusts of 67 mph. This was the highest snowfall amount ever recorded in Rhode Island.

According to Merriam-Webster, *bombogenesis* refers to the rapid intensification of a storm triggered by a sudden, steep drop in atmospheric pressure.

Thanks to BLMA Director Bob Langton for grabbing this great shot from the Skycam.

The Beavertail Lighthouse Association Scholarship in Memory of W. Craig Armington

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 \$1,500 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 6, 2026. The Scholarship is awarded in honor of W. Craig Armington, who served many years as an enthusiastic and hardworking member of the BLMA.



Applications can be downloaded at: <https://beavertailight.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/BLMA-2026-Scholarship-Application-Form-1.pdf>. Applications are also available at the Jamestown Library.

Night for the Light Fundraiser -Save the Date!

Save the date for *Night for the Light* on August 9 at the Fort Getty Pavilion in Jamestown, proudly sponsored by the Balise Auto Group.

This special event will help BLMA preserve the historic buildings and support the lighthouse window replacement project.

BLMA members will receive an email with details on when tickets become available.

A vertical poster for the 'Night for the Light' fundraiser. The background is a soft-focus image of a lighthouse at dusk. The text is overlaid in various fonts and colors. The title 'Night for the Light' is in a large, elegant script. Below it, 'Sunday, August 9' is in a bold, sans-serif font. The event description 'An Evening Under the Stars Cocktail Gala Fundraiser' is in a bold, serif font. The activities 'Open Bar and Heavy Hors d'oeuvres', 'Live and Silent Auctions', and 'Live Music by Decades by DeZyne' are listed in bold, sans-serif font. The location 'at Fort Getty Pavilion, Jamestown, RI' is in a bold, serif font. The bottom section contains the website 'Details coming on beavertailight.org in May' and 'Tickets will go on sale on-line in May' in bold, sans-serif font.

Night for the Light
Sunday, August 9
An Evening Under the Stars
Cocktail Gala Fundraiser
Open Bar and Heavy Hors d'oeuvres
Live and Silent Auctions
Live Music by Decades by DeZyne
at Fort Getty Pavilion, Jamestown, RI
Details coming on beavertailight.org in May
Tickets will go on sale on-line in May

The Keeper Who Had to “Fish” for the Fog Bell



A Beavertail Fog Bell model is held in the Archives of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association. It represents the original 600-lb fog bell installed in 1829, mounted on a 12-foot wooden tower with a clockwork, wind-up drum mechanism that struck the bell 10 times per minute.

The model was built by BLMA Director Varoujan Karentz, using the original 1829 specifications written by Christopher Ellery, the Collector and Superintendent of Lighthouses. Christopher Ellery was the nephew of William Ellery, the Rhode Island signer of the Declaration of Independence.

This 1829 bell predates the later, much larger fog bells that were repeatedly damaged or washed off the rocks in storms. Old Beavertail stories tell of a 19th century keeper who, after a storm swept the iron fog bell from its frame, made his way down the treacherous ledges of Beavertail Point at low tide and wrestled the bell back up by rope. Imagine doing that in wool trousers and sea spray.

A Clambake at Beavertail

Renowned well beyond the local community for his fish chowder, keeper William Wales turned the Beavertail lighthouse lawn into a gathering place. His clambakes, held throughout his service from 1873 to 1895, attracted guests from across the region.

During these occasions, the whole family pitched in. The younger fry, particularly, danced about singing, "A clambake, a clambake, we're goin' to have a clambake!"; they knew that it would mean an excursion along the shore to gather rockweed.



So, off the children went at low tide with one of the adults in tow; they walked the rocks down towards the tide pools, finding thick mats of rockweed draped over the ledges. Rockweed is one of the most distinctive features of Beavertail's shoreline ecology, a favorite hiding place for periwinkles, crabs, and juvenile fish. The children gathered several bags of the briny, dark olive-green rockweed, with all its little bladders that pop when you pinch them. There is no word to describe the salty ocean smell of rockweed. Back the children trudged to the lighthouse--- the bags were heavy, for in order to be good the rockweed must be wet.

By the time the children reached the house, the guests had arrived and a fire was burning merrily on a large flat stone out on the lawn. There was the smell of the keeper's famous fish chowder emanating from the kitchen, since that had to be made early and stand long enough to become blended and seasoned. Wales's sons, John and George, both who would one day take their turns as keepers at Beavertail, piled more sticks on the fire, which crackled and roared at a great rate, and their mother, Catherine, tied up two huge stuffed tautogs in a bag, while sister Sarah was doing the same with some bread dressing.

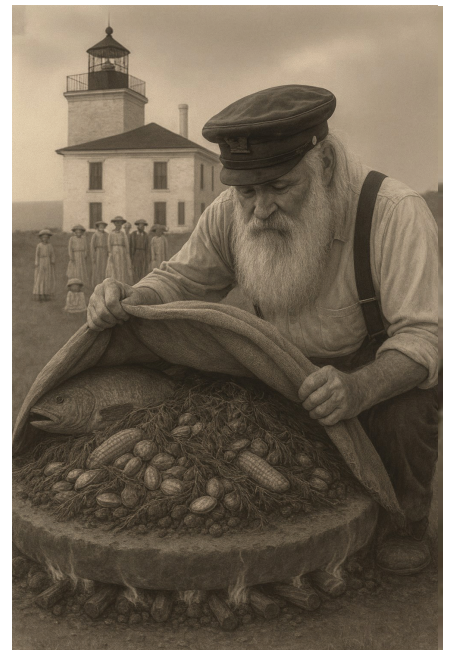
Then, word going up that the stone was white hot, John and George appeared, carrying a bushel basket of clams between them, and proceeded to dump them onto the rockweed, a layer of which had been put on the hot bed of stone, sizzling and steaming; then more steaming and hissing as they piled more weed on the clams and the bag of fish was tucked in, as well as the dressing, and green corn with some husks left on to protect it. The brown bread was in the keeper's house, and so were the clam fritters which Catherine had fried to a golden brown.

William, dressed in his keeper's uniform, with his white beard flowing, piled the rest of the wet rockweed over all, and he put a large square of canvas over that. Then all lounged on the grass on blankets enjoying a cooling breeze and Beavertail's sweeping vistas ---they waited about two hours or longer as is the custom---with keeper Wales deftly manipulating the clams, filling the air with an aroma which was of the very essence of the ocean, and the woods, and fire and Indian lore. Words cannot describe it.

Pretty soon Wales would lift up one little corner of the canvas over the "bake" and peep under the seaweed to see if the clams were open and, finding them steamed nearly enough, would say, "It's time to start on the chowder."

It didn't take long for everyone to sit down to the tables lined up on the lawn which were spread with white cloth. The sun was shining, the bay sparkled blue, and the waves crashed in steady rhythm against the rocky shore. All waited impatiently while Catherine and Sarah brought out huge bowls of steaming chowder. They ladled it into dishes while the "hardtack" was passed around so all could fall to.

Right in the midst of things more visitors just happened to pass along, and the keeper invited them all to come and sit down and eat. The guests kept nudging their neighbors to pass the fritters, or the brown bread; and then ate stolidly until more was needed. Catherine and Sarah were kept trotting from the house to the lawn and back again, bringing more of this and more of that. Would there ever be an end to it. Not as long as a clam was left! And oh, how good that baked fish tasted, and the green corn!



This story is adapted from "Random Scenes for Nancy" published by Emily Dunham Hall in 1938 about one of the many Rhode Island clambakes that she attended as a child in the 1890's. Her story has been updated to embellish the accounts that have been told of keeper William W. Wales's famous clambakes held on Beavertail Point during his tenure as Lighthouse Keeper there. The illustrations are AI imagined.

Beavertail and the American Revolution: A Story of Fire and Resilience

Come celebrate the United States Semiquincentennial anniversary at Beavertail Lighthouse.

We are pleased to share that the museum is preparing a powerful new exhibit exploring one of the most dramatic episodes in our past: **Beavertail's pivotal role during the American Revolution.**

In the 18th century, Beavertail Point stood as a critical guardian of Narragansett Bay, commanding both the east and west passages. That strategic importance became unmistakable in December 1776, when British forces—7,000 strong—occupied Newport and swiftly took control of Conanicut Island. For the next three years, the British operated the lighthouse for their own naval advantage while island residents fled for safety.

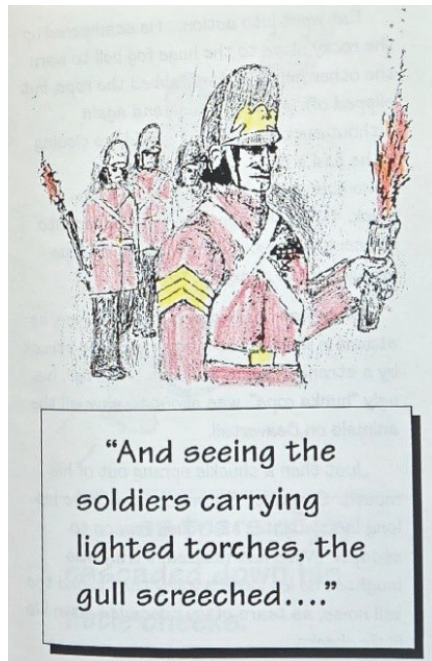


The story reaches its climax in October 1779. As the British prepared to withdraw from the bay, they carried out a scorched-earth retreat designed to cripple American and French navigation. On October 20, they set fire to the stone lighthouse tower, destroying its interior woodwork, and removed the optics to ensure the approaches to the bay remained perilously dark. The blaze burned so fiercely that it “shocked” the masonry itself—warping the tower’s walls and leaving them vulnerable to leaks for decades afterward.

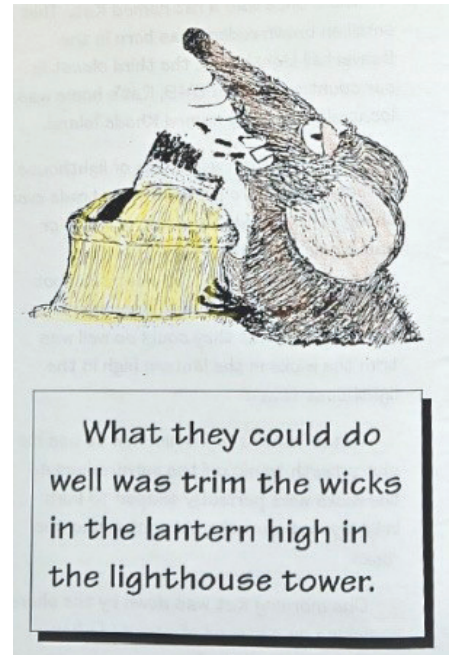
This exhibit will illuminate that turbulent chapter through artifacts, documents, and vivid storytelling, revealing how Beavertail stood at the crossroads of war, strategy, and survival.

Bringing History to Life: “Mr. Rat of Beavertail Lighthouse”

A centerpiece of this exhibit celebrates how former BLMA Board Member, lighthouse volunteer, and Jamestown resident **Peter Frazier** passed Beavertail’s Revolutionary-era history to a new generation through his children’s book *Mr. Rat of Beavertail Lighthouse*. In this imaginative “historical fantasy,” Frazier introduces readers to Rat, a small brown lighthouse resident descended from a long line of devoted “lighthouse rodents.” Each night, Rat dutifully trims the lantern wicks to keep the light shining across Narragansett Bay.



The tale reaches its dramatic peak in October 1779. As British “Red-Coats” arrive with torches to destroy the station, Rat discovers his moment of courage. Using his remarkable tail to grasp the rope of the heavy fog bell, he strikes a resounding **BONG** that alerts the Keeper and the island’s animals, giving them just enough time to flee before the lighthouse collapses into a “loose pile of stones.”



Visitors will also encounter reproductions of rare historical

depictions of the light station as it appeared during the Revolutionary era, including artwork showing the second stone tower just a year before its destruction. These images offer a vivid window into a landscape on the brink of upheaval.

Whether viewed through the lens of military strategy or through the eyes of a brave little wick-trimmer, Beavertail’s history continues to shine.

Join us this season as we commemorate America’s 250th anniversary and uncover the stories of resilience and resolve that shaped Beavertail Lighthouse.

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast

Point Judith (Part 8)

A year after the loss of the schooner LUGANO brought another disaster, the likes of which were becoming too familiar to the men of the lifesaving service stationed there. A 382-ton barge named **JENNIE** was carrying coal from South Amboy, NJ, to Fall River along with a second barge named **IDA** when the two encountered a storm on December 30, 1907. The report of the life savers illustrates the actions they were tasked with, which is a testimony of their success. *"Dec. 30 - Point Judith, Rhode Island - Barge JENNIE - The master of the barge IDA made a hazardous landing in his dory at 6:20 a.m. He reported to the keeper that his vessel sunk 2 miles south of the station and about the same distance offshore. He reported also that the barge JENNIE, which had been towing astern, had anchored and was in danger of sinking. The master of the JENNIE had his wife with him. The lifesavers manned the surfboat and started for the scene, against a strong gale and high sea. The rain was falling in torrents and the barge could not be seen from the station. It took the surfboat an hour and 40 minutes to make the two miles. The master and his wife were taken in the surfboat and safely landed behind the breakwater. They were furnished with stimulants, food and dry clothing from the W.N.R.A. supplies. A few hours later the barge struck on the rocks 150 yards east southeast of the station. The seas tore off the hatches, stove in her side, and made a complete wreck of the barge."* The **JENNIE** was a true barge (rather than a schooner barge) from the time of her launching in Gildersleeve, CT, in 1901 until the end of her career. She was owned by William B. Tobey and made her home port at Hartford.



By 1912, two-thirds of the structure of the Point Judith breakwater had been completed, and the third and final section was in progress. On November 24th, the 376-ton barge **PIONEER**, along with the barge **TORNADO** and their tug **SALUTATION**, were "parked" inside the breakwater. The trio of vessels were heading for Jersey City, having departed from Newport, RI, before a storm arrived. Because the barges were "light" (without cargo), they would be more threatened by a storm than if loaded so the tug opted to seek shelter. Each of the three was anchored separately and, seemingly safe, when a sudden change in the wind direction and speed pushed the barges ever closer to the beach. The tug attempted to pull them off, but after the hawsers parted, she abandoned the effort and steamed up to as close as she could get to the inside of the "V" shaped center breakwater for her own safety. For the 40-year old **PIONEER**, the end of her career was imminent. Wave after wave crashed over her and threatened her crew, but as the lifesavers set a rescue plan into action and shot lines to those aboard, the tide turned and began to ebb. With each passing minute, the danger for the mariners became less and less. The lifesavers decided that it would be riskier to attempt to bring them ashore at this point than to wait until the tide was completely out. They followed that premise, and on the following morning, Captain John Johnson and his crew saved themselves. The Scully Transportation Company determined that the cost of saving the old barge was simply not worth it.

The fishing schooner **LUELLA NICKERSON** was destroyed on the inside of the center wall of the breakwater on December 7, 1914. She was but 48' long and 30 years old, having been built in Port Jefferson, Long Island, in 1884, and was carrying a load of oysters when destroyed. But the rescue of her two-man crew was still a priority. It is recorded as one of the most daring rescues of recent years to the credit of the life-saving service. An excerpt from their report details the event, *"... It appears that the vessel in question—a 26-ton schooner, named the LUELLA NICKERSON—dragged her anchors during the night of the 6th, and went on the breakwater shortly after daylight of the 7th. Fortunately, the two men aboard of her succeeded in escaping unhurt to the wall, there to find refuge upon a lantern post standing upon the wall's extreme outer end, a full mile from the land, where they remained for more than an hour, exposed to the uninterrupted sweep of a fierce biting wind, and constantly drenched by the icy spray of the seas. The service crew mentioned, their surfboat equipped with anchors and lines, got away to the rescue about 8:30 a.m. Working their way cautiously to within 300 or 400 feet of the wall, they put out two anchors and payed out a hawser until they were within 40 feet of the imperiled men. From this position, exposed to disaster from the wreckage of the schooner threshing about in the backwash of the breakwater, a heaving line was thrown. The first effort with the line failed entirely. On the second throw the heaving stick caught in a crevice of the rocks and the boatmen could not dislodge it. One of the men on the wall now slid down between seas, made a dash for the line, secured it, and carried it back up to the post. Instead of tying it about his body, however, he lashed himself fast again. The station keeper, in the boat, endeavored to make the men understand by signals what was expected of them. The man who had the line failed to comprehend, however, and let it drop to the wall. Finally, after the keeper had given them an ocular demonstration of the proper use of the line by tying it around the bodies of two of his oarsmen they understood and did as directed. Then, at a favorable moment, both men, fast to the line, left the post, picked their way down the lee slope of the wall, and cast themselves into the water.*

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

It was but the work of a moment or two to haul them into the surfboat. Now came the problem of raising the anchor and getting out of the dangerous locality of the wall. Up to this time the entire crew had pulled constantly at their oars to keep the boat from being swamped. Unable to get ashore in the sea that prevailed, it became a question of keeping afloat. For five hours they held their boat under the breakwater, not daring to leave its small protection from wind and sea. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon the torpedo boat MORRIS was sighted coming into the harbor. Seeing the surfboat, she bore down upon it, got a line aboard by the exercise of good seamanship, and towed the boat inshore. The weather continued so bad that the coast guardsmen, unable to make a landing, remained on the torpedo boat overnight."

The log of totally lost shipwrecks at Point Judith will continue in the next segment of this series. JFJ

Exciting New Displays at the Museum

The Great Hurricane of 1938

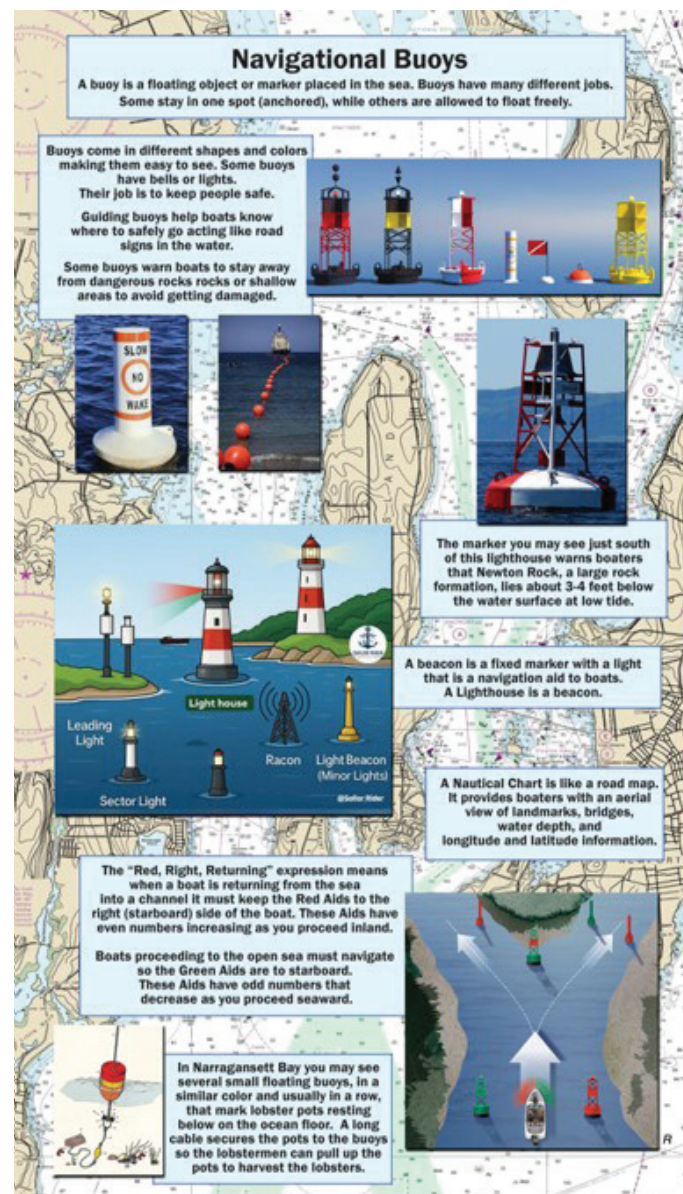
The 1938 New England Hurricane, one of the most destructive storms in U.S. history, struck Rhode Island on September 21. Winds of 160 mph were recorded on Long Island.

The hurricane caused catastrophic damage across Rhode Island, with estimates of property losses at \$306 million (or 4.7 billion in 2024). The storm surge and high winds destroyed or damaged over 57,000 homes, uprooted trees, and caused significant flooding in coastal areas. 400-800 people were killed. The Category Three storm traveled faster than any other storm previously or since recorded.



The high surf and winds at Beavertail destroyed the Fog Signal Building and exposed the 1749 foundation of the original lighthouse, which had long been forgotten. Currently the foundation, restored in 2000, is seen across the road from the lighthouse tower.

These handsome new wall displays designed by BLMA Director Ursula Parenteau will be placed in the museum's Theater room.





BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
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Jamestown, Rhode Island 02835

BLMA 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 Our Updated
Website!**

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.



Museum & Tower Climb Schedule

BLMA plans to reopen the Museum weekends starting May 16 from 10:30am to 4:30pm each day and on Memorial Day, Monday May 25.

The Museum will be open weekends and weekdays starting June 20 from 10:30am to 4:30pm each day thru September 7th and weekends only again after that until early October. The Tower will be open for climbing from 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM on: May 25 Memorial Day, June 6, June 20, July 4, July 18, August 8, August 22, September 7 - Labor Day, September 12, September 26, October 3, and October 12 - Columbus Day. Remember: Openings are weather-dependent; if uncertain, call 401-423-3270.

Please see our website www.beavertailight.org 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 www.Beavertailight.org.

Weddings and private events on the Lighthouse grounds are not allowed. For information on scheduling events at Beavertail State Park contact the RI Dept. of Environmental Management (RIDEM) at 401.884.2010.