



# The Lighthouse Log

A publication of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association  
Members of the New England Lighthouse Association  
Fall/Winter

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## A message from our president...

Dear Museum Friends,

It's September already and where did the summer go? We have had a very busy season at Beavertail Lighthouse with visitors from all over the world. In looking through the guest book recently, we found that visitors had traveled from many far-away countries – Australia, England, Austria, Germany, Spain, New Zealand, Belarus, Portugal, China and Russia. Almost every state in the union was represented, as well. Many people are discovering what we already know – Beavertail is a magnificent place!

Joe Bouchard was elected Vice President, and the four new Board Members welcomed aboard during the past season were Don Barrows, Brenda Johnston, Varoujan Karentz, and Richard Koster. Those whose terms ended, each of whom we thank with deep and sincere gratitude, are Alan Brunner, retiring Vice President, who will continue to respond to the email messages sent our way; and retiring Board members, Agnes Filkins and Emily Wild, whose services are very much appreciated.

Our thanks go out to Linda Jacobson, Jill Meyer and Pat Lucas for their work on our Oral History Project. Look for more details on this project elsewhere in this newsletter. We certainly appreciate the hard work of our new Docent Coordinator, Richard Koster – without his diligence we might not have had the staff we needed to keep the Museum going all summer – and of course, our deep gratitude to all those volunteers, the new ones this year and our long serving and faithful standbys who kept the gift shop operating and the visitors informed.

It has been a wonderful year of progress on several programs and if you haven't been down for awhile, there's still time. The Museum is open week-ends right through to Columbus Day (October 11<sup>th</sup>). Hope you can find a chance to come down for a visit. This time of year brings the comfort and enjoyment of the cool, dry days of autumn, the clear blue skies and sea.

Come on down! We'll be looking for you.

Sincerely,  
*Linda Warner,*  
President BCMA

## SUMMER WANES: FALL APPROACHES

Our Annual Meeting was held on August 18, 2004 and was well attended. There were many interesting reports to be heard, not the least of which was the success of the great progress by the Oral History Project. Linda Jacobson, Jill Meyer and Pat Lucas were instrumental in this success and worked with Andrew Potter Productions. A wonderful Power Point presentation was shown to those attending. It featured Beavertail Lighthouse beginnings and beautiful photography. Richard Chellis, who once lived at the Lighthouse, Bob Dennis a long time supporter of Beavertail Lighthouse and Jim West, a senior resident of Jamestown, were interviewed and provided many interesting remarks. This, we were pleased to hear, is the preface and will be added to with further productions as time goes by. This project was made possible, in part, by donations in memory of Diane Umbenhauer and BLMA life member, Jim Dodge. We've stepped into the ever growing world of technology which will keep Beavertail Light's spectacular story alive well into the future.

### **Lighthouse Acquisition Varoujan Karentz**

The BLMA Notice of Intention regarding the future of the lighthouse site was formally submitted to agencies of the US Government, State of Rhode Island, the Town of Jamestown and several RI officials on 18 August 2004. While there has been no determination by the USCG as to the disposition of the site, BLMA in accordance with the Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 is preparing to examine the various ownership and operational issues when that time arrives. The notice outlines the long term interest of BLMA for preserving the lighthouse, improving and expanding its educational benefit to visitors. Jamestown Town Council took immediate action to assign a town representative to work with our Acquisition Committee.

After initial meetings with State and Town Representative, BLMA will begin a series of detailed study options to arrive at an operational concept for site conveyance and museum expansion that will meet the requirements of concerned agencies and BLMA.

Two copies of BLMA's "Notice of Intent" (a 30 page planning document) are on file at the

Jamestown Library and may be reviewed there by interested parties.

Over the next two years the Acquisition Committee along with the BLMA Board of Directors will be examining site improvements, adding new artifact collections, financial planning to include grant possibilities, staffing need and identification of educational programs. Any interested BLMA member who wants to help on this committee can contact Varoujan Karentz at 423-0636.

### **Guest Speaker, Paul J. Perkins The Wreck of H.F. Payton and its cargo of Granite Stones**

On March 3, 1859, our speaker began, the H.F. Payton went ashore at Beavertail Point, during a blinding snow storm, strewing its wreckage and its cargo of 140 cut granite stones, along the east shore of Beavertail, located at the southern end of Conanicut Island, Jamestown, Rhode Island.

Up until the 1950s, much of Beavertail Point was US Government property and closed off to the public. Even long time residents of Jamestown, knew very little about the stones. Research at the Jamestown Historical Society revealed little more than the ship was heading for Washington D.C. perhaps for a specific building.

Mr. Perkins told us that the captain of the *Payton* was Asa Whelden Nickerson, born in 1823 in South Dennis, MA and that he had spoken with people with the same last name, possible descendants in the area, hoping to add to his knowledge. He searched libraries and several coastal town records looking for the ships logs and provided a slide show of various points of interest.

He then, turned his attention to the rocks themselves and became deeply interested in the Fleur-de-Lis designs engraved on them. He noted many different versions of those designs and after much research came to the conclusion that because of the particular design of the Fleur-d-Lis on the stones, they were likely intended to be used for a mausoleum in the D.C. area. His research established that the stones probably came from the Cape Ann and Chelmsford MA area, which was somewhat substantiated by the fact that 22 ships chronometers were also a part of the cargo, and believed to have come from Chelsea, Mass.

Mr. Perkins told us of his search through many and varied sources, hoping to uncover the answer to the mystery of the Granite Rocks of Beavertail, and learned quite a bit. The sea has, so far, refused to give up its mysteries, but perhaps the book has not yet been closed on the Beavertail Rocks.

**Old Beavertail Lighthouse Records  
Discovered In US. Archives  
Varoujan Karentz**

During a search at the US National Archives Center in Waltham, MA, this past August, a trove of various records kept by Light Keepers who manned Beavertail Light Station were found.

The Department of Commerce, Lighthouse Service who operated all the nations light stations prior to the US Coast Guard required Keepers and their Assistants to maintain detailed daily records of every aspect of their duties. These Logs and Journals eventually found their way into the National Archives. The Beavertail records are only partially available at the New England Center. Others may be stored in the National Archives center in College Park, MD.

Four series of Journals were found dating back to 1880 in addition to US Coast Guard inspection records dated during the 1950s. One of the early Journals included "**Passing Vessel Logs**" where the Light Station Keepers had to enter the date and type of any vessel (Full Rigged Ship, Bar, Brig, Schooner, Sloop or Steamer) that passed in sight of the lighthouse. As an example on 10 August 1881 a total of 56 vessels were logged.

Keepers and Assistants were not allowed to leave the light station site at any time without entering their name, time they left and the time of return to the site. The Journal was called an "**Absences Report**", "to get provisions", "to get haircut", "to go to church", "to get some clams", "to get the mail", "to get fresh milk", "to buy new shoes", "to get a pane of glass".

A more detailed log was also required to identify the daily consumption of lamp oil, wicks and chimneys used in the light lens lamp. The 1888 log book meticulously lists the exact minute of each day the light was lit and number of hours and minutes it remained lighted. In addition, an oil consumption rate for each day also had to be

included, when wicks were trimmed or replaced. The log of December 1888 shows a total of 26 gallons of oil consumed during the month in the lamp of the Third Order Fresnel Lens and an additional 3 gallons of oil used in the quarters for illumination. The June 1887 log sheet graphically shows the reduction of oil use since the summer darkness hours were much less.

Site inspections were conducted unannounced. After 1929 the USCG took control of the Beavertail light station and continued detailed checks of the condition of the light station. Its supplies and unit quantities of tools and spare parts were examined against the allowance tables established by the USCG. Interestingly, the February 11, 1952 report shows the inclusion of two Standby Illuminant lamps, one incandescent and one oil-vaporized in case the main light malfunctioned.

Fog signal records cover the period of 1882 through 1914 show the various signals that were tested or deployed including sirens and steam whistles. Inspection reports cover the period of 1914 to 1945. Mysteriously, there are no entries or weather reports during the month of September 1938, the year of the famous "33 Hurricane".

The logs and Journals at the New England Archives Center were not complete. Only a few of each type are on file. The Center does allow archives to be researched after application to use the records is approved. Copies of pages can be reproduced but they do not allow any of their records to be loaned to leave the archive repository.

Varoujan Karentz and his daughter Deneb who visited the Archives Center and researched the file did make sample page copies from the Beavertail Journals and logs. They in turn will be copied to a computer disk for use in the museum at some future date.

**ITEMS OF NOTE**

Mark Taylor of the USCG spoke at the May meeting and displayed the new fog horn sensor that will be installed on the south face of the tower. The existing sensor was removed and presented to BLMA for the museum, along with

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a trumpet, believed to have belonged to Beavertail Lighthouse. Both of these items are now part of growing history of Beavertail Lighthouse.

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BLMA will be applying for a RI Historic Preservation grant to fund the restoration of the windows in both keeper and assistant keeper's quarters. Additionally, storm windows will be added, the bulkhead repaired or replaced and the doors restored.

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Frank Meyer was chairman of arrangements for painting the exterior of the Museum building and its chimneys. PMB Painters of Newport RI carefully prepared the surfaces of the walls, trim before putting the new paint on, to prevent the flaking of the paint.

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We have a new exhibit of lighthouse and light ship models, made by Joe Bouchard our VP.

The Fresnel Lens on display has become a whole lot more realistic this summer, since it was equipped with a flashing light to show the reflective power of the lens.

Under the management of Jim Filkins, the Gift Shop has many new and different items. A new line of clothing beautifully embroidered with our Beavertail Lighthouse is available. Check them out – some are long sleeved and suitable for the upcoming fall and winter seasons.

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Our W. Craig Armington Memorial Scholarships were awarded to two very deserving Jamestowners = Jamie Woodside, a student of North Kingstown High School, our school of record and Leah Rosen-Pritchard, a student of Prout School.

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Well, another year has come to a close and as always, there were many visitors all summer, rain or shine, wind or calm. Beavertail Lighthouse, continues to draw more and more people to enjoy the outdoors, the restless sea, the cool breezes and the great story of the third oldest lighthouse in the USA, which is depicted on the walls that surrounds us in the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum.

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Be sure to check the enclosed flyer for the best info on our upcoming events.