



# The Lighthouse Log

Winter 2023

## Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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## Winter 2023 President's Message



Hello Everyone,

Welcome to our Winter newsletter. The museum is closed for the season, but we had two successful weekend openings in December. We held our annual holiday open house on Sunday, December 4th, with lots of goodies for all. And we had a friendly crowd to cheer on Santa as he climbed the ladder to put a lighted wreath on the tower. You can see additional pictures of this event further in this issue.

After several delays, we have made significant progress in completing our courtyard project. You can read about that progress in this issue.

Our membership drive for 2023 is underway, and we have been pleased with the response. If you would like to join us, please go to our website:

[www.beavertailight.org](http://www.beavertailight.org), for more information.

Good news! We have just received final approval of our license plate design. We are excited to begin our marketing campaign in 2023 for this wonderful project to raise funds for our lighthouse's preservation. Look further in this issue for a picture of the new plate.

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In addition to our license plate campaign, we have some exciting plans for 2023. Our project to archive and catalog our artifacts, photos, and documents will start up again this winter. We plan to participate again in **401Gives** in April, more information is forthcoming. And we are planning a Beavertail walkathon for the spring!

Donations from our local community and those who visit us from out of state are crucial to maintaining and preserving the lighthouse and museum. We constantly strive to expand our exhibits to enhance the historical and educational knowledge our visitors can learn.

Please consider donating to Beavertail so that we can keep our mission of preservation and education alive!

Best wishes,  
Diane

## British Journalist Visits Beavertail Lighthouse



*Left to right. Varoujan Karentz, Zoey Goto, and Linda Warner*

On October 27th, BLMA Directors Varoujan Karentz, Linda Warner, and Diane Bakley met with Zoey Goto at the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum. Zoey is a journalist and author from Great Britain writing about travel, fashion, lifestyle, music, and popular culture. She has written for National Geographic Traveler, Times Travel, and GQ, to name a few. With the Rhode Island Director of International Tourism's help, Zoey visited various lighthouses in New England to do a story for the Times of London. Zoey was traveling with her family and planned to spend a night at the Rose Island Lighthouse.

Although the United Kingdom has many lighthouses, Zoey said that the British people have always had a keen interest in them, so Rhode Island lighthouses might be something they would consider visiting while traveling in the U.S.

We look forward to reading Zoey's article, which will be published sometime in the spring of 2023.

## Meet Our BLMA Directors

### Joe Martino



“After a long career in the IT management and consulting business and several years in the construction business, I am pleased to work with the dedicated group of people managing the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum. As a new board member, I am enjoying serving on the Technology and Building & Grounds sub-committees.”

### Stewart Morgan

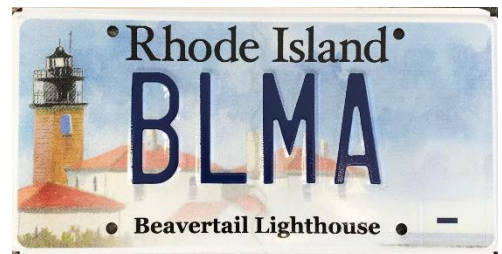
“Martha and I moved to Jamestown in the summer of 2008. We became docents at Beavertail Lighthouse in 2009. I have served as President and Vice President of BLMA for multiple years. I enjoyed being able to bring the lighthouse to its current condition from where it was in 2009.”

## Beavertail License Plate

The new Beavertail Lighthouse charity license plate has received all Rhode Island state approvals! Check out the new plate at right.

It has been a year since we started working on this project, and we are excited to announce this news to our members. The new license plate will cost \$42.50 for a set, \$20 goes to BLMA, and \$22.50 goes toward the production of the plate.

We will need 600 pre-orders to implement the new Beavertail plate fully, and we are working out the ordering details with the Department of Motor Vehicles. Stay tuned to our website: [www.beavertailight.org](http://www.beavertailight.org), for more information coming in mid-January.



## Lighthouse Wisdom



“Is the beam from a lighthouse affected by howling wind and rain? It remains perfectly steadfast and unaffected by the storm. Your true self is like that. Nothing can ever harm you once you are consciously aware that it is so.”

Vernon Linwood Howard (March 16, 1918 to August 23, 1992)  
**American author, philosopher, and teacher.**

## Courtyard Project Update

After Many delays due to Covid 19 and material cost inflation, the Courtyard Project made good progress with meeting both ADA regulations allowing wider brick sidewalks surrounding the two Keeper houses and a ramp enabling disabled visitors to maneuver wheelchairs into the museum with ease.

Under the direction of Board Member Leo Orsi, the project, made possible from grants by the Champlin Foundation and the Vivian J. Palmieri Charitable Trust, made progress with three granite step locations and a beautiful retaining wall, also finished with granite slabs.

The granite wall will provide some seating during outside lectures and information talks to visitors. BLMA will complete the project in early spring, where the old staff parking lot will be covered with new chip sealant and merged with the new asphalt area. The site of the new staff parking lot is still under review, and waiting for the results of the RIDEM plan for the entire state park to be published with their new Master Plan, which will include new roads and parking areas.



## The ANT Bristol USCG Crew

Located at 1 Thames Street in Bristol, RI, the specialized United States Coast Guard Aids to Navigation Team (ANT) maintains 250 navigational aids plus 12 Lighthouses, including Beavertail Light Station's VRB-25 light in the tower and the Fog Signal activated by VHF radio.

The 12-man crew maintains buoys and lights from Maine to Long Island, with three utility boats and trained electrical and mechanical technicians. ANT monitors the location of anchored buoys and aligns them using navigation charts. The person in charge has the ranking of Chief Boatswain. He and the crews assigned rotate every four years.



## Women Keepers: Sally Ann (Gavitt) Crandall Watch Hill Lighthouse



*Watch Hill Lighthouse- About 1905*

Watch Hill Lighthouse has been around since 1745, but the current tower was built the same year as the present Beavertail Lighthouse tower in 1856. The Watch Hill Lighthouse is very much like a mini-Beavertail Lighthouse. The tower is just slightly shorter.

Located in Westerly, Rhode Island, near the Connecticut border, Watch Hill Lighthouse stands on a spit of land jutting out into the Long Island Sound. Between there and Watch Hill Reef is a treacherous passage only 300 yards wide and five fathoms deep. Not the place for a novice Lighthouse Keeper.

The 1850 Federal Census for Westerly, RI, shows newly-wed Sally (aged 23) living with her husband Captain Jared Starr Crandall's family while Jared is at sea on the Bark Prudent, a whaling vessel sailing the North and South Pacific.

After a few years, Jared became the Master of his own vessel. Sally must have joined him on his next Whaling expedition as their eldest child Jared was born at sea in 1854, and their second child, Sarah Ida, was born in Hilo, Sandwich

Islands (Hawaii), in 1858.

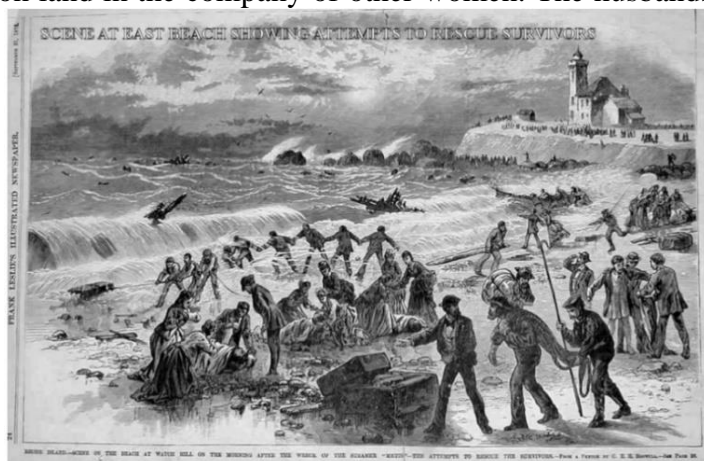
If Sally's life at sea were anything like what the Prudent's Captain recorded in his vessel's journal, Sally would have sailed past the Sandwich Islands, maybe stopping in Guam for fresh sweet potatoes and bananas before continuing to Hong Kong, the Russian coast, and beyond. Later they might head south to Tahiti before rounding Cape Horn on their way back to New England.

For the very few women who were included on whaling expeditions, it was not uncommon for expectant mothers to stop at the Sandwich Islands to give birth on land in the company of other women. The husbands would depart and return some months after the child's delivery, hopefully with many barrels of whale oil, when the child was older and more fit for life at sea. The Crandall family was back on dry land by 1859 because Sally and Jared's five youngest daughters were all born in Westerly.

Just a few years later the Crandall family, of course, was impacted by the Civil War and Jared did his part attaining the rank of Captain with the Union Army. After the war, Sally and Jared moved their family to Watch Hill Lighthouse when he became the Keeper there in 1868.

On a stormy August night in 1872, a few miles off of Watch Hill Point, the coastal schooner "Nettie Cushing" struck the passenger ship "Metis." The crew of the "Metis" did not realize that the accident had breached the ship's hull due to a bulkhead hidden behind large bales of cotton holding the water inside. When the bulkhead gave way, the vessel bilged immediately. Men, women, and children clung to the large hurricane deck that had detached from the vessel as it sank, but the heavy seas and large breakers threw the deck at each wave, sometimes 60 feet into the air. The deck eventually crashed down near the shore, where its splintered wreckage pulled many passengers back out to sea.

After the wreck, with scores of men and women washed up on the shore, it is most likely that Sally was one of the women there, providing comfort to the survivors and possibly a warm place at the lighthouse. Dozens were already taken to the resorts to shelter from the harsh weather. Of course, the heroic efforts of her husband, Jared, overshadowed anything that Sally could have done to help the passengers of the wrecked "Metis." He and the other rescuers went out in a small boat through the surf and harsh weather to find as many survivors as possible. Some say that Jared used the old whaleboat as his lifesaving vessel.



*Aftermath of the Wrecked Metis*

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In all, rescuers and spectators on the shore saved 33 passengers from the floating deck, but more than three times that amount lost their lives. Jared and the lifesaving team received gold Congressional Medals for their heroism in rescuing victims of the Metis disaster.

Not many years later, Jared died, and Sally became the first female Keeper at Watch Hill Lighthouse; she also cared for their six daughters, ages 10 to 20. It seems that all of that time at sea and as a Lighthouse Keeper's wife made Sally fit for the job. It appears that Sally managed the light without the help of her son—he was out of the house by that time. Perhaps her daughters helped her with the lighthouse duties.

Some say Sally was the most popular Keeper on the East Coast, man or woman! The lighthouse community knew Sally well; the Alabama Enquirer wrote of her just after her retirement “For ten years she has climbed the skeleton iron staircase each evening as dusk crept over the booming ocean. In that time not a mariner ever looked in vain for Sally Crandall's light.”

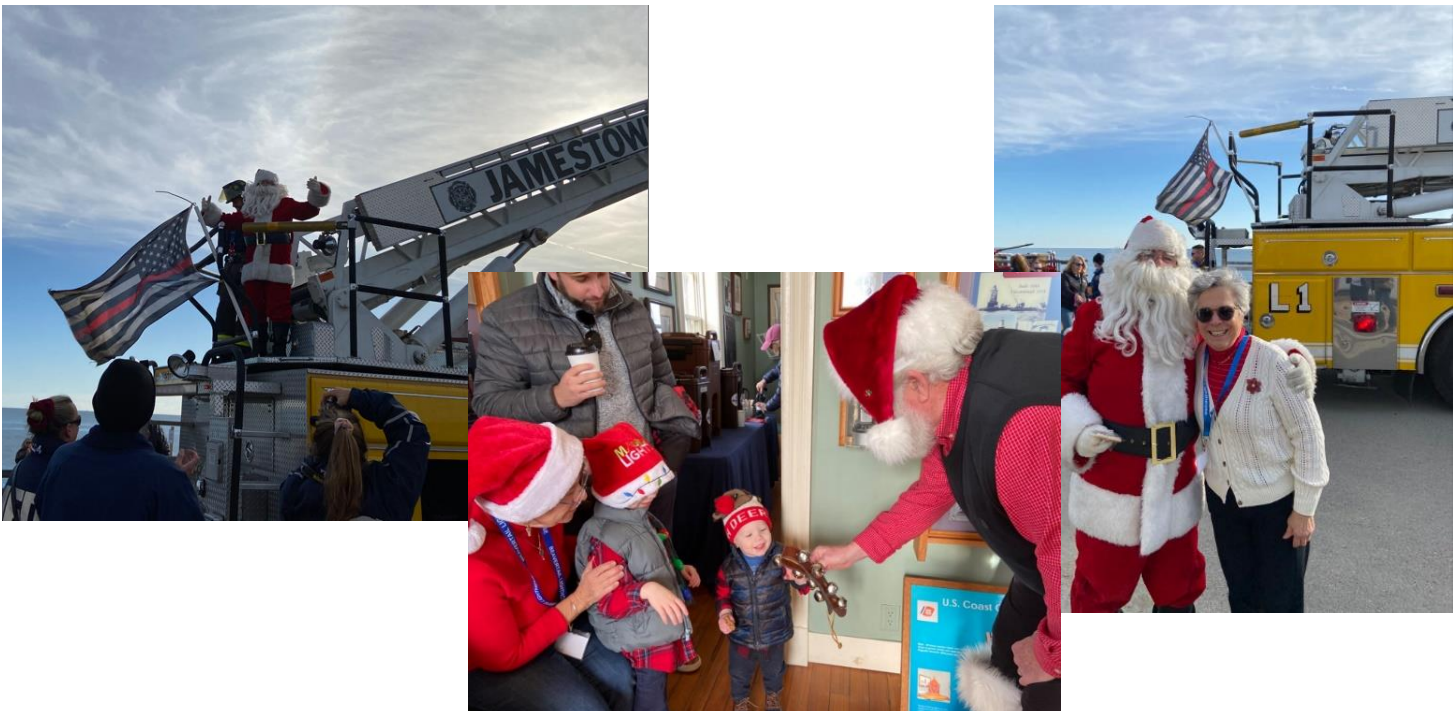
Visitors from the resorts would stop by the lighthouse to see the giant beehive of glass (a fourth-order Fresnel lens), which Sally kept covered with a cloth during the day. Visitors would leave Sally a small donation of ten or twenty-five cents for pulling back the fabric from the lens to display it to visitors. According to Sally, the lighthouse could catch fire if she left the lens exposed to the sun.

Sally stayed on at Watch Hill Lighthouse until October of 1888 when she retired. Watch Hill Lighthouse's next Keeper was the only other female Keeper, Fanny K. Schuyler, who remained at Watch Hill for two years.

Some say that when two young ladies came to visit the lighthouse, they were shocked to find Sally herself to be the Lighthouse Keeper. Sally informed the girls that "ladies can do whatever they want, and should try to do just that!"

CV

## Santa Visits Beavertail



Santa made an early stop to place a wreath atop the Beavertail Lighthouse Tower (l). Santa visiting with BLMA President Diane Bakley (r). BLMA Director Nancy Beye and her grandchildren visiting with Santa's helper (BLMA Director Bob Langton) bottom.

## Rhode Island's Perilous Coast

### South Shore of Block Island-Part 1

Block Island is a silent sentinel to Narragansett Bay; the tiny island probably got its name from its founder Adrian Block in 1614. Block Island has collected more than its share of shipwrecks during the last four centuries. Although the predominant vessel type lost along this shore is the common schooner, the shore here can claim rigs as large as a four-masted schooner and at least two steamships were lost here. The wrecks included in this discussion were lost between Southeast Point and Southwest Point.



The first shipwreck of note on this shore was the brigantine **PRINCE FREDERICK** which comes with a degree of mystery. According to an address written in 1882 by William P. Sheffield dealing with early privateering vessels, this brigantine had performed that duty admirably during the 1740s with several prizes to her name. But in her role as a merchant vessel, she met with a less prestigious end as she ran ashore in an intense snowstorm on March 23, 1751. More than one source details the loss of the brigantine at this time, but the story needs to be more explicit when in another work, **PRINCE FREDERICK** was reported as being owned in Newport as late as 1757. So did the vessel survive the storm, or was there another vessel with the same name? That is a mystery that, at this time, has not been solved.

Traveling from Charleston, SC, for her home port at Cape Ann, MA, the merchant schooner **LIBERTY** became yet another victim of a winter storm. The day after Christmas in 1773, Captain Robinson drove the fully-loaded craft ashore. The weather got the better of this experienced Master, who anchored his coaster behind the southwest point of Block Island during an easterly gale on the day before her loss, essentially using the island to block the wind. Unfortunately, the following morning, the wind shifted and blew from the west-southwest. The wind drove the schooner from her anchors, too near shore, and left the beach strewn with the remains of a cargo consisting of pitch, rice, and hemp. Two decades later, there would be another loss in this locale. Some of the cargo and rigging of the vessel were saved from the wreck, but the hull was otherwise a total loss.

On January 30, 1797, the southwest point of Block Island claimed yet another victim when the brig **POLLY**, en route for New London with a cargo of salt, had the ill fortune of sailing too near the shore at Southwest Point. **POLLY** ran aground on a reef "just 10 rods" (about 165 feet) off the point. The master of the brig, Perez Chesbrough, firmly believed there was no relief coming from the shore at this time of year and decided that it would be "every man for himself" lest they stay aboard the rapidly disintegrating wreck. Three men jumped into the sea to save themselves; two, including the captain, made it ashore. That left five men aboard the vessel. When the local inhabitants learned of the wreck and managed to drag a small boat across the island to launch a rescue, there was little hope that they would be successful. Of those still aboard at the time of the stranding, one man had frozen to death, and a second had fallen into the inner part of the wreck and had become trapped. He succumbed to the frigid water temperatures. The remainder of the crew, three in number, were safely removed from the wreck before she went to pieces where she lay.

Block Island is well known for another type of weather that has caused the loss of many vessels – fog. The date was May 25, 1819, and the merchant schooner **AMERICA**, in the command of Captain Lincoln, was returning from a trip to the West Indies with a cargo of salt and cedar logs. She was 26 days out of St. Barts and headed for Boston when disaster struck. The fog was reportedly thick, and the vessel hit the shore and quickly bilged. Crew saved part of her cargo and some of the ship's materials (sails, rigging, etc.) from the schooner, but her sailing days were over.

In the next segment of this story, you will see that the south shore of Block Island continued to claim vessels on a regular basis over the years.



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE  
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

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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 us on the web at  
[www.beavertailight.org](http://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 2023 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](mailto:info@BeavertailLight.org).

## Group Tours & Events

We will announce any updates and/or changes to the schedule on our website at [Beavertailight.org](http://Beavertailight.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.