



BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

The Lighthouse Log

Winter 2017

*The quarterly Newsletter
of the BLMA*

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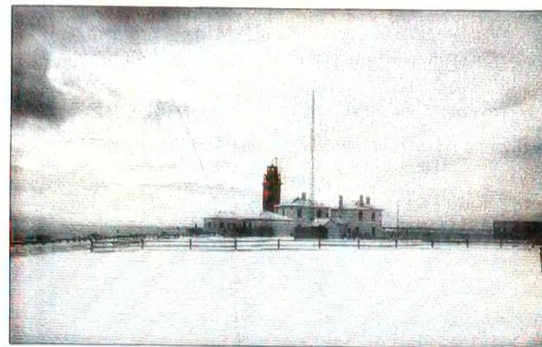
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Message From The Editor



We are experiencing a typical New England winter season hard by the RI shore, apart from a blizzard in early January - so far so good. Perhaps it's a function of global climate change, but we'll take it. I first discovered this paradise in the early 1960's when Conanicut Island (AKA Jamestown) was "just" an idyllic place to fish and swim during summer with a handful of close friends. I can't believe we all took it for granted. The next school year always came too soon, but that was the price for living a dream during the summer. Now this tiny beach house is a year-round home. It's as near perfect a place to retire as I can imagine, cold weather notwithstanding. Central heating, a wood stove, and attic insulation definitely helped.



Many visitors stopped by the first two weekends in December, including an unexpected visit from Santa Claus. During our Open House on December 4th, we provided free refreshments & treats and ample conversation. The homemade fare provided by several of the board members was praised by all who tried the healthy and savory items. We estimate that 100 people joined us, and sales in the gift shop totaled \$670. It was great to say hello to new friends and long-time acquaintances alike. The Open House has become a tradition here at Beavertail and is a special event for all of us.

Speaking personally, it's like having a fourth holiday in the November-January time frame. Scheduling it the first weekend in December allows just enough time to catch one's breath after Thanksgiving and fully enjoy the occasion.

The next chapter of "RI Perilous Coast" appears on Page 5, and Jim Jenney has started a very detailed series concerning the ships lost around Castle Hill (Newport) RI. Castle Hill lighthouse is visible from the Beavertail tower to the NE across the East Passage of the bay, and is one of only a few lighthouse structures actually constructed of granite blocks. It is adjacent to the Castle Hill Coast Guard station as well as the historic Castle Hill Inn and near some of the most famous of the Newport mansions. The waters off Castle Hill are treacherous due to the frequent sudden fog banks and infamous "Butterball Rock."

We have been involved with more facility improvements since the last newsletter, including an updated security system, a new basement door, and are pursuing the use of credit cards for gift shop purchases. Many visitors have requested this service, and we

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Message from the Editor continued from previous page . . .

hope to have it available for the 2017 season. We also hope to feature internet sales of our stock items. These were discussed at length at our recent Board Meeting in January. We are pursuing both services actively and when and if approved will be confirmed in our next issue.

We were blessed in January with two grants from the RI Historic Preservation & Heritage Commission and the Heritage Harbor Foundation. These grants must be used for an on-site interactive historical information system about Beavertail, as well as a portion of the much-needed building improvements we documented in our grant request. The Rhode Island commission approved these grants based on the needs specified in our application, with contributions from board members Suzi Andrews, Varoujan Karentz, and Dave Smith.

The private fund-raising campaign we featured in the prior issue is proceeding on course. We are approaching total pledged donations of \$65,000. Our goal of \$500,000, which would be matched by Mr. Jim Buttrick if we are successful in reaching that remarkable sum, is ambitious, but we are dedicated to the cause. This will continue throughout the remainder of 2017. This magnitude of privately pledged funding is without precedent in the history of BLMA, and to say we are grateful is an incredible understatement. Funds are sorely needed for the planned museum expansion work, for preventive maintenance and repairs to damaged walls and roof coverings in our historic buildings, and various other building improvements. Preventing weather related damage from water intrusion, freeze and thaw cycles, and high winds on site is a huge undertaking. We get plenty of these challenges at the entrance to Narragansett Bay!



On January 14, we hosted the New England Lighthouse Lovers (NELL) in a 'rare' winter event. Rare for us that is. NELL is a not-for-profit organization which conducts their "Lighthouses, Hot Chocolate and You" tour in January each year. Visits are made to select lighthouses situated in the 6 states comprising New England. We welcomed 26 hardy NELL members on that date and felt privileged to host their 2017 tour. Three tower climbs were conducted by yours truly, in addition to a full tour of our regular museum facilities made

by various board members. Usually our tower climbs are made in Summer or early Fall, and the winds, while always pronounced at Beavertail, are almost tropical by comparison. The hot chocolate was extremely welcome upon our return to the museum!

At the time of the previous newsletter, the US Coast Guard was preparing to install a new drum beacon light for the tower after the old light assembly stopped functioning. Despite initial frustrations - the replacement drum rotated at 9 second intervals as required but was not illuminated - the new drum beacon was finally restored to full functionality on Monday Nov. 28th. In a reply to my earlier email of inquiry, the USCG Boston office stated that 'some additional parts were needed.' I received this reply the same day work was completed, and we were extremely pleased to see the light back in full service. (A brief incident in January rendered the light inoperable for 3 days but this was corrected.) In her letter to the USCG Suzi Andrews, BLMA President, formally requested the old drum beacon light be returned to us as a permanent display item. We hope to feature both the existing Fresnel lens and the beacon the USCG removed from the tower, to add to the lighthouse historical perspective we all can enjoy up close.



In closing, I hope to see all of you who plan to visit Beavertail during the 2017 season which starts on Memorial Day, May 29th. It can't happen too soon for me.

Warm regards,

Bob Dutson

BLMA RECEIVES TWO GRANTS!

Preservation Grant

As of this January BLMA was designated as the recipient of a major **\$94,000 matching grant** awarded by the **RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission**. This competitive grant will allow external preservation of 4 major buildings crucial to site activity. These will include repair of the iron work on the light tower, window sill, and storm window replacements, refurbishing the parge coat and painting the exterior of the buildings. Work will commence in Spring 2017 and should bring Beavertail Light Station back to its white sparkling brilliance.

Heritage Harbor Foundation Grant

BLMA has also received a **competitive \$6,259 grant** from the **RI Heritage Harbor Foundation**. The foundation believes that Rhode Island historical organizations such as BLMA are best positioned to raise history awareness levels through programs and special projects. Organizations can explore new or neglected aspects of history to disseminate this knowledge and leave durable records.

This grant will be used specifically to develop and install historical information displays describing Beavertail and other Rhode Island lighthouses and their use of lights, lenses, and fuels since 1749. The displays will be in our Oil Storage Building and include theory, operation and assembly of Fresnel lenses. Two large interactive touch screen displays will be available, allowing visitors to select subject videos and related stories. These will include visual understanding of lens prism characteristics and about how lights contributed to the navigational safety to vessels transiting Narragansett Bay.

Contributors to the grant application were Clarice Willis, Dave Smith, Alex Brincko and Varoujan Karentz.



Beavertail Lighthouse
Matching Endowment Campaign

\$500,000
\$400,000
\$300,000
\$200,000
\$100,000

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DCB 24 ROTATING LIGHT PROBLEM



On October 7th, Beavertail's reliable light (DCB -24), which normally rotates every 9 seconds, 24 hours a day 8,760 hours each year, experienced a major failure. While the light did not fail nor the electric drive motor, the driven reduction gear system which controls the rotation rate did.

USCG Bristol's Navigation Aid Team (NAT) spare part department, which maintains Beavertail's light, could not come up with a working gear box. The broken system including the beacon light was removed by block and tackle on October 26th with a replacement shipped from Baltimore. Meanwhile Beavertail's emergency light mounted on a pole above the lantern room dutifully flashed a weak but effective light.



The replacement beacon arrived on November 10th, and eight days later was operational, this time with a counter clockwise rotation.

Operation lasted only a few days and the light went dark again on the November 20th. Eight days later (November 28th) with new repair parts, Beavertail is shining again.



Photos by Robert Dutson & VK

VK ■

FOG BELL HOUSE MODEL

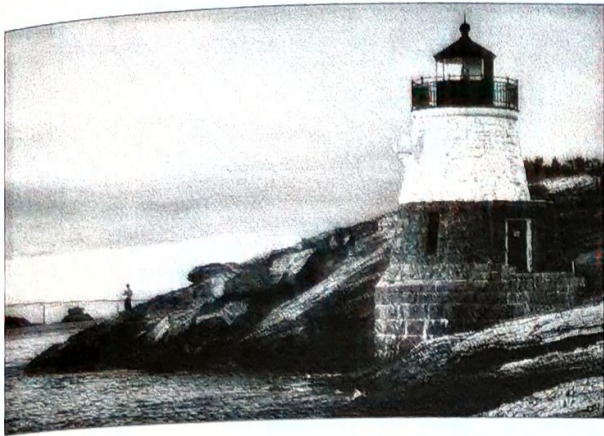
Beavertail Light Station has the distinction of having the 1st Fog Bell in America. It was constructed in 1829 just north of the 1749 light foundation, and its foundation was uncovered by Hurricane Sandy in 2012. There was much controversy about the quality of the bell building built by *David Melville*, who 12 years earlier in 1817 was the inventor of gas lighting at Beavertail.

BLMA member Varoujan Karentz, following the "Solicitation Notice" specifications drafted in 1829 by *Christopher Ellery Newport's* Customs Collector, constructed a replica model for display in our museum. This model brings to attention Beavertail's decades of continued development and testing of fog signal apparatus. The building housed the mechanical equipment, which struck the 600 lb bell 10 times each minute and was designed to run 16 hours with one winding.



VK ■

RI'S PERILOUS COAST CASTLE HILL



On the east side of the main shipping passage into Narragansett Bay is a rocky promontory which was once referred to as Ram's Head due to its shape but is most commonly known to us as Castle Hill. Since this land mass juts out into the entrance to the East Passage, it was the logical site for a lighthouse to be situated to guide mariners into the bay. The southern extremity of Castle Hill is known as Ragged Point and lies just a few yards from a nearly submerged rock that we know as Butterball Rock. On the east side of Ragged Point is a small beach which today is simply called Castle Hill Beach but which over the years has been known under several names. It has been called Collins Beach, Bateman's Beach and Agassiz's Beach usually to reflect the name of the owner of the adjacent land. Numerous vessels have come to grief at Castle Hill and at least a dozen are known to have been totally lost there. Of these, three-quarters of them were caused by weather conditions: four due to fog, three due to snowstorms, and two due to other storms. The following is a description of the final voyage for each.

Although Newport was established in the 17th century, the first confirmed loss at Castle Hill was in the 19th century. The sloop MORNING STAR belonged to Nantucket, MA but when lost was inbound from Hartford, CT to Providence with a cargo consisting of 100 barrels of domestic gin and some produce. As with seven other vessels on this list, there was no lighthouse there at the time and the sloop ran ashore at night. Captain Nye and his crew were saved, as was the gin. Even the sails and some of the rigging were removed from the wreck; but the produce and the remainder of the vessel went to pieces where she lay. The date was November 7, 1828. Nineteen years later, almost to the day, the next total loss was recorded here.

It was November 13, 1847 when the brig RIO, under the command of Capt. Coggeshall, fell victim here on a foggy day. Like most of the known losses at this location, she was inbound to the bay. Somehow she missed Butterball Rock (known as Table Rock or "The Washbowl" at that time) and ran on Collins Beach but later she drifted off the beach and became a total loss on that rock. The brig was carrying lumber from Bangor, ME destined for parties in Bristol though the cargo was owned in Newport. The work of salvaging began immediately and the cargo was removed in less than a week but in getting off the beach she ran into difficulty in clearing the rock and ended her days perched atop it where her bottom gave way. It was quickly reported that "*the sea is ebbing and flowing in her*", a sure sign that she would never sail again.

Nine years later, on April 2, 1856, the small schooner D.W. DIXON had the misfortune of coming ashore here while seeking shelter from an offshore storm. The 80-ton vessel was carrying a cargo of mackerel from Harwich, MA to New York City. As with many of the other victims she ran ashore at night, first striking on Brenton's Reef, just over a mile to the south but, after freeing herself from that most dangerous reef, she ran for the safety of Newport Harbor and was either intentionally run ashore on the beach to prevent sinking or simply mistook the point resulting in the stranding. Captain Doane and his crew managed to escape from the wreck of the three-year old schooner but in short order the vessel itself

Continued on next page . . .

RI'S PERILOUS COAST—CASTLE HILL (CONTINUED FROM PG 5) . . .

was a loss. Just eight and a half barrels of mackerel were saved from the wreck.

The fourth victim to this area was the 200-ton schooner RICHMOND of Dennis, MA. Launched in 1849, she was ten years old when lost on February 18, 1859. This merchant vessel was traveling from Boston to Baltimore with an assorted cargo which included 900 bags of linseed, pails and brooms, and thirty-tons of bar iron. Under the command of Captain Thatcher, who was also her owner, she struck Table Rock and drifted from there to Bateman's Beach. It was high water when she struck and almost immediately the schooner freed herself but due to mishandling she ran ashore again. Being in an exposed position to the wind and sea, she was driven ever higher on the beach but managed to stay relatively intact despite the ongoing heavy weather. Within three days nearly half of her cargo had been removed and taken to Newport. Good fortune seemed to be with the salvagers and over the next few days the sea was relatively calm and the job of discharging her continued but on the fourth day the bad weather returned and a day later she was well up on the beach, high and dry, with the bottom all out of her on her starboard side. On March 7th, the remains of the wreck were sold at auction on the beach.

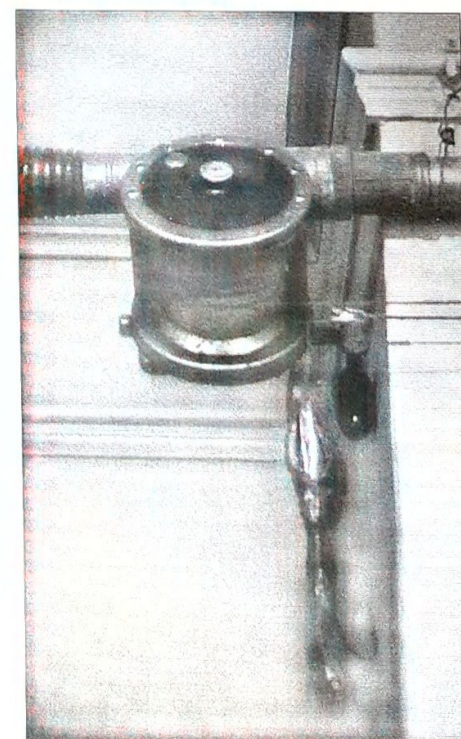
JJ ■

ARTHUR CLARKE'S EELBOB

While everyone is in awe of the enormous 65 lb. Striped Bass in the renamed *Richard Sullivan* room, visitors often miss the rod & reel hung above the display case. Surfcaster Arthur "Archie" Clarke used the classic rod to catch the striper in October of 1936. The fish was a world record for 27 years. Adding to this 'fish story' is the dried-up bait hanging from the reel. While it looks like beaten up sausage, it too is an anecdote worth explaining to museum visitors.

Invented by Archie, it became the most popular bait for striped bass anywhere. Fishermen from all over New England and down to the New Jersey Shore were ecstatic about how it caught stripers. It was a rigged eel or tail of one attached to a single free swinging hook with a lead head preserved in brine and sold by Archie clustered in a glass jars. The free-swing bait, when properly manipulated by the angler, allowed the bait to dance and entice stripers to strike the lure. It was called a "Clarke Eelbob", described as "*a lead head with a free-swinging single hook to which is attached a whole dead eel, or tail section of an eel. The lead head provides weight for casting and also allows the eel to probe deeper water. The free-swinging hook allows the eel to undulate when the angler imparts a jigging motion on retrieve.*"

To this day anglers still write about Archie "Eelbob" lure.



VK ■

BRENTON LIGHTSHIP

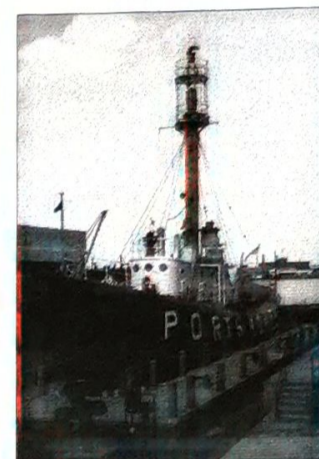


The Brenton Reef Lightship

Entering Narragansett Bay via the East Passage was always dangerous due to the reef off "Brenton Point" in Newport. The reef extended a full half mile, projecting to the SW below the tip of this east entrance to the bay. Although Beavertail Light was the prominent navigation aid, we sometimes forget to point out the location of the *Brenton* lightship, standing guard off the reef. Four different vessels filled in the role from 1856 to 1962 until a "Texas Tower" was constructed. That too was

no longer needed and was deteriorating rapidly, so an ocean entrance buoy (NB) with a radar beacon transmitting the code letter "B" replaced the tower in 1989.

The disposition of the last Brenton Reef lightship (LV 102) is still unknown. It was sold by the USCG to a fishing fleet in Ketchikan Alaska and renamed *Big Dipper*. Other than a report she caught fire and was saved by the CG Cutter *Citrus*, no records have shown her final disposition. Her sister ship *LV101* is a museum ship located in a museum in Portsmouth, VA.



The Portsmouth Lightship

VK

BEAVERTAIL WILDLIFE



Photo Courtesy of RIBird.org

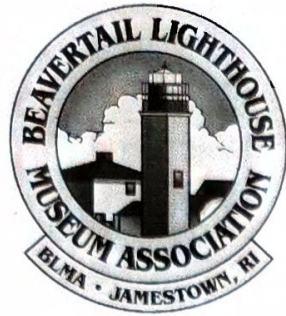
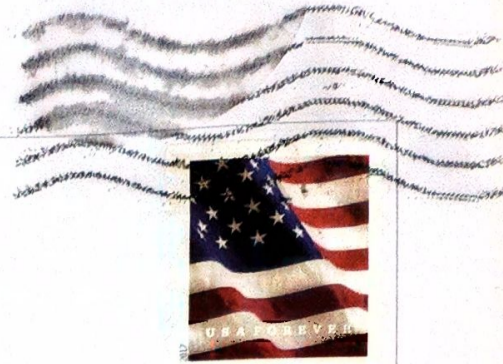
There are creatures in abundance on Conanicut Island and all species live right here in Beavertail Park or a short cast from the rocks. Fish, fowl, reptiles of the harmless variety, and a wide variety of mammals are always present. The many species of fish and shellfish that populate the bay can be found in the aquarium on site operated by the RI DEM. Mostly the local wildlife is much more aware of us than vice versa. Walking the park nature trails with a sharp eye provides evidence of coyote and foxes, or at least the remains of rabbits they dined on the night before. In the spring

coyote are much more apparent as they hunt 24/7 to feed their young and they always know when I am in the neighborhood. Timing is everything if you want to spot the many birds that visit only during annual migrations north or south. They stop by for only a day or two before heading to their destination. The snowy owl pictured above is a regular guest in the park during winter months. Three days after Christmas 2015, the North Kingstown RI harbormaster photographed a 50-ft. humpback whale which had to pass right by Beavertail using the West Passage of the bay; earlier this year a 15-ft. hammerhead was documented next to the new wind generating "farm" immediately south of us. A local resident told me a bear cub had been spotted near the lighthouse in November; perhaps a case of mistaken identity (many large dogs are walked here by owners all year long) or perhaps a very elusive critter, as no one else reported it, but who knows? One thing we do know is our local wildlife is ubiquitous, and adds to the charm of our site. Please check it out next time you visit.

BD

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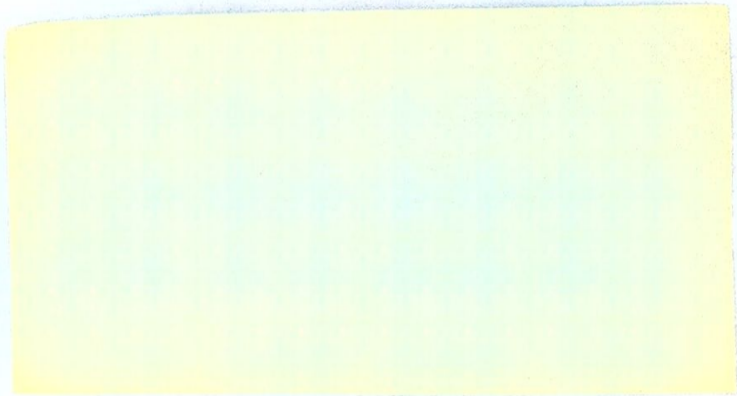
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BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
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Jamestown, Rhode Island 02835

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 at
www.beavertailight.org



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MUSEUM HOURS

The Museum is currently closed. We will reopen at the end of May 2017.

We are, however, available for group tours. If you would like to schedule a tour of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum please call (401)423-3270, or email us at info@BeavertailLight.org.

We will announce 2017 Tower opening dates after the first of the year.



GROUP TOURS AND EVENTS

To arrange Lighthouse tours for school or senior groups please contact Mrs. Linda Warner at:

info@beavertailight.org

Weddings and private events on the Lighthouse grounds are not allowed by the U.S. Coast Guard.

For scheduling special events, including weddings in Beavertail State Park contact the RI Dept. of Environmental Management (DEM) at 401-884-2010.