



The Lighthouse Log

Fall 2025

Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Fall 2025 President's Message



As the summer season comes to a close, I want to take a moment to thank all of you—our members, volunteers, and visitors—for making it another memorable one at Beavertail. From welcoming families who climbed the tower for the first time, to seeing familiar faces return year after year, the lighthouse continues to serve as both a beacon and a gathering place for our community.

This summer, we were especially proud of the progress made on the restoration of the tower's interior. Step by step, we are ensuring that Beavertail is preserved for future generations, while also enhancing the experience for everyone who comes through our doors. These projects are a testament to the dedication of our volunteers and the generosity of our supporters.

We also gathered last week for our Annual Meeting, where we celebrated our accomplishments and enjoyed an engaging presentation by author Lenore Skomal, whose stories of Ida Lewis captured the imagination of everyone in attendance. It was wonderful to see so many of you there, sharing in both our history and our plans for the future.

Looking ahead, we are excited to collaborate with the Aquarium on Friday, October 3rd, for their Halloween event. The lighthouse will be open for tours and, weather permitting, tower climbs will be available. We hope this partnership will bring even more families to Beavertail for a fun and festive evening.

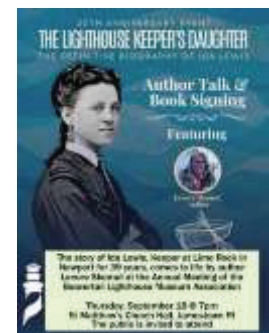
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As we head into fall, the pace at the museum may slow, but our work does not. Planning is already underway for next year, and we are excited about the opportunities ahead. Together, we will continue to protect this historic landmark, share its stories, and welcome all who seek to experience its history and beauty.

On behalf of the BLMA board, thank you for being part of this journey with us. Your commitment ensures that Beavertail remains not only a treasured landmark but also a vibrant part of our community.

With gratitude,
Nancy Beye
President, BLMA

BLMA Hosts Lenore Skomal at its Annual Meeting



BLMA held its annual meeting on September 18 at St. Matthew's Church Hall in Jamestown. Following a brief business session, a large audience gathered to hear from award-winning author Lenore Skomal, who spoke about her acclaimed book, *The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter: The Remarkable True Story of American Heroine Ida Lewis*. Her talk was well-received, and guests had the opportunity to meet Lenore and have their books signed while enjoying refreshments.

During the meeting, BLMA also recognized longtime Director Varoujan Karentz and his wife, Rose, with a special token of appreciation for their many years of dedicated service to the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association. Learn more about their contributions on the next page.

Support BLMA Year-Round—Join or Renew Today!

One of the most impactful ways to support the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association (BLMA) is through membership. Whether you're joining for the first time or renewing your commitment, your support helps preserve and celebrate the legacy of Beavertail Light.

Thanks to our secure payment platform, Zeffy, becoming a member or renewing takes just seconds. Simply visit beavertaillight.org/join-renew, click the "Join/Renew" button, choose your membership level, and fill out the form.

Want to make it even easier next year? Check the "Automatic Renewal" box. You'll receive a reminder email on your membership anniversary with a link to renew—no hassle, no delay. And here's a great bonus: Zeffy doesn't charge BLMA any credit card processing fees. That means 100% of your contribution goes directly to supporting our mission. Zeffy will invite you to donate to help keep their platform free, but the amount is entirely up to you.

Your membership keeps the light shining—thank you for being part of our community.

BLMA Honors Varoujan and Rose Karentz



BLMA Director Bob Langton presents Varoujan and Rose Karentz with a Plaque of Appreciation.

At the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association's Annual Meeting on September 18, long-time BLMA Director Varoujan Karentz and his wife, Rose, were honored with a surprise tribute recognizing their extraordinary contributions to the museum and its mission. A beautifully crafted plaque was presented to the couple and will be prominently displayed in the museum's Interactive Room—a space enriched over the years by Varoujan's extensive work and dedication. Its placement there is a fitting tribute to his legacy.

The award came as a complete surprise to Varoujan and Rose, who had no idea they would be recognized in such a meaningful

way. BLMA wanted to express its deep appreciation for their unwavering love, commitment, and decades of service in preserving Beavertail Lighthouse and educating the public about its historical significance.

And no, they're not retiring! Varoujan and Rose continue to be active partners in preservation and community engagement through their work with BLMA.

As highlighted on the plaque, Varoujan has devoted countless volunteer hours over the past twenty-plus years, serving as BLMA Vice President, Board Member, and Docent. He is also a respected conservator, author, and historian whose deep knowledge of Beavertail Lighthouse has enriched the experience of countless visitors. Rose, too, has made invaluable contributions as a Docent, sharing her talents and time to support the museum's preservation efforts and educational outreach.

In a past edition of the Lighthouse Log, Varoujan reflected on the museum's growth: "In 2006, we started expanding the museum from a two-room venue to encompass all of the buildings on the site, and ended up as the best small museum in Rhode Island. With preservation as the main theme, every room tells the stories of the 273-year-old site. Those accomplishments and working alongside my peers continue to drive my interest to probe further into Beavertail's history and make our museum even better."

Their passion and partnership continue to inspire the BLMA community and beyond; thank you, Varoujan and Rose!



National Register Of Historic Places Plaque Installed at the Lighthouse

BLMA Director Bob Langton recently led efforts to install a National Register of Historic Places plaque on the exterior of Beavertail Lighthouse, positioned beside the east entrance door. This new addition complements the existing plaque in the museum's Lens Room, which was placed years ago, but unlike its indoor counterpart, the new plaque will be visible year-round—even when the museum is closed.



New External Plaque for the National Register of Historic Places

During his research, Bob uncovered the original nomination form submitted to the National Register of Historic Places. Thoroughly documented and rich in historical detail, the form offers a deep dive into the significance of Beavertail Lighthouse. The nomination was submitted in May 1977 and was approved by the Department of the Interior in December of that year—well before the founding of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association, which opened the museum to the public in June 1989. At the time of the submission, both keeper's houses stood vacant, having been boarded up by the Coast Guard due to vandalism

following the automation of the light in 1972. Despite these changes, the lighthouse tower remained—and still remains—an active aid to navigation.

The form highlights Beavertail Light's prominence during colonial times, noting its critical role in marking the entrance to the East Passage of Narragansett Bay and Newport Harbor, one of colonial America's most vital ports. It describes the tower as "a prominent landmark, familiar to generations of Rhode Islanders and to out-of-state tourists, and an important element in the visual fabric of lower Narragansett Bay—a cultural artifact with great emotional significance for many residents."

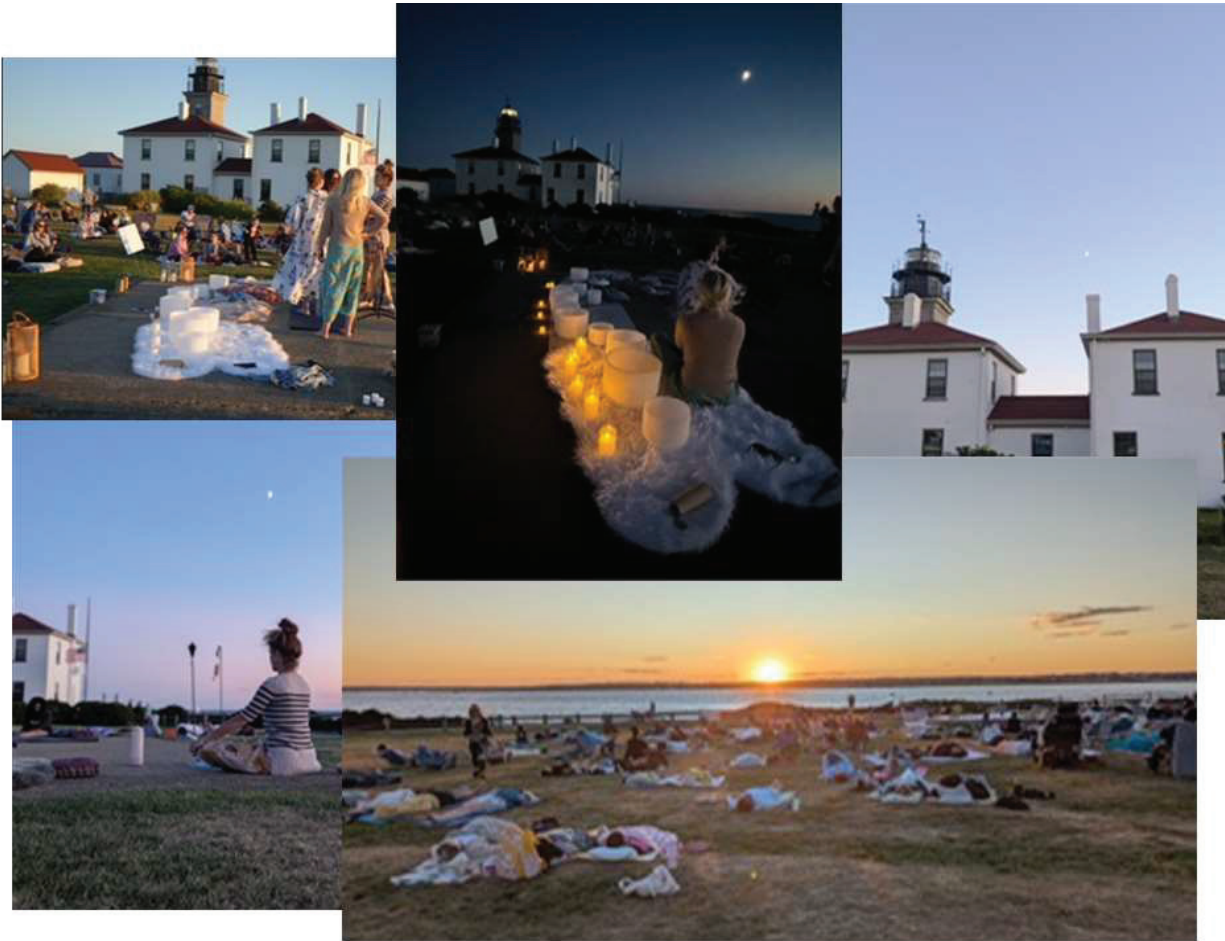
Beavertail Lighthouse also played a pioneering role in lighthouse technology. In 1817–1818, David Melville of Newport, a trailblazer in gas lighting, conducted early experiments with gas illumination at the site in collaboration with the Federal Government. In 1851, C. A. Daboll's fog whistle and a fog trumpet were installed experimentally, powered by compressed air from a horse-driven pump. A steam whistle followed in 1857, though it proved ineffective and was replaced with a reed trumpet in 1866. A more advanced steam whistle was successfully installed in 1881. These innovations positioned Beavertail as a testing ground for some of the earliest lighthouse technologies in the United States.

Finally, the nomination form emphasizes Beavertail's ecological importance. As a thriving coastal habitat, it supports a wide range of marine life and serves as a nesting site for migratory birds. It's also a seasonal gathering point for monarch butterflies preparing for their southern migration. These natural features, combined with its historical and technological legacy, make Beavertail Lighthouse not just a landmark—but a living monument worthy of preservation.



Original Plaque for the National Register of Historic Places in the museum's interior

Soundbath Season Success!



BLMA Director Nicole Contino and her dedicated team have led this community event with great success throughout the summer. Thanks to their efforts—and the generosity of attendees—donations totaled \$1,048 in June, \$1,492 in July, and \$1,350 in August. The Soundbath season at the lighthouse is set to conclude on September 27, and final donation figures are still to be tallied once complete.

2025 has truly been a remarkable season. Heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers, participants, and donors who made it possible. Every contribution directly supports the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association and helps preserve this cherished local landmark.

Back in History

Providence Evening Bulletin, Newport, November 3, 1869



Vintage Postcard of the Rose Island Lighthouse

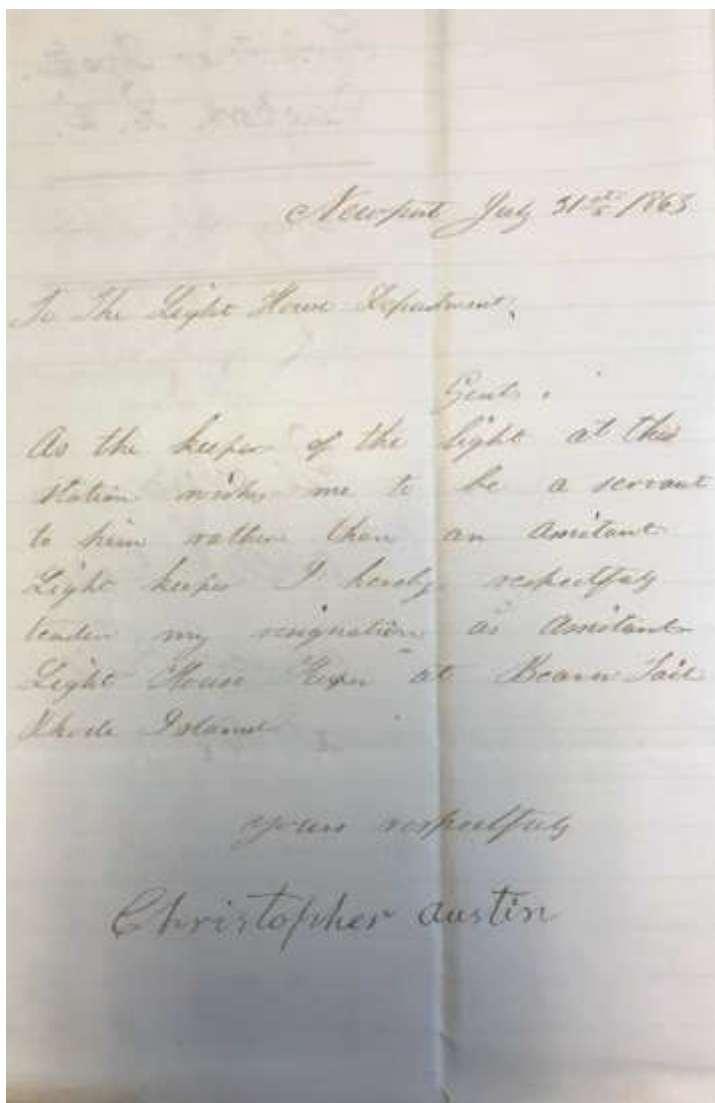
As Mr. Silas G Shaw (a former Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper), a resident of Jamestown, was coming in his boat to this city, on Monday evening, for the purpose of attending a meeting of the I.O. of G.T. (International Organization of Good Templars,) accompanied by his wife and son, his boat struck a rock near the south end of Rose Island, it being dark at the time, and capsized. His son swam ashore and fortunately found a boat, which he launched and went to the assistance of his parents, rescued and landed them to safety.

The I.O. of G.T. is a fraternal organization that is part of the temperance movement, promoting abstinence from alcohol and other drugs; it was founded in 1851. The Rose Island Lighthouse was under construction in 1869 and went into service in January of 1870.

Keepers: Assistant Christopher Austin

February 13, 1863 to October 17, 1863

According to the contents of a letter written by Beavertail Assistant Keeper Christopher Austin addressed to the Lighthouse Department, "The Keeper of the Light at this station [Silas G. Shaw] wishes me to be a servant to him rather



than an Assistant Keeper, I hereby respectfully tender my resignation as Assistant Light House Keeper at Beaver Tail, Rhode Island." Austin held the position at Beavertail Lighthouse for a little over 8 months. Interestingly, the Lighthouse Board recorded Christopher's surname as Austen, when Christopher's letter clearly shows that he spelled his name Austin with an I.

The surname Austin is common enough in the area, but Christopher was a relatively rare given name at the time. The *Genealogy of the Descendants of Robert Austin of Kingstown, RI*, only records one person of the name Christopher, called Kit, who was born just before the Revolutionary War, so this is not the same person.

One might imagine a petulant young man accusing the Keeper of treating him in such a way, yet with the Civil War grinding on, a younger man would not likely risk the protection from the military draft that the Keeper's position provided.

Many Assistant Keepers were single men with seafaring backgrounds used to living and working without a family to consider. Assistant Keeper Austin is likely the same man whose obituary appeared in the November 13, 1865, *Providence Evening Press*. If so, he was a Newport man of about 60 years of age in 1863. There is no marriage record found for him, and his death certificate does not list his parents' names. His obituary explains that he followed the seas most of his days, but that he had complained of illness in the days just before his death after he was exposed in an

open boat during a recent blow. A second *Providence Evening Press* article, published one day later, explained that this same Christopher Austin was in the service of the US Navy in the Pensacola, Florida, Navy Yard during the initial days of the Civil War, and that while serving at the Navy yard, an officer ordered Austin to replace the US flag with the "flag of rebellion." Austin refused, saying in a cool manner that the officer would "see him dead first." When the officer reminded Austin that he had the power to shoot him on the spot, Austin reportedly replied, "Then shoot and be damned." It would take a higher power to induce him to lower the flag. Someone else had to perform that duty.

If this Christopher Austin is the same man, then it is likely that the federal government assigned him to Beavertail Lighthouse as an Assistant Keeper in appreciation for his stoic service at the Navy Yard. Many Civil War veterans were rewarded with keepers positions in this era. If so, it is likely that Austin knew Head Keeper Silas G. Shaw's brother was a Confederate Colonel who was actively in battle in the South at the time and, perhaps, this colored his attitude towards Shaw. At any rate, the Christopher Austin mentioned in the *Providence Evening Press* article is buried in the Common Burying Ground in Newport not far from where Silas G. Shaw is buried. Austin's cemetery stone and both *Evening Press* articles spell his surname with an I. He was replaced by William Batchelder as Assistant on October 17, 1863. Both documents courtesy of the National Archives, Waltham, MA. RG26 Newport, General Records 1792-1870. Research to prove that this Christopher Austin is one and the same as the Assistant Beavertail Lighthouse Keeper is ongoing.



Rhode Island's Perilous Coast Point Judith (Part 6)

At the farthest end of the year 1887, on December 31st, yet another three-masted schooner came to grief at Point Judith. This one was the 477-ton schooner MARY A. DRURY, and her story illustrates the speed with which salvagers need to start working if the vessel or cargo is to be saved. From the life savers' action report of the incident: *"December 31. The three-masted schooner MARY A. DRURY, of Boston, Massachusetts, stranded at twenty minutes past 4 a.m. on the end of Point Judith, a quarter of a mile north of the station of that name (Third District), coast of Rhode Island.*

She was bound for Providence, in that state, from Norfolk, Virginia, with a cargo of soft coal and carried a crew of eight men all told. The weather was clear, with a moderate westerly wind, the accident being due to an error of judgment in standing too close to the land. The beach patrolman discovered the vessel immediately after she was struck by, and he quickly flashed a Coston signal and then ran to the station to summon the life-saving crew. The latter lost no time in manning the lifeboat, and ten minutes after launching, the rescuers were alongside the schooner, ready to render whatever assistance was in their power. The task of floating her was at once commenced, the surfmen helping to utilize all available canvas and to work the pumps. At 7 o'clock, she was clear, with four feet of water still in the hold. The salvagers' pumps were kept constantly going, sail was increased, and they made every effort to get the craft to a harbor, but the water gained so rapidly that it was necessary, to prevent her from sinking, to run her ashore again. The captain telegraphed to Newport for aid, and in the afternoon a force of wreckers arrived, but easterly weather setting in, accompanied by a rough sea, they were obliged to abandon their operations, after having made but little progress towards freeing her. The keeper remained on board, and during the night assisted the crew to land, with their baggage, and gave them comfortable quarters at the station. The next day (January 1st) a heavy southeast gale prevailed and the schooner began to break up, a large quantity of the wreckage being gathered by persons in the neighborhood. On January 2nd the keeper procured a team and conveyed the sailors and their effects to the Narragansett Pier, where, by representing their condition to the railway officials, they were given free passage over the line to their destination. The captain deferred his departure until he could settle up the business pertaining to the wreck, and did not leave the station until January 11th, on which day he sold the material which was saved by the wreckers and life-saving crew at auction, and disposed of the hull containing the cargo at private sale. Only a small quantity of the latter was afterwards saved."

The DRURY was a 15-year-old vessel, owned by J.H. Conant. When lost she was under the command of a Captain Nickerson and was carrying 650 tons of coal which now lies on the bottom off Point Judith. In the Boston Daily Globe of March 13, 1888, the following report was found, *"BOSTON SCHOONER WRECKED – The McNeal Gone to Pieces off Point Judith – Providence, R.I., March 12 – At Point Judith. This morning the three wrecked schooners, including the MCNEAL, that have been stranded there for some time, are strewn along the beach. Shore property at Narragansett Pier has suffered, and the aggregate damage will amount to considerable."* To say that this report is meagre is an understatement. Research has not been able to turn up an exact date that the schooner went ashore or, in fact, exactly how far from the point she lay. That said, this report, which is part of a much larger story about a massive snowstorm, is clear that there was a wreck of this name which was destroyed at this time.

Another winter storm affected Point Judith on February 10, 1893. The Newport Daily News of the 25th filed the following report, *"THE STORM - Wrecks at Block Island and Point Judith with Loss of Life at the Former - The weather of this past week has not been such as to bear out the theory that 'with the advent of February winter had broken.' Last Saturday morning found Newport streets buried under more than a foot of snow, and Monday we received our proportional part of a wind storm which was remarkable for its severity throughout the east. Schooners JOHN PAULL and EAST WIND, which went ashore at Point Judith, the former two weeks ago and the latter last week, have both been abandoned. Reports of much damage to shipping and great suffering from exposure come from all points along the coast, showing the storm to have been of unusual severity."* Monthly Weather Review, February 1893 - 10th—Southeast to southwest gales prevailed along the Atlantic coast, with heavy rain on the south New England coast. A schooner ran ashore 1 mile north of Point Judith at 3a.m.; the crew was saved; the vessel and cargo were lost. As time passed, the number of wrecks increased; not due to the area becoming any more dangerous. It was strictly a matter of more traffic passing the point.





BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE
MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 83

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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 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

The Beavertail Lighthouse Museum is open from 10:30am-4:30pm, weekends only starting September 6 through October 12 and on Columbus Day October 13. 4:30 - 6:30 pm, Friday October 3, 2025 along with the Beavertail Aquarium Halloween Party.

Don't forget, BLMA Holiday shopping days on December 6 & 7, and December 13 & 14, 12pm – 3pm.

Please, see our website for Tower Climb dates.

Website & Contact Info

We will announce any updates and/or changes to the schedule on our website at www.BeavertailLight.org.

We are a FREE ADMISSION Museum.

To contact the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum please call (401) 423-3270, or email us at info@BeavertailLight.org.