



The Lighthouse Log

Winter 2026

Quarterly Newsletter of the BLMA

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Winter 2026 President's Message



Dear Members and Friends,

As we settle into the quieter winter months at Beavertail, I'm reminded that this season, while less visible to the public, is one of meaningful progress for the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association. Winter gives us the opportunity to reflect, plan, and prepare—work that is essential to everything our visitors enjoy once the gates reopen.

Behind the scenes, our dedicated volunteers and committees have been busy. From organizing and preserving historic documents in our archives to developing new and engaging interpretive displays, their commitment ensures that Beavertail's story continues to be told with care, accuracy, and creativity. I am deeply grateful for the countless hours given so generously in support of our mission.

We are also looking ahead. In partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, important improvements to the grounds and buildings are underway or in the planning stages, including the replacement of fencing and future window restoration projects. These efforts help safeguard this historic site while enhancing the experience for generations to come. Recognition, like being named Rhode Island's most breathtaking autumn view, is a testament not only to Beavertail's natural beauty, but also to the stewardship that protects it. Your membership, volunteerism, and financial support make

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that stewardship possible, and I thank you sincerely for standing with us.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish you a peaceful winter season and look forward to welcoming you back to Beavertail in the months ahead.

Warm regards,

Nancy Beye

President, Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association

Voted Most Breathtaking Autumn View



In October 2025, a survey of more than 3,000 travelers conducted by Exoticca Travel Agency crowned Beavertail Lighthouse as Rhode Island's most breathtaking autumn view. What makes this recognition extraordinary is that Beavertail Point does not blaze with the crimson and gold of hardwoods so often associated with New England's autumn. Instead, Beavertail's sweeping coastal panoramas take on an amber hue from the scrub brush, which fights against fading, holding its green until at last it yields, casting its earthy glow across the rugged coastline, captivating visitors with awe-

inspiring beauty. This striking photograph by Demi Pita graced the cover of *The Lighthouse Log* in Fall 2022.

A Lasting Legacy in Every Share

Gifting appreciated investments to the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association is a powerful way to support our mission while also offering meaningful tax advantages. When you donate investments, such as shares of stock that have increased in value and that you've held for more than one year, you can generally take a charitable deduction for the full fair market value of the stock and avoid paying capital gains tax on the appreciation. That means we can receive the full value of your gift, while you may be able to give more than you could with cash alone, all at a lower after-tax cost to you. Such donations help preserve our historic lighthouse, sustain our educational efforts, and ensure that future generations can experience the beauty and history of this island treasure. For instructions and assistance on donating investments, please contact Ross Williams at rosswilliamsz@gmail.com or 203-722-3961.



☀️ Keep Beavertail's Light Shining - Renew Today!

It's that time of year again. Your membership keeps Rhode Island's iconic **Beavertail Lighthouse and Museum** alive with history, exhibits, and restoration projects that inspire future generations.

Renew online in minutes at: beavertailight.org/join-renew

✓ Include your email for updates; ✓ Choose automatic annual renewal

Already renewed? Thank you for helping preserve Beavertail Lighthouse's legacy!

Santa Shines at Beavertail!



Santa returned to Beavertail Lighthouse for his annual visit, arriving just in time for the BLMA Holiday Open House in early December. The museum, beautifully adorned for the season, welcomed guests with holiday cheer. With a helping hand from the Jamestown Fire & Rescue Company, Santa was lifted to the lighthouse tower to carry out the cherished tradition of hanging the holiday wreath.

In the Works for Spring and Summer

With winter's chill in the air, it may be hard to imagine the warmer days ahead. Yet BLMA, working in partnership with the RI DEM, is already planning for spring. Next season, all of the 3-rail fencing around the lighthouse grounds will be replaced, as the old fencing has reached the end of its life. DEM has already removed much of the existing fencing and will install the new materials once they arrive.

Looking further ahead, BLMA is preparing for a major window replacement project in the two main lighthouse buildings. The current windows, more than a century old, are due for renewal. To support this effort, BLMA will host a lively fundraiser in August; be sure to mark your calendars and join us in preserving this historic landmark.



Keepers: Sylvester Robinson Hazard 1829 - 1844

Blessed with great physical strength and a heart devoted to service, Sylvester R. Hazard chose to dedicate himself to the military at a young age, answering the call to protect and uplift his community during the War of 1812. It has been written that Sylvester was regarded with universal respect and admired for a kindness that endeared him to all. He traced his lineage to the prominent Narragansett families of Hazard and Robinson, whose estates once covered extensive lands in the area.

In 1700, his ancestor Rowland Robinson purchased 300 acres on Boston Neck from Governor John Winthrop, Jr., Boston Neck being just across the west passage of Narragansett Bay from Beavertail Lighthouse. Another forebear, Thomas Hazard, rose to prominence as one of Narragansett's largest landholders in the late 1600s, acquiring 900 acres on Point Judith Neck. Thomas Hazard's estate grew again in 1708 when he acquired the 26-acre Little Neck Farm at Point Judith. It was here that Sylvester was born, on land purchased from Benedict Arnold, not the traitor, whose family once owned the land where Beavertail Lighthouse now stands.

In 1812, at age 21, Sylvester volunteered for service in the Newport Artillery (Fry's Detachment), where he rose through the ranks to become a Captain. One account of his remarkable strength recalls how he carried several heavy field artillery pieces from town to aid in the brief clash on Sachuest Beach against the British man-of-war **Nimrod**, which is credited with capturing or destroying over 50 American vessels. Even the smallest artillery pieces of the era, forged in iron, weighed between 700 and 1,000 pounds. Another tale describes an eyewitness account of Sylvester stepping beneath a medium-sized horse, lifting it clear off the ground, and carrying it across the street. With feats like these, it is little wonder he was considered the ideal man to serve as Keeper of the Beavertail Lighthouse.

On October 10, 1829, *The Providence Patriot* reported that Sylvester R. Hazard had succeeded the late George Shearman as keeper of the Beavertail Light. Hazard, appointed by President Andrew Jackson, followed Shearman, the father-in-law of David Melville. Melville is remembered for his pioneering experiments with gas illumination at the lighthouse and for overseeing construction of the lighthouse tower during Shearman's tenure.

According to a two-page article in the *Herald of the Times* newspaper on March 30, 1837, which contains affidavits from many of the people involved, Sylvester was one of the witnesses who gave derogatory evidence against David Melville regarding the building materials used to construct the Beavertail Lighthouse Tower.

Hazard said "*Mr. Ellery*" (William Ellery, the Newport Collector and signer of Declaration of Independence) "*then requested me to bring him over a sample of the mortar said building (Beavertail Lighthouse tower) was built of, which was nothing more, comparatively speaking, than yellow sand from the shore, which sample I gave him; and the bricks that said building was built of were very much broken, and of inferior quality.*" This was a sworn affidavit in which Hazard is described as the Keeper of the Newport lighthouse (Beavertail).

The affidavit of Alexander Murray, of Newport, a bricklayer and stone mason, is interesting because it provides

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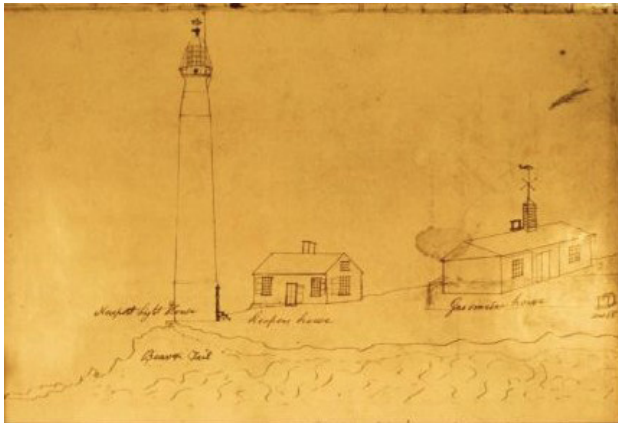


Image from the BLMA Archives showing Beavertail Lighthouse in 1817 with Davide Melville's Gas House (r).

information on the condition of the Beavertail lighthouse at that time and also outlines some of the building timelines. Murray said, *"I further certify on oath, that I took down twenty feet from the top of Beavert Tail lighthouse in 1827, for said Melville, who had contracted with the late Collector, Mr. Ellery, to lower it so much and put a new deck and larger lantern, which wall had been built about 20 years (about 1817), and cut down four feet into the old wall that had been built more than 70 years."*

In his own affidavit, Melville acknowledged Sylvester as an upright and honorable man, though one swayed by political pressures to testify against him. Melville's comparison is strikingly humorous. It came during a period of political upheaval; the rematch between William Henry Harrison and incumbent Martin Van Buren for the presidency, just months before the Panic of 1837 plunged the nation into a prolonged economic depression. Melville captured Sylvester's dilemma in this way: *"for the choice of Electors of President and Vice President a strong gale in favor of Harrison reached here and continued to blow furiously for several days, the tide seemed to be setting against Van Buren. Beaver Tail is a bleak place in a storm, and Sylvester, from his critical and exposed position shivered....As the storm subsided and the tide turned in favor of Van Buren, the friends of the President Elect threatened to turn Sylvester adrift, and there were many competitors for his office."* Melville continued, *"thus situated, he was obliged to join in the flagitious crusade against me."* Melville finished his statement on Sylvester's testimony by saying, *"I sincerely believe Mr. Hazard more sinned against than sinning."*

Few details survive from Sylvester's years as the Keeper at Beavertail Light, a chapter of his life only lightly documented in civil records. His first wife, Hannah, died young, leaving him with a son, Christopher. In time, he married Gulielma M. Babcock, and together they raised Christopher alongside their daughters, Hannah and Abby, forming a blended family during his tenure at the lighthouse. Records show that Sylvester resigned on November 30, 1844, yet a September 1841 *Herald of the Times* article suggests he had intended to step down earlier. It appears that a shortage of suitable candidates delayed his departure: Benjamin Hadwen was slated to succeed him at Beavertail but was instead appointed Keeper of Point Judith Light, leaving Sylvester to continue at Beavertail for several more years.

After Beavertail, Sylvester was a Newport teamster by trade and later a farmer. He returned to public service by 1850, when he was appointed Newport Constable. A decade later, he was serving as Overseer of the Poor, and over the years, he held numerous civic posts, including Town Sergeant, Night Watchman, and, remarkably, Inspector of Nuisances at the age of 78, a role that oftentimes required the removal of dead horses. His obituary records a life marked by steadfast dedication to the community. Sylvester passed away on September 16, 1875, at the age of 84, and he was laid to rest in Island Cemetery, Newport.

Rhode Island's Perilous Coast Point Judith (Part 7)

In 1891, construction of the Point Judith Breakwater began. It was hoped that the harbor of refuge being made would afford a place for vessels to take shelter in stormy weather, perhaps saving themselves. On September 9, 1896, the not-yet-completed breakwater took on its first test. A storm, which by the recorded wind speed had to be a hurricane, wreaked havoc on any and all vessels in the vicinity. Five were distressed in the vicinity of Point Judith. One of these was a small fishing vessel from New Hampshire named **PAWTUCKAWAY**.



She was just 16 tons and measured 45' in length, certainly no match for hurricane-force winds off the lighthouse. She was driven ashore toward nightfall on the 9th, where she eventually went to pieces. The lifesaving crew dared the storm only after the winds had subsided and found several wrecks around the breakwater. But this one, the 6-year-old fishing boat from Portsmouth, NH, was found with no one aboard. Although not confirmed, it was strongly believed that the crew had been picked up by a passing vessel.

As Rhode Island entered the 20th century and the first main section of the breakwater was complete, the structure seemed to be doing its job. This was also an era that began to see more tugs and barges than in the past. And it seemed to be the smart thing to add masts to a barge so that if the tug was threatened, the barge could sail on its own and be saved. At least that was the theory. These vessels were called schooner barges, and as the years passed, they grew larger to accommodate more cargo. May 3, 1905, saw the schooner barge **MOONBEAM** being towed from Hoboken, NJ, to Providence by the tug **GERTRUDE**, of the Eastern Coal Company.

She was under the command of Captain Charles Ackers, accompanied by a crew of four and his two children, who were always delighted to have a ride up Block Island Sound with their dad. They ran into a storm, and the trip became anything but fun. According to a report in the New York Times of May 5th, "... *The tow was off Point Judith when those on the GERTRUDE saw a torch flashed from the decks of the **MOONBEAM** immediately followed by a shrill blast from the barge's steam whistle. Capt. Halyburton of the tug put about and attempted to approach the **MOONBEAM**. Suddenly the barge careened, gave a final plunge and nothing more of her could be seen save a few pieces of wreckage which had been swept from the decks.*" All aboard the 675-ton barge were lost along with the vessel itself. But a vessel that size does not disappear easily. Parts of her were visible for some time and had to be removed with dynamite to eliminate the remains as a hazard to other navigation.

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Eighteen months after the fateful storm of 1905, there was another storm. The date was November 15, 1906, and the only thing that frightened a mariner more than a fire was a New England Nor'easter during winter months. The victim in this instance was a 104' schooner named **LUGANO**. Built in 1867, she had spent nearly four decades at sea plying her trade when faced with a sudden storm while carrying wood laths from Gardiner, ME to New York City. An excerpt from the life savers report reads as follows: *"There were five men in her crew, consisting of the master (Edmund Barter), the mate, 2 deck hands and a cook. ... The **LUGANO** had favoring winds and good weather until she reached Sow and Pigs lightship, several miles southwest of Cuttyhunk Island, Massachusetts, about noon of the 15th, when she was overtaken by a violent East-Northeast rain and hail storm, accompanied by a heavy swell. ... Shortly after the schooner fell in with bad weather, she began to leak, so that the cargo in her hold was soon wet, greatly increasing her draft. The crew started her pumps which kept going, but they were unable to cope with the flood coming in through the opening seams in her hull finding its way down from her sea-washed decks, and had it not been for the character of her load she would undoubtedly have foundered while still at a considerable distance offshore. The laths served to keep her afloat, however, until she was swept into shoal water, where stranding gave wind and sea an opportunity quickly to finish their work of destruction."*

She made a concerted effort to reach the harbor of refuge but fell short of success. She ran on the eastern side of Point Judith about ¼ mile off the lifesaving station. The life savers immediately sprang into action and assessed the grave situation. Try as they might to set up a functional "breeches buoy" by which to bring the crew aboard, they were thwarted in their efforts time and time again. Captain Edmund Barter, frustrated with the lack of success and surely afraid that this would be his last voyage, finally turned to his crew and said, *"I am not going to wait any longer; you will all have to look out for yourselves,"* and seizing a plank, he leaped into the sea. All the crew, except the cook, followed his example. Two of them made it ashore alive; the others, plus the cook who remained aboard, perished. The 174-ton schooner became a total loss.

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

JFJ

Lighthouse Wisdom

"Every man should use his intellect, not as he uses his lamp in the study, only for his own seeing, but as the lighthouse uses its lamps, that those afar off on the seas may see the shining, and learn their way."

Henry Ward Beecher

Clergyman, social reformer, and
brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe



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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 Tower and Museum are closed for the winter season.

BLMA plans to reopen the Tower and Museum in late May. Please see the Spring 2026 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.

Group Tours & Events

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