

# The Thacher Island News

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 1 APRIL 2012



*The new Ocean Reporter back in a familiar spot.*

## RETURN OF THE Ocean Reporter

A newly christened Ocean Reporter, to replace the vessel lost off Straitsmouth Island last fall, will be back on the water by June, thanks to donations from many Thacher Island Association members and dozens of people in the community.

**WATER TAXI TO THACHER**

*Bill Lee to offer water taxi service to Thacher Island and more.*



Starting in June, Bill Lee's new Ocean Reporter will operate as a Rockport water taxi that, for a flat rate of \$80, will take up to six passengers

A special account was created at the Rockport National Bank, and the community responded in force to get boat owner Bill Lee back on his feet. "I am doing this for selfish reasons," one donor said. "We all need Bill and his boat for waterfront work. He is hard to replace."

In his search for a replacement, Lee looked at 50 boats in seven states before returning to Salem to purchase the first one he'd considered -- a 44-foot-long vessel built in 1986. The boat that sank was the fourth of Lee's named Ocean Reporter, but it had served its creator-captain for more than 23 years, bridging a career change from commercial fisherman to marine surveyor. Lee compared the sinking to the loss of a pet -- an old dog he loved and deeply mourns. Now there is a new puppy with the same name.

A combination of insurance and ingenuity would have led to a replacement vessel in time, but an outpouring of donations Lee described as "so generous it brought tears to my eyes" allowed him to move quickly toward the acquisition and renovation of his new craft. It spent much of the winter

from T-Wharf to Thacher Island and back. Return trips need not be on the same day, making Lee's vessel a good way for campers to reach the island. Because Lee moors 50 yards off Thacher and uses a dinghy to ferry visitors ashore, passengers should have the physical dexterity

and spring at Rose's Marine in Gloucester, where Lee made substantial changes. Among other things, he added a hoist to the stern, reduced the size of the cabin, and rebuilt the foredeck. A new sunken walkway allows safe movement around the perimeter.

The captain added an amenity he expects to be especially well received: a below-deck head. A piece of flotsam salvaged from the previous Ocean Reporter is especially meaningful to Lee: A plastic penguin that he purchased at a Christmas Tree Shop 15 years ago was recovered near the wreck site by Rockport Harbormaster Rosemary Lesch and now sits atop the Ocean Reporter's cabin roof.

Lee is a jack of all trades and a master of many. After growing up in Pigeon Cove, he joined the Navy Seabees, spent a year in Vietnam and two in Puerto Rico, and exited the service a master welder. He worked at Rose's Marine on the oil boat Captain Dave and later used his welding skills to build, in his back yard, two of the five Ocean Reporters. *Story continues on page 2*

to climb in and out of his vessel. In addition to Thacher runs, the captain, a knowledgeable birder, can tailor trips for those who want to look at birds, seals, or Straitsmouth Island. To book a trip, e-mail Lee at [oceanreporter@comcast.net](mailto:oceanreporter@comcast.net) or call 978-502-5994.

# RETURN OF THE Ocean Reporter

Before changing careers, he fished commercially for 37 years. Now he does whatever needs doing, “from the clean to the dirty.” He currently has 11 research contracts that span federal, state, and municipal projects. “I’ve got the equipment,” he said. “I’m Coast Guard certified, I know what needs to be done, and I’m willing to contract for small jobs.”



Ocean Reporter sinking on October 16, 2011.

Lee said he has been involved with Thacher projects “since before the town of Rockport owned it. I was doing work out there when the Coast Guard still had people living on the island.” He has a long and varied history with the Thacher Island Association -- locating missing moorings and lifting electrical cables; installing, pulling, and maintaining mooring chains and gear; transporting volunteers to the island for mid-winter and spring damage assessments; and, more recently, transporting workers and materials to the association’s less-accessible venue on Straitsmouth Island.

Lee described his role on the Rockport waterfront in prosaic terms: “I sit on a fence and watch my herd. Sooner or later, one of them is going to fall down. That’s how I make my living.” Reminded of his reputation for working harder and longer than his bills to the Thacher Island Association reflect, Lee shrugged. “It’s my community,” he said. “My neighbors. My island, too. I’ve got a personal interest.”

Bill Lee will christen his new vessel at Rockport’s T-Wharf on Friday, May 25, at 4 p.m. That’s when the Ocean Reporter will rise again, neither puppy nor penguin— more like a phoenix.



Image print from glass plate negative.



Glass plate negative c. 1890.

## A GIFT FROM THE PAST WILL ENHANCE ISLAND MUSEUM

Glenn Carroll, son of the late keeper and volunteer George Carroll, recently donated a 5-by-8-inch glass plate negative that his father had found in the attic of the principal keeper house 30 years ago. The photo’s subject seems to be two keepers standing beside the North Tower. From the duplex residence and outbuildings in the background and the men’s garb, the photo would appear to date from around 1890. A covered walkway, eliminated after 1912, is still evident, and the house has the single kitchen wing that was added in 1889; a second kitchen wing was built sometime after 1895.

Today all remnants of the buildings are gone except for the foundation. The house was burned by the Coast Guard in 1950 because it was excess property and no longer needed. Built in 1869 to house a single keeper family, it was later developed into a duplex quartering two families; that use lasted from 1878 to 1932.

The keepers assigned to Thacher in 1890 were Addison Franklin Tarr, principal; Edward P. Lowe, first assistant; John Farley, second assistant; Ethan Allen, third assistant; and Elliot C. Hadley, fourth assistant.

### THE EVOLUTION OF GLASS PLATE NEGATIVES

British inventor Frederick Scott Archer produced the first usable glass plate photographic negatives in 1851. Known as the wet collodion negative, it allowed identical prints to be made in quantity. By 1870, a factory-made gelatin plate was introduced and offered a more convenient method of taking photographs. The silver gelatin dry plate negative was invented by Dr. Richard L. Maddox and became available in 1873.

By 1888, George Eastman sold the first Kodak cameras and flexible-roll film, leading to the decline of glass plate photography, which disappeared altogether by the mid-1920s.

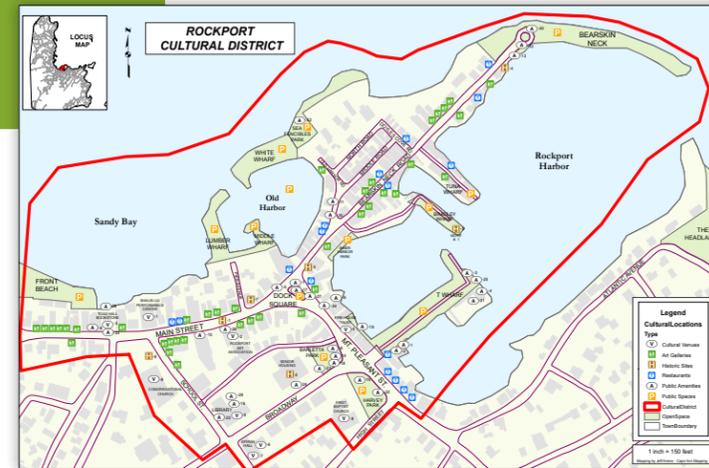
Grateful to Carroll for the gift in memory of his father, the Thacher association will display it prominently in the island museum and has also made prints from it. The association would welcome any information about the identities of the men in the photo.

## Thacher Island Association partners with the newly designated Rockport Cultural District

A cultural district is defined as a specific geographical area in a city or town that has a concentration of cultural facilities, activities, and assets.

On March 20 the Massachusetts Cultural Council designated the downtown area of Rockport as one of the first cultural districts in Massachusetts. A cultural district is defined as a specific geographical area in a city or town that has a concentration of cultural facilities, activities, and assets. The district should be walkable, attractive, and easily identifiable to visitors and residents. It’s not a zoning designation and has no regulatory impact.

The goal of the district partners is to attract artists and cultural enterprises, encourage business and job development, establish a gateway for visitors, preserve and reuse historic buildings, enhance property values, and foster cultural development.



The Thacher Island Association joins a number of local partners in the district, including Rockport Music, Rockport Art Association, Rockport Library, Sandy Bay Historical Society, Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce, the town’s Planning Board and Board of Selectmen, and more than 30 other groups. The objective is to cross-promote and link with business and cultural organizations to promote Rockport and make it a cultural hub that tourists and residents can enjoy and support.

Below is a map of the district outlined in red. Although Thacher Island itself is not in the district, the association keeps its boats in the harbor and runs trips to Thacher from T-Wharf all summer. The association also conducts its annual Art & Photo Show in the area as well as monthly and annual meetings. The district includes 40 galleries and more than 150 businesses and cultural venues within its 1.2-square-mile area.

Partnership should provide more awareness of the association and perhaps an increase in membership and individual involvement with both Thacher and Straitsmouth Island projects.

Map of the new Rockport Cultural District outlined in red.

## ★ 2012 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS FOR THACHER ISLAND ASSOCIATION ★

### June 18 Annual Meeting

At the Rockport Community House, 58 Broadway, 7:30 p.m. The public is invited, and refreshments will be served. The association will recap the past year’s accomplishments, outline future plans, and make a special presentation.

### July 21 Kayak-A-Thon

A fund-raising paddle to Thacher Island and back. Launch from Granite Pier at 11 a.m. The entry fee is \$25, with donated prizes going to participants who raise the most money. Refreshments will be served and awards made on the island. To register, visit [www.thacherislandpaddle.com](http://www.thacherislandpaddle.com).

### July 27 Light House Cruise

A narrated sunset tour of the lighthouses of Cape Ann. Departs at 6 p.m. from Gloucester, returning at 9. Leaves from Captain Bill’s Whale Watch, 24 Harbor Loop, Gloucester. New this year we will travel up the scenic Annisquam River as part of our around the Cape tour. Cash bar, sandwiches, and snacks available during the cruise. Tickets are \$30 per person. To reserve seats, call 978-283-7223 or e-mail [thachercruise@gmail.com](mailto:thachercruise@gmail.com).

### August 1 & 4 Art & Photo Days

For artists and photographers of all levels. Morning trips to Thacher Island both Wednesday and Saturday, departing from T-Wharf at 8, 9, and 10, with return trips at 1, 2, and 3. In addition, for photographers wanting to catch sunrise on the island, departures both mornings at 4. Donation is \$25, and beverages will be supplied. For reservations, call Linda Walker at 978-546-2250. (Rain dates: August 8 and 11.)

### August 23-26 Art & Photo Show & Sale

At the Rockport Community House, 58 Broadway. Opening reception on Thursday, August 23, at 7 p.m. Show hours Friday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. For entry details, call 978-546-2250.





**Profile:**  
**Rita Chris Riley**  
**BOAT CREW**

*"It's the best job on the island"*

*Chris Riley has been the bowman for four years.*

You can call her Rita Christine Murray Brock Riley, or you can call her Chris. You can call her anything but late for supper, jokes the bowman on Thacher Island's Saturday launch.

Riley, who graduated from Addison Gilbert Hospital's LPN program in 1976, worked at Den-Mar Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Rockport for 25 years before moving to Brimfield. Four years later, she was back in Gloucester, living in a harbor-view apartment over Virgilio's Bakery & Deli, where she gardens, makes glass wind chimes, practices yoga, paints, and writes poetry.

Riley had gardening in mind when she approached Thacher Island Town Committee chairman Dr. Sydney Wedmore about volunteering on the island. They'd known each other at Den-Mar, where Riley had planted, among other things, the holly tree that now stands in front of the facility. But she was employed by the Golden Living Center in Gloucester, and Wednesday, work-crew day, did not fit

her schedule. "He asked if I would like to try the bowman-in-training position on the Saturday boat," Riley said. She did and "fell in love. I had taken sailing lessons years before and found being on the water a mind-clearing experience." Thacher volunteer Charlie Allen taught her the ropes, and she's done it ever since.

"It's the best job on the island," Riley said emphatically, admitting that standing in the launch with the bow door open and the winch line in her hand, she feels as if she's driving a chariot up the ramp.

In addition to her bowman duties, which she is performing for the fourth consecutive year, Riley handles launch reservations and check-ins and has been learning to drive the new island launch.

"Working with the Thacher Island Association does more for me than I do for it," Riley said, calling the island "a magical place." That's a fitting phrase for someone whose favorite quotation is from "Peter Pan," by J. M. Barrie. "Peter says to Wendy, 'Do you want a cup of tea, or would you rather have an adventure?' I'll take the adventure every time."

# WHAT'S A KEEPER TO DO?

Want to make a Thacher Island volunteer laugh? Say, "I'd love to be a keeper. It would give me time to finally write my novel." As the volunteers who staff the island from June into September well know, their days are filled with tasks -- core, assigned, and chosen -- that leave little time for artistic creation.

The first category of tasks, core duties, starts with aiding mariners, whether aboard kayaks or yachts. Keepers watch and often aid boaters as they make their approach to the island and assist with the scheduled launch landings that transport work crews and visitors.

In this same category, volunteers perform monitoring duties that can best be described as protecting the island from visitors and visitors from the island. This includes fire prevention, cautioning parents to watch their children in the lighthouse and on the rocks, basic first aid, and the rare call to the harbormaster or police to remove those who are injured or unruly.

Keepers also greet visitors, sell items from the boathouse gift shop, answer the

island phone, raise and lower the flag, and, of course, monitor the two lighthouses.

Standard maintenance jobs include checking oil and fuel levels in the machinery and generators, pumping water into holding tanks and adding chlorine for household use, mowing trails, and weed-whacking brush. At the end of the day, they do the paperwork. In addition to a daily log and incident reports, they record gift-shop sales, visitor donations, and kayak and mooring statistics.

Keepers describe the second major category of tasks as "anything Syd asks us to do." Sydney Wedmore, chairman of the Thacher Island Town Committee, assigns work according to abilities. Keepers with mechanical skills have been asked to build winches and troubleshoot the foghorn. Those with carpentry skills have rebuilt steps and porches. Those with plastering skills have replaced walls in the former Coast Guard building. Keepers who possess more enthusiasm than specialized ability are most often asked to paint.

Finally, after performing core and assigned tasks, keepers do what matters

most to them. One keeper paints the island skiff; one sweeps the lighthouses from top to bottom; yet another clears the brush in a wide circle around the island grave. During patrols of the island, including the lighthouses, they police dead birds and litter, remove snagged balloons from rocks, and, especially on rainy days, clean out cabinets, organize household and medical supplies, and sweep cobwebs from the basements.

There's one task that keepers don't perform: keeping the navigational light in the South Tower burning. But if the light does go dark, it's the keepers' responsibility to alert the Coast Guard.

Island lovers who still want to be an intern keeper -- and can delay writing their novel or composing their symphony -- should e-mail Sydney Wedmore at [sydneywedmore@comcast.net](mailto:sydneywedmore@comcast.net) or call 617-335-1799. Those who would like to help out on the island on a more limited basis should ask about joining the Thacher Island work crew, which spends Wednesdays on the island performing building, painting, and grounds-maintenance tasks.



1. Dewey Glick checks out the whistle house equipment.
2. Dick Whittaker cuts a new trail.
3. Jeanette Haynes works the gift shop.
4. Sharron Cohen repairs the cistern roof.
5. John Fulton disposes of a dead sea gull.
6. Darelne Fulton paints the porch.
7. Bob Joseph helps to lay new conduit.
8. Susan Murphy removes the trash.
9. Paul Sena and Patty Wegman cook for the Kayak-a-thon.
10. Camille Glick mows the yard.
11. David Murphy weed whacks.
12. David Cohen clears the trails.
13. Chris Perry and Nancy Jaretz clear the boat ramp.

Contributors to this issue were Paul St.Germain, Sharron Cohen, writing, David Cohen, editing, Percolator Design, Inc. design and layout.



Keeper quarters in summer of 2010.



Airlifting materials for preservation project.

## A collaborative boost for Straitsmouth preserves its “skyline”

Last fall the Massachusetts Audubon Society began a program to stabilize and weather-seal the keeper house on Straitsmouth Island. Audubon owns the house and, as a gesture to the town of Rockport, wants to improve the property so that the lighthouse-station structures remain as part of the scenic view from the harbor and beyond.

Although Audubon’s main mission is to provide a sanctuary for birds and animals, the organization feels it has a civic responsibility to make the buildings safe and secure. There are no plans to make the keeper house livable, but Audubon wants to ensure that it will remain standing and be sealed against the weather and secured so people cannot enter or possibly face injury.

Since the town accepted ownership of the 40-foot tower and about two acres of land it sits on, the Thacher Island Association and Thacher Island Town Committee have been working together to maintain as much as possible of the original Straitsmouth Light Station. The site includes the keeper and oil houses, both owned by Audubon, and the town-owned lighthouse.

Audubon has given Rockport a right-of-way license to pass over its property and create a walking trail to allow crews to work on the tower.

In return for the association’s agreement to restore the oil house to its original 1900s look, Audubon offered its use for storage of tools and materials needed for the lighthouse repairs.

Audubon praised the oil house restoration work that Thacher volunteers did last summer and

later flew in materials to the island by helicopter and had its own crews re-frame and seal the eastern wall of the keeper house for the winter and repair two porches. The house has seen severe deterioration since the 1991 “perfect storm” and is included on Lighthouse Digest’s “Doomsday List” of endangered structures. The magazine has tracked at-risk lighthouse sites nationally since the early 1990s.

Audubon contractors will return this spring to lay a new roof and repair the soffits and fascia and add clapboards to that eastern wall. The island association has volunteered labor to help with the re-siding, and Audubon has received a contribution for the

project of a specially treated wood siding from Eastman Chemical Co.

One hope for the future is the creation of walking trails to allow birders, kayakers, and outdoor enthusiasts to visit the island and enjoy its historical and environmental resources.

The restoration company Traditional Framers has produced a video of the work done on Straitsmouth. To view it, visit [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and type the words “Straitsmouth Island Restoration Project.”



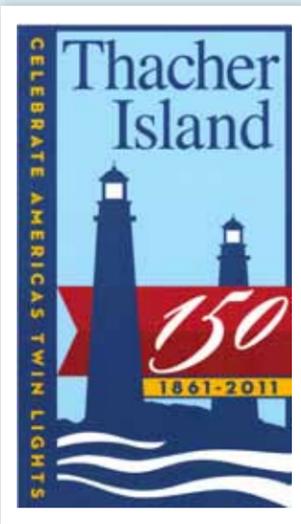
Traditional Framers completed framing in October.

Greenboard was used to seal house for the winter; clapboard will be applied this year.

## Thacher Island Challenge Coins



These 2 inch Challenge Coins are available in silver or gold color. **\$10.00 each**



### 150th Anniversary Poster Available.

Due to the very high interest in the 150th Anniversary logo recently shown at our annual art show, we have reproduced it in 2 sizes suitable for framing. Each is printed on heavy 48 pound acid free stock. Sent in a mailing tube ready for framing.

**20” by 36” - \$55.00**

**14” by 24” - \$30.00**

## THACHER ISLAND GEAR



**Polar Fleece Jacket.** Warm, 14.5oz fleece, non-pill, zipper front and pockets, elastic sleeves and waist, standup collar with embroidered Thacher Island Twin Lights symbol. Available in Red, Navy or Charcoal. Sizes S,M,L,XL,2XL. **\$48.00**



**Denim Keeper Shirt.** This 100% cotton soft denim shirt is a key item to own. It proudly shows off the new Thacher Island twin lights logo embroidered in dark blue. Comes in S,M,L,XL,2XL was \$40.00 **now \$30.00**



**Red, White and Blue Flag” on White 100% cotton.** Sizes S,M,L,XL. **\$20.00**



**Official Mug.** White ceramic, 11oz. With blue Thacher logo **\$6.00**

**T-shirts now available in Youth’s sizes S=6-8, M=10-12, L=14-16**



**Sunburst” on Sea Foam Blue 100% cotton.** Sizes S,M,L,XL. **\$20.00**



**Kayak Paddle” on Putty 100% cotton.** Sizes S,M,L,XL. **\$20.00**

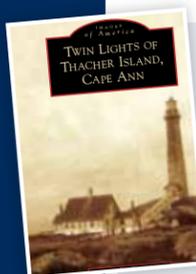


**Thacher Pins Left.-Logo 1” Right -Towers 1 1/4” \$4.00**

All prices include postage and handling. To order, make checks payable and send to: Thacher Island Association Box 73, Rockport, MA 01966 **All Proceeds go to our restoration efforts.**

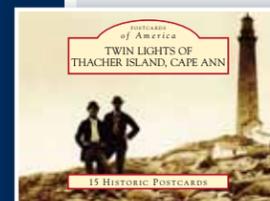


**Colorful Hats.** Shows off the Thacher Island Twin Lights logo. Yellow, Faded Blue, Khaki, Nautical Red, Charcoal, Navy. Adjustable, 100% cotton, washable. **\$20.00**



### NEW

**New book by Paul St.Germain, President of the Thacher Island Association, tracing the pictorial history of the “Twin Lights of Thacher Island, Cape Ann” with over 200 vintage photos many never before published. \$21.99**

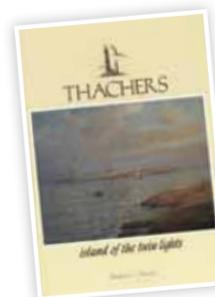


**Thacher Island Vintage Postcards, 15 different scenes per pack. \$7.99**

### Half Hull Schooner Onato

**Beautiful handmade half hull of the schooner Onato.** Each half hull is mounted on a cherry wood back plate that measures 4 by 10 1/2 inches. Taken from the original drawings and handmade by local Rockport craftsman Ed Locke, this is a special model just right for your home or study. The Onato was a typical fishing schooner used around Thacher Island around 1904. It was a medium-large “Indian Header” designed by Tom McManus and built by Oxner and Story at Essex. She was 106 feet long, one of several of an advanced, round-bowed type all given Indian names.

**Price \$75.00**



**Book by Eleanor Parsons.** The definitive book on the history of Thacher Island. **\$22.00**



### 150th Anniversary Commemorative Ornament

**This beautiful 3 1/4 by 2 1/2 inch three dimensional gold engraved ornament is packaged in its own navy blue velvet lined box ready for gift giving. \$20.00**



Thacher Island Association  
P.O. Box 73  
Rockport, MA 01966

ON THE WEB: [www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org)  
EMAIL: [info@thacherisland.org](mailto:info@thacherisland.org)

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
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PERMIT NO. 19

## Twin Lights of Thacher Island Replica Model

This is a limited edition piece (only 1200 will be offered) each individually numbered and hand painted. Note the intricate detail on this 11" wide by 6" high piece. Free for a donation of \$200 or more. (Or buy it for only \$145.00)

*Note: Your donation is tax deductible less the \$145 cost.*



## Boat schedule for 2012: Faster trips, smoother ride, new boat

Reservations for trips to Thacher aboard the new launch, Thacher Island II, will be accepted starting May 15. The weekly trips on Wednesdays at 9am and three on Saturdays at 8,9, and 10am. Each trip will give visitors about two hours on the island. The schedule of runs begins on June 9 and lasts through September 8. Compared to the previous boat, the new vessel, is faster, safer, larger, and more comfortable.

While there is no charge for the round-trip service, donations are gratefully accepted.

*For reservations, call 617-599-2590. Members of the Thacher Island Association receive priority.*

# Spring into action by renewing your membership now!

Membership dues are a vital part of our annual fund-raising effort. Although most of the major projects are complete on Thacher, the association still has a number of unfinished and future projects on its to-do list.

### **They include:**

- Restoration and stabilization of the lighthouse tower on Straitsmouth Island. Cost: \$240,000.
- Purchase and installation of an environmentally

friendly composting toilet. Cost: \$20,000.

Repair of the support structure of the cistern roof that catches and collects rain water (the only freshwater source on the island). Cost: \$3,000.

Replacement of the eight deep-cell batteries for our solar power electrical storage needs. Cost: \$4,000.

Painting and final woodwork for the whistle house interior to create a museum annex. Cost: \$2,000.

Ongoing island maintenance, painting, repairs, and trail clearing for 2012. Cost: \$6,000.

Use the enclosed form and envelope to mail your tax-deductible donations and membership dues. And remember: We welcome not only your financial support but your energy and ideas.

Thanks. – *Paul St. Germain*

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

*Join the Thacher Island Association and preserve a historic piece of America.*

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

- Individual \$30.00    Family \$60.00    Corporate \$125.00    Life \$500.00

### BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP:

- Receive two or more newsletters per year
- Window sticker for your car or boat
- Attendance at our Annual Meeting
- Participation in trips to the Island via the Thacher Island launch (Reservations required)
- Satisfaction of helping to preserve a National Historic Landmark

*I would like to send an additional gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to support the restoration of the Island.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to:  
Thacher Island Association  
Box 73  
Rockport MA 01966  
**Donations are tax deductible  
(to the extent allowed by law)**

**Please detach this form and mail it to:** Thacher Island Association Box 73 Rockport, MA 01966