

Thacher Island News

April 2014 Newsletter

VOL 14 ISSUE 01



T-Rex at Twin Lights by Thomas Philbrook

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMBERSHIP

What would Thacher Island be without members? While it would not be abandoned to dinosaurs as Thomas Philbrook's whimsical sketch suggests, it would be more difficult to reach and less pleasant to experience. Thanks to the financial support of those who have joined the Thacher Island Association and continued their memberships. Over the past 33 years more than two and a half million dollars raised by the association has gone toward:

- Improving access.
- Enhancing the experience.
- Sharing the island with those who cannot reach it.
- Preparing Straitsmouth Island for future visitors.

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2014 MEMBERSHIPS RUN FROM MAY 1 – APRIL 2015.

Check the address label on this newsletter to see your paid member year.



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2014
Valid Through April 2015

IS A MEMBER IN GOOD STANDING AND ENTITLED TO ENJOY THE PRIVILEGES THE ISLAND HAS TO OFFER.

PRESIDENT

DATE

ADVANTAGES OF MEMBERSHIP

Free ride on the Thacher Island launch and waiver of the landing fee.

Receive at least 2 newsletters annually.

Sticker for your car, boat or kayak.

Satisfaction of helping to preserve a National Historic Landmark and making it available to everyone.

NAMELESS DEAD

The Island's Unsolved Mystery

On August 15, 1635, the pinnacle Watch and Wait, making its way from Ipswich to Marblehead, foundered in a storm. Twenty-one of the twenty-three people aboard drowned off the coast of Rockport. The two survivors, Anthony Thacher and his wife, Elizabeth, were washed ashore on the island that now bears their name. The only body recovered was that of Reverend Joseph Avery's eldest daughter, whom the Thachers buried on the island. A letter Anthony wrote home to his brother, Peter, described the chaos of the shipwreck in horrifying detail but omitted some important details- the names of everyone on the boat except his, his wife's, and that of "my cousin Avery," using only Joseph's last name.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMBERSHIP

Improving access. An average of 3,000 people now reach the island every year aboard the Thacher Island launches, private vessels, and kayaks. The original launch was purchased in 1985 and a second larger and faster one added in 2011. The landing ramp was rebuilt in 1999 and requires yearly repair.

Enhancing the experience. A new tractor and other equipment have been purchased with which to maintain walking trails. A campground has been improved with the addition of a protective canopy pavilion and a composting privy. Historic structures, like the tramway and whistle house, have been rebuilt, both lighthouses and keepers' houses have been fully restored, and a museum and visitor center has been created along with an island wide solar electric power system.

Sharing the island with those who cannot reach it. Two live webcams have been installed, and the association has worked in cooperation with the Cape Ann Museum to create a Thacher Island gallery at the Gloucester facility to exhibit the recently returned first order Fresnel lens.

Preparing Straitsmouth Island for future visitors. Structural repairs were made to the lighthouse and keeper's residence in 2013. Trails were cut. An improved landing point at Gap Cove is planned.

A significant percentage of the money for these projects has come from membership dues and fund-raising activities. In 2014 membership renewals will account for 19% of our operating budget. Please be a part of the organization that promotes public access to Thacher (and someday Straitsmouth) Island. Renew your membership—or become a member now—by sending a check in the enclosed envelope or renewing online at

www.thacherisland.org

Summer fund-raising events will include a lighthouse cruise on July 18 and Art & Photo Days on the Island on August 9 & 13.

For details, please check the website.

Work Crew Profile Tom and Paula Eldridge

Tom Eldridge keeps the Thacher Island launches running. He schedules the crews for the Wednesday and Saturday boats, captains one of the two launches on Wednesday's work crew runs, and fills in when necessary on the Saturday tourist trips. Paula Eldridge manages the launch reservation system, filling the available 90 seats a week, taking credit card information, and orchestrating refunds when weather forces cancellation of the trips.

It's a perfect dovetailing of tasks for a couple whose lives have been intertwined since their childhoods in Rockport. "We were boyfriend and girlfriend starting in the third grade," Paula said, "though we had parted ways by high school."

Tom attended the University of Maine but left to enlist in the Navy. There was just one problem: Despite his passion for the ocean, he said, "I tended to get seasick." Assured that there was one vessel on which he could serve without discomfort, he signed up for a two-year hitch on a nuclear submarine.

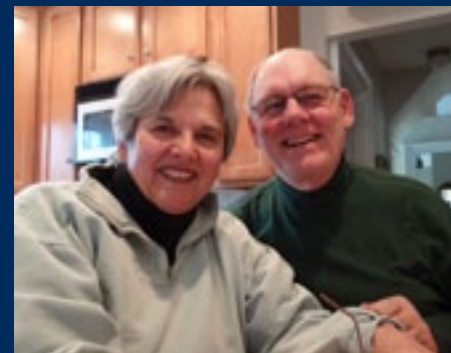
Meanwhile, he had contacted Paula before her senior year at Marietta College in Ohio. "August 19, 1966," she remembers. Tom served aboard the Thomas A. Edison from April 1967 to June 1969. They married a few days after his enlistment ended and moved to Westford, Massachusetts, where they raised children Kirsten and Thomas.

Tom returned to a job he had held pre-enlistment for the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company and to his studies, eventually earning a degree in civil engineering from the University of Lowell. Paula taught high school biology in Burlington, then opened her own frame shop.

Their lives took an abrupt turn in the mid 1980s when Paula surprised Tom with a windjammer cruise off the coast of Maine. Delighted by the experience and determined to own their own sailboat, they spent four years looking for the one they wanted—a 34-foot Hunter—and saving the money to purchase it. Paula was a sailing novice who learned quickly. Tom, who had learned how to control his sea sickness, took every course on seamanship he could find, including in a Master of Sailing Course in Boston Harbor, and in 1995 he obtained his captain's license. The couple moored the boat in Gloucester, from where they sailed the New England coast. In order to travel more widely, they sold the boat after ten years. Still, they continued to sail, including ten bareboat charters in the Caribbean.

After their retirement—Tom from 30 years with the phone company and 14 as a commissioning technician for Seacoast Marine in Newburyport and Paula from her framing business—fate took another turn. They had intended to settle in Boothbay, Maine, but in 2006 they moved to Paula's childhood home with the intention of living there only long enough to renovate and sell it. But Rockport reached out and drew them in. They were having drinks at the Rudder when Tom said, "We're not leaving, are we?" and Paula agreed that they were not.

Tom started operating Thacher Island's Wednesday work crew launch in 2007. Paula took on the launch reservations in 2013, the same year that the island association instituted fees for non members. Tom's training has given him the experience to handle the launch in what can be difficult conditions. Paula's business background has given her the skills to handle a complicated mix of tasks associated with time, money, and communication. Each of them has a neatly organized notebook roughly the size of a toaster oven. Each of them has a system. Together they get people on and off the island.



Paula & Tom Eldridge.



Tom works on ramp model improvements.



Tom with photo of his nuclear submarine Thomas A. Edison.

NAMELESS DEAD

The Island's Unsolved Mystery

So many years have passed that some of the names, including that of the child who lies buried on the island, have been lost. There was no remaining Avery child to beget a family that might have cared to preserve information. The little we know about the Avery family comes from members of the Thacher family, one of whom, Rebecca Thacher Clarke, shared her genealogy with Thacher Island Association president Paul St. Germain. It is from her we learned that Reverend Avery's name was not, as long believed, John. Nor was he a blood relative of Anthony Thacher. Anthony's "cousin Avery" was an honorific indicating friendship and respect.

According to Anthony Thacher's account, his family numbered seven people when they boarded the Watch and Wait: him and Elizabeth, four children by his former wife, and a servant who may have been his nephew. Reverend Avery's group numbered 11: the minister, his wife, their six children, and three others who were servants or relatives or both. There was one other passenger, William Elliot of New Sarum, England, and four mariners. Eleanor Parsons, author of "Thachers: Island of the Twin Lights," identified one of the mariners as Captain Moses Maverick, who two months earlier had taken possession of his father-in-law's pinnacle. A variety of online ancestry sources provide the names and approximate ages of the four drowned Thacher children:

William, 17, Mary, 15, Edith, 13, and Peter, who was between 2 and 5 years old. Those same sources list Joseph Avery as the "primary immigrant" of a family arriving in the Colonies in 1635 with a "wife & 2 children" and four additional children listed by their first names as John, Susanna, Elizabeth, and Sarah. No ages are given for anyone in the Avery family, so no clue points to which of the girls the Thachers buried on the island.

The 11 named dead account for only half of the shipwreck victims. The remaining 10 -- three mariners, Reverend Avery's wife and two of their (probably youngest) children, three family members or servants who were traveling with the Averys, and Anthony Thacher's servant or nephew -- are as yet unnamed.

Some of the information, however, may not be lost forever. According to "Oxford University Alumni, 1500-1714," Joseph Avery of Berkshire, England, graduated from Queen's College in 1621, and went on to become the vicar of Romsey, in Hampshire, England. Avery was 26 years old when he took up his post in Romsey, and 35 when he set sail with his family and a group of parishioners, bound for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Birth dates of the minister's children, which would identify which of his daughters was the eldest, might lie in the Romsey parish registry.

Grave of Joseph Avery's oldest daughter.





People who knew John admired him for his dry humor, unassuming nature, and methodical approach to mechanical problems, which resulted in practical and often creative solutions.

In Memoriam
John Bennett (1921-2014)

John Bennett, who died on January 23 at age 92, was the oldest member of the Thacher Island work crew and had the longest continuous record of volunteer service to the island. John and his wife, Mary, were co-chairs of the Thacher Island Town Committee, taking over from its first chairman, Ned Cameron, and, after ten years of service, passing the torch to Syd Wedmore.

Even in his tenth decade, John was never an emeritus member of any Thacher group. He attended almost every town committee and association meeting and showed at T-wharf almost every Wednesday from May

into October of 2013 to join the work crew. Over the decades the man who founded Bennett Welding in Rockport had assisted in the putting up, taking down, and maintaining of almost every structure on Thacher Island. He had



hands-on knowledge of every machine and motor and an uncanny knack for diagnosing mechanical problems. "I remember him sitting in the boathouse," one keeper recalled. "The generator

was acting up. People were in and out of the stone house looking at it. John just listened to its sound and made suggestions for its repair."

In accordance with his wishes, there was no funeral. His daughters, Linda Berard and Alice Bennett, will conduct a celebration of his life on May 4 at the Rockport Community House, followed by a scattering of his ashes in the same place John scattered his wife's ashes several years ago — off Thacher Island.

During World War II, John Bennett was assigned to four-engine seaplane, the PB2Y Coronado that carried cargo and mail across the Pacific Theater. Last fall John visited the Naval Air Station Pensacola, in Florida, to see the last remaining PB2Y and sit at his old flight engineer's station aboard that plane.

In Memoriam
Chip Norton 1957-2014

Frederick H. Norton III, better known to the Rockport and Thacher Island communities as Chip, passed away January 13, 2014, at the age of 56.

Chip was in his early 20s and just out of college when he became involved with the crew of Thacher enthusiasts that Ned Cameron organized to bring some order to the island in the early 1980s. According to Charlene Brown, a fellow founding member of the Thacher Island Association, the volunteers met on weekends in their rattiest, most expendable clothing to muck gull guano

and broken glass out of the North Tower, beat back the poison ivy that had overrun the landscape, clear and widen paths, stabilize the rundown buildings, and milk the goat that had been brought to the island in a vain attempt to control weeds. Brown remembers Chip as a hard-working man with a whimsical side to his personality. "He liked solitude," she said. "And he loved the island."

That sentiment was echoed by his wife, Hope Norton, who said Chip's love for Thacher Island never waned. It was the first place he took visitors to Rockport, either on the Thacher Island launch or by kayak. On those trips he paddled a wooden kayak that he had built in his

home workshop. Chip Norton, who was the watershed land manager for the city of Cambridge and a resident of Rockport, leaves his wife, daughters Julia and Grace, son Corey, and grandsons Andrew and Thatcher.



SUMMER PROJECTS

In addition to routine maintenance, repairs, and grounds keeping, a variety of projects are planned for both Thacher and Straitsmouth islands.

On Thacher, work will include reinforcement of the cistern, replacement of the southern wall of the boathouse, and repairs to the ramp decking. The reconstructed tramway will be extended from the turntable toward the whistle house, interpretive signs will be installed at points of interest around the island, and efforts will continue to make the original foghorn operational as a demonstration piece for visitors.

On Straitsmouth, the volunteer work crew will continue to clear and widen the trail from Gap Cove to the keeper's house, where restoration will begin on the interior of the dwelling.



▶ The cistern is all important as it collects our only source of water through a series of pipes, gutters and downspouts from its roof as well as from the newly constructed campground pavilion. This 25,000 gallon cement lined cistern holding tank collects rain water that is pumped back to the houses.



▶ Brick oil house barn doorway will be widened to accommodate the new Kubota tractor.



▶ A Trail will be cleared and widened from the western end at Gap Cove across the island to the keeper house. This will allow workers to access the island from a safer location at the Gap where the wind and surf is less violent.



▶ Planning will begin for the interior restoration of the newly leased keeper house making it habitable for future summer keepers. The work will include new plumbing, electrical, septic facilities, windows, inside staircases and flooring. This will be a phased plan to be accomplished over the next few years.

Town Approves Lease of Straitsmouth Keeper House.

Rockport Town meeting recently approved a long term renewable 30 year lease of the Straitsmouth Island c 1878 Victorian style keeper house and the 1890 oil house with the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

During the past 3 years Mass Audubon has spent over \$180,000 on the building's stabilization. The collapsed eastern wall was replaced, new roof sheathing, architectural shingles, clapboard siding and trim boards, chimney and repainting was completed in 2013. Association volunteers rebuilt the two porches, stairs, railings, added lightning arrestors to the roof peaks and assisted with the final painting. In 2010 the Thacher volunteers restored the oil house now used as a storage facility by permission of Mass Audubon. Future plans are to complete the interior restoration to make it habitable for volunteer keepers to live there during the summer. Volunteers will complete trail clearing along the length of the island this summer to allow safer access from the western end at Gap Cove.

Although camping is not allowed and entry to the lighthouse is forbidden by the coast guard, it is hoped passive recreation will be available some day as landing facilities are improved. Mass Audubon will continue to maintain the island as a wild life sanctuary.

In 2010 the Town accepted ownership of 1.8 acres of the 30 acre island as well as the 35 foot tall lighthouse from the coast guard. The three structures, lighthouse, keeper house and oil house make up the original Straitsmouth Island Light Station that was established in 1835. It has been on the National Register of Historic places since 1987.

Before



Straitsmouth Island c 1878 Victorian style keeper house

After



Fresnel Lens AT THE CAPE ANN MUSEUM

Following a major renovation, Gloucester's Cape Ann Museum will celebrate its reopening in midsummer. A gallery has been built to house the first-order Fresnel lens that once illuminated Thacher Island's South Tower. This new gallery will measure 18 feet high, 30 feet deep and 14 feet wide and feature special lighting, a five foot wide video screen wall, and a sky light to allow ambient natural light to enter the gallery. The lens will be mounted atop its original cast-iron base cabinet, which will be attached to an ornate pedestal that replicates

the original. The display will stand 17 feet high with a guardrail to protect the million-dollar, 500-piece crystal prism, which is considered an industrial work of art. The gallery will also house the original brass Funck hydraulic-float, five-wick oil lamp that illuminated the lens in 1861. The display will include a 15-minute interactive video history of the island produced by local filmmaker Ann-Patrice Hickey of Eden Design. The video will also be available for viewing at the museum on Thacher.



Steel base installation. Gallery sub floor installed around special steel support girders. Photo courtesy of Leon Doucette, Cape Ann Museum.

THACHER ISLAND LAUNCH TOURS

LAUNCH RESERVATIONS will be accepted beginning May 19.

Eight trips a week will leave from T-Wharf in Rockport starting on June 18 and run through September 6 (weather permitting).

There will be three trips on Wednesdays at 9:00, 9:45 and 10:30 am and five trips on Saturdays at 8:00, 8:45, 9:30, 10:15, or 11:00 am. Each trip allows passengers two hours to explore the island.

Call for reservations at 617-599-2590 any day from 9am to 5pm only. You must make reservations at least two weeks in advance. Launch fees will be payable by credit card when making reservations.

Seats aboard the Thacher Island Launch will cost \$20.00 per adult and \$10.00 for children under 14.

This fee will be waived for all Rockport residents and paid up Thacher Island Association members. The launch fee will be reimbursed if the trip is cancelled due to weather or rough seas. However, all passengers, including Rockport residents and paid up Association members will be required to pay a launch fee if they cancel their reservations less than one week prior to departure or fail to appear.

Each trip is limited to 6 passengers, so we suggest you make reservations as early as possible. The launch leaves from the Town dock (T-Wharf) next to the Sandy Bay Yacht Club. The trip is not recommended for young children under 3 years of age and, because the island is a wild life refuge, is off-limits to pets.

Where to Park.

There is meter free parking on Norwood and Atlantic Aves two streets up from T-Wharf. There is limited parking on T-Wharf for non-residents on the right hand side. The meters in and around downtown on Mt. Pleasant St. and Dock Square are 5 hours.

What to Bring.

Water, sunscreen, jacket, sandals are not recommended for climbing the tower and walking the trails.



New Thacher Merchandise

Thacher Island laser-engraved time-or-tide clock

14-inch solid cherry frame with birch-laminated face. Jeweled movement, battery included. Made in the USA by EMA Clockworks. \$130 plus \$7 for shipping and handling. (Order time 10-21 days.)



TIME CLOCK TC 101



TIDE CLOCK TC 202

New Thacher Island Polo Shirts

100% Pima Cotton. Honeycomb pique texture results in a lofty fabric with a silky feel. Made by Port Authority. Available in Navy or White Sizes Sm., Med., Lg., XL. \$32.00 plus shipping and handling.



PS 1 NAVY



PS 2 WHITE

Order on-line at our web site at www.thacherisland.org and see the complete line of Hats, T-shirts, Sweat shirts, Fleece vests, and Books.



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Summer 2014 Events

For information on upcoming events,
Annual Lighthouse Cruise on July 18 and
Art & Photo Days on the island on
August 9 & 13.

Check the web site

www.thacherisland.org

Thanks to Sharron and David Cohen for writing and editing,
Thomas Philbrook for the use of his *T-Rex at Twin Lights* photo and
Mark Drury of Percolator Design for design and layout of this edition.

Trash.

Thacher Island has always been a magnet for colorful flotsam like lobster buoys, but in the past few years there has been a dramatic increase in a less picturesque form of litter: plastic containers used for water, juice, and sports drinks. According to the Massachusetts Audubon Society, only 23 percent of nondeposit containers are recycled (in contrast to an 80 percent redemption and recycling rate for containers covered by the Massachusetts Bottle Bill).

The 77 percent of plastic containers not recycled end up in landfills, parks, roadside bushes, the ocean, and on the shorelines of places like Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands. While the Thacher Island Association cannot control what waves carry ashore, there is a strict **“carry on, carry off”** policy for items visitors bring to both islands.

