



Thacher & Straitsmouth Island News

November 2020 Newsletter

VOL 20 ISSUE 02

Injured Kayaker Assisted

Although they are not lifeguards or official rescue personnel, keepers know that aiding mariners is one of their most important duties. Straitsmouth keepers James Kennedy and Melissa Meyer were reminded of that when, running from a late-August squall, they found a man waiting for them beside the keepers' house.

Wearing a life jacket, clutching a kayak paddle, and bleeding from a gash that had opened his left knee to the bone, he, too, had been surprised by the storm. Two opposing waves had struck the granite ledge at the northeastern end of the island, overturned his kayak, and pitched him into the water. His kayak was swept out to sea, but he managed to reach the island and pull himself to shore.

After alerting the Rockport harbormaster, Kennedy and Meyer treated the man's wound with disinfectant and closed it as much as they could with bandages from the island's first-aid kit. They assisted him to the landing ramp to wait for the harbormaster, who had trouble approaching the ramp in the rough seas. "We ran through a series of scenarios," Kennedy said, "and in the end, the kayaker decided he was in good enough shape to get into the water. The harbormaster threw a rope, and he hung onto it as he was pulled to the boat."



Kayak Crash Site.



NEOWISE Comet Strafes Thacher

On July 14 Dr. Thomas Carbone snapped this marvelous photograph of the NEOWISE comet heading toward the South Tower of Thacher and has graciously allowed us to use it.

This comet was discovered on March 27, 2020. It was viewed 160 million miles away

from Earth and 190 million miles away from the sun. It is known for being the brightest comet in the northern hemisphere since the comet Hale-Bopp in 1997. Photographed by professional and amateur photographers it could be seen with the naked eye for most of its life through the entire month of July.

Its closest approach to Earth occurred on July 23 at 64 million miles. It is known as a long-period comet, and its orbital period is about 6700 years to make one lap around its own orbit. It travels at an astounding speed of 17,500 miles per hour or 298 miles per second. Comets do not make their own light; their light is the reflection of sunlight off the comet's debris field.

The comet is made up of ice, dust, rock, and gases with high amounts of sodium. The debris tail is millions of miles long and has split into two tails with colors of blue, red and gold depending on its location. The diameter of the nucleus is about 3 miles. Scientists often refer to it as a "dirty snowball". It is named after the NASA telescope that discovered it.



UNDER A CLOUD OF UNCERTAINTY

Planning for a summer season starts long before launches deliver the first work crews to Thacher and Straitsmouth islands. It starts in winter when Thacher Town Committee chairman Syd Wedmore constructs a proposed keepers' schedule.



It comes into sharper focus in the following weeks as keepers firm up their commitments. Public meetings resume in March. Boat crews are lined up. The launches come out of winter storage, and the first forays are made to the islands to assess the season's maintenance needs.

This year's planning coincided with the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Massachusetts. Uncertain about the course of the virus, the town committee decided to move forward — carefully — with the most pressing maintenance and construction projects on the islands. Only one launch would be taken out of storage. Though the islands were initially closed to visitors, keepers would still be required to prevent vandalism and land the launches for the work crews. Crews and keepers were asked to assess their involvement in light of health and family issues, and all understood they would be following Covid-19 safety protocols.

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THACHER ISLAND VOLUNTEER WORK CREW

WORK CREW PROFILE

TIA BOARD OFFICERS

It Takes a Village

This year, three people with an array of financial, organizational, and communication skills stepped into positions vacated by outgoing Thacher Island Association board officers Paul St. Germain (president), Peter Bergholtz (vice-president), and Judy Leach (secretary), while outgoing treasurer Bill Whiting took on the role of president.



New board officers L to R Bill Whiting, President; Randy Saville, Vice President; and Meredith Glaser, Treasurer; (all demonstrating social distancing).

William Whiting (president):

After 30 years at Cigna Healthcare, Bill retired as vice president of national accounts. He has been a member of the island's weekly work crew since 2009, most recently concentrating on the construction of a public privy and a winch shed on Straitsmouth Island. He has been on the TIA board since 2011, serving as treasurer since 2014. Bill also volunteers as an ESL tutor at Wellspring House in Gloucester and at North Shore Habitat for Humanity.

Randy Saville (vice president):

After earning a bachelor's degree in management from Babson College, where he is still involved as a coach in the Teamwork & Leadership Program, Randy worked in Chicago, Akron, and Atlanta. A job with AT&T brought him back to Boston and eventually his hometown of Rockport. In 2003, Randy cofounded Strategic Spaces, which designs work environments to match business, brand, and budget objectives. He has served on the board of the Sandy Bay Historical Society since 1998, currently as its president. Randy is also a member of Rotary and a corporator of the Cape Ann Savings Bank. Randy joined the TIA board in 2018, after his retirement from Strategic Spaces. He is a member of the work crew and has been a keeper on both Thacher and Straitsmouth islands.

Meredith Glaser (treasurer):

Following graduation from the Culinary Institute of America, Meredith worked as an executive pastry chef in Boston hotels and restaurants. After moving to Cape Ann, she started MG Wedding Cakes and Design and, in 2006, opened the Plum Cove Grind bakery and cafe in Lanesville, where she also

served as treasurer for the Lanesville Community Center during its renovation period. Since selling the cafe in 2017, Meredith has pursued a career in elder mediation. She has been a member of the work crew since 2017, an assistant keeper on Thacher in 2018, and a keeper on Straitsmouth for the past two summers.

Kristy Rudel (secretary):

With a bachelor's degree from Dartmouth College and an MBA from Stanford University, Kristy has held management positions at General Foods, Nestlé, and the Dreyfus Corporation. Building on a start-up assistance program she created as a consultant, she was part of a team that founded UBP Asset Management, where she spent 14 years, serving as the chief of finance, compliance, operations, and administration. The mother of two daughters, Kristy is a certified Girl Scout Outdoor Education trainer, teaching Girl Scout leaders how to safely take their troops camping. She joined the TIA board in June 2019.



Other members of the Thacher Island Association board of directors are

Peter Bergholtz, William Bräunlich, Richard Calnan, Nathan Ives, Judy Leach, Christine Lovgren, Richard MacPherson, Don Southard, Paul St. Germain, Edward J. (Jeff) Taylor, and Karen Wise.



Former TIA President Wins Lifetime Achievement Award

Two people with Thacher Island connections were awarded the F. Ross Holland Lifetime Achievement Award this year. Presented jointly by the United States Lighthouse Society and the American Lighthouse Council, the award is considered the lighthouse preservation community's highest honor. Only 13 people have received the honor in the award's 20-year history.

Paul St. Germain, member of the Thacher Island Association since 1998 and president of the board for 18 years, led the effort to raise more than \$3.2 million for restoration of lighthouses and other structures on both Thacher and Straitsmouth islands. In addition to writing five books about Cape Ann, including one each on Thacher and Straitsmouth, he lectures extensively on local history. His research on Thacher Island led to the station's designation as a National Historic Landmark in 2001 and the return of the South Tower Fresnel lens to Cape Ann in 2013.

Also honored was America's senior lampist James Woodward, who has worked on Fresnel lenses for more than 54 years. Woodward made three Thacher-related trips to Cape Ann: in May 2013 to unpack, restore, and assemble Thacher Island's South Tower Fresnel lens when it first arrived at the Cape Ann Museum from a U.S. Coast Guard storage facility; a year later, when the lens was dismantled and moved to a newly constructed gallery; and again in May 2015, when his team replaced a prism and installed a light inside the lens. One of only 39 remaining first-order lenses in the country, the Thacher Fresnel is on permanent display in the Cape Ann Museum.

St. Germain was also awarded the Citizen of the Year by the Rockport Rotary Club for his leadership in the preservation and operation of Thacher and Straitsmouth islands 2019-2020.



IN MEMORIAM



DOROTHY J. CARROLL

Face of the Island (February 1921-June 2020)

For many people, Dottie Carroll was the face of Thacher Island. After she and her husband, George, retired to Rockport in 1986, they spent six months a year as keepers on Thacher, troubleshooting problems, landing the launches, and carving out some of the trails that exist

there today. The island campground is named for the Carrolls, who envisioned the need and created the space.

Dottie was 66 and had already lived a full life when she and her husband followed up on a Yankee magazine article noting that Thacher Island needed keepers. Widowed at 23 when her first husband, a Thunderbird pilot, went missing over Italy during World War II, she married George, a decorated Navy veteran of Normandy, Anzio, and Okinawa, and settled down to raise a family in South Lancaster. She was a secretary, first for a trucking company, then, for 25 years, to the principal at Nashoba Regional High School. Active volunteers in their previous community, she and George had no intention of going quietly into their golden years.

Their six-year tenure as keepers ended in 1991 after Hurricane Bob washed out the Thacher Island ramp, but the Carrolls continued to care for the island. They regularly visited Thacher by skiff and clambered over the rocks in order to maintain the trails. When a new ramp was built, the Carrolls remained active members of the work crew. George drove the Kubota tractor, while Dottie purchased supplies for the keepers and scheduled launch trips for both crew and visitors, even after George passed away in 2011.

Dottie died on June 2, 2020, at the age of 99. Like those of her husband, her ashes were scattered from the Thacher Island launch into the waters around the island she had served.

ANDREW PAUL HEINZE

Keeper and Board Member (October 1941-April 2020)

Andy Heinze didn't know about it at the time, but his wife, Kathy, had put their names on a waiting list to be Thacher Island keepers. While he might have preferred to play golf, he gamely went along, spending a total of five Septembers on the island from the mid 1990s into the early 2000s. That time included September 11, 2001, when he and Kathy honored those who died in New York City by lowering the flag between Thacher's own twin towers.

Originally from Lawrence, educated in North Andover, and a Navy veteran, Andy settled in Rockport after his retirement as an insurance claims manager for Royal Sun Alliance. He served on the island's work crew and was a member of the Thacher Island Association board from 2003 to 2011. He also served on Rockport's Conservation Commission and Board of Selectmen and sang with Chorus North Shore. When he developed ALS, the hardest thing for him to bear was the loss of his voice, but, according to Kathy, he still managed to be a part of the chorus's March 2020 concert, "just mouthing the words and singing with his soul."

Andrew Heinze died at home on April 29, 2020, at the age of 78.



THE SUMMER'S
WORK

Nature doesn't pause for a pandemic. Vegetation erases trails. Wooden buildings decay and metal work rusts. A thick layer of marine flora covers ramps. Despite the problems posed by Covid-19 restrictions, the island work crews carried on. The Thacher crew tackled maintenance, while the Straitsmouth crew pressed forward with construction.



While many tasks needed to be done, most of the Straitsmouth work crew's efforts focused on completing a winch-hydraulics shed and adding solar panel stanchions on the roof.



By September, with both the winch-hydraulics shed (left) and the compost toilet (right) close to completion.

STRAITSMOUTH
ISLAND

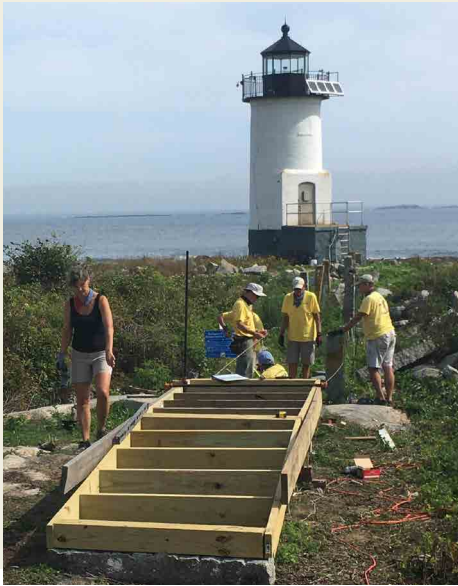
All projects were complicated by the need to haul materials up the embankment at the Gap Head end of the island.



They also completed work on a public privy.



Alejandro Jimenez, Doc Wedmore's grandson, celebrates the installation of the first section of the walkway with his mentor, Peter Bergholtz.



The Straitsmouth crew adds the second section to the walkway to the lighthouse.

A WINCH FOR
STRAITSMOUTH

Even with the addition of a landing ramp at the Gap end of Straitsmouth, launch landings have been "touch-and-go." The amphibious launch approaches the ramp with its bow door lowered, volunteers step from boat to ramp, and gear is passed to waiting hands. In order to safely land visitors, the launch needs to be pulled up the ramp and stabilized. For that, a winch system like the one on Thacher had to be created.



Sixty 80-pound bags of concrete mix were delivered using Doc Wedmore's specially constructed "Ramp Tram".



Ray Moss installs rebar reinforcement into the form before concrete is poured.



The hydraulic power unit for Thacher's winch was replaced with a more powerful machine, freeing the older unit for use on Straitsmouth,



Bill Whiting and Ray Moss were among those who created the base for a winch at the top of the embankment.



Ray Moss puts the finishing touch on the block ready to receive the capstan winch.



The winch plate and capstan winch were bolted to the concrete base.



where it was installed in the winch house.



At Granite Pier, a capstan and its 600-pound base plate were lowered from Will Trafton's welding truck onto the launch.

UNDER A CLOUD
OF UNCERTAINTY

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When virus transmission rates flattened, the town committee reopened the islands, without landing fees, to all who could reach them on their own. Visitors were welcome to walk the trails, but the lighthouses, museums, gift shop, and privy remained shuttered because it was deemed impractical to ask the reduced number of keepers to disinfect all surfaces after use. Tourist launch trips remained canceled for the season.

At least one group associated with the islands appeared happy with the new arrangement: The Thacher gulls escaped Fish & Wildlife's yearly population-reduction efforts. Keepers expect to see more gulls and visitors in 2021. They'll be happy to see the visitors.



Dick Morris, George Langer, Fred McGrath, and Norm DeLisle repaired the roof of the oil-house shed.



George Langer and Norm DeLisle repaired an entryway roof on the assistant keepers' house.



Joe Napolitano repaired a cornice on the assistant keepers' house.



The Thacher crew of Sloan Craven, Fred McGrath (on ladder) and George Langer fixed the roof and pointed up and painted the brickwork of the North Tower entrance.



Donna Cusick created a trail connecting Anne's Way to Bennett's Trace.



Like many nonprofits, the Thacher Island Association lost a great deal of its expected annual revenue due to Covid-19. With the loss of membership and landing fees, launch-ticket and merchandise sales, the lighthouse cruise fundraiser, and a reduction in town funding, the organization fell approximately \$27,000 short of its 2019 revenue level. Although most of the labor on Thacher and Straitsmouth is done by volunteers, the shortfall impacts the association's ability to purchase materials for building and maintenance projects and depletes the savings needed for emergency repairs.

Despite the revenue losses, members of the association are grateful. We are grateful to keepers and work crew members who made the difficult decision to absent themselves from the islands this season and to those volunteers who were able to stretch themselves further to fill the gaps.

We are grateful to the visitors who found ways to reach the islands despite the curtailment of launch services and enjoyed the trails despite lack of access to the lighthouses, museums, and privies. We appreciate that volunteers and visitors followed mask and social-distancing guidelines, and we are relieved that no one contracted Covid-19 on the islands.

We are grateful to those who subscribed or renewed their memberships even though launch tickets, one of the primary member

benefits, were unavailable. And we are grateful for those who donated to the island association in lieu of or in addition to their memberships.

While we are grateful, we are also hopeful. Hopeful that better times lie ahead. That launches will again bring visitors to the islands. That keepers will welcome campers, bird watchers, and history enthusiasts to the islands' shores. That docents will talk with visitors in the lighthouses.

You can be part of the brighter future of Thacher and Straitsmouth islands in the following ways:

- Become a member of the Thacher Island Association or renew your membership. (Your renewal date is on the mailing label of this newsletter.)
- Make a donation through the web site, <https://thacherisland.org/product-category/donations/>; mail it to the Thacher Island Association, P.O. Box 73, Rockport, MA 01966; or use the envelope enclosed in this newsletter.
- Designate Thacher Island as your charity when you order through amazon.com.
- Purchase island merchandise from Katie's Gift Shop, 3 Mt. Pleasant St., Rockport, or the Thacher Island online gift shop, <https://thacherisland.org/about-us/shop/>.

NEW BOOK

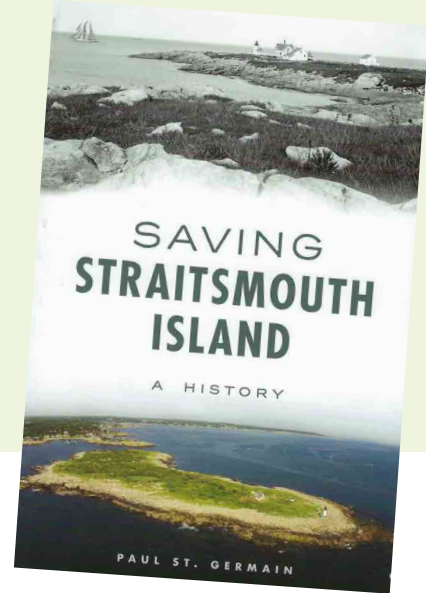
Saving Straitsmouth-A History

President Paul St. Germain has written his fifth book on historical sites of Cape Ann. This one is a comprehensive history of Straitsmouth Island in Rockport.

Straitsmouth Island has enjoyed a noteworthy history that belies the island's small size. From the Pawtucket Indians who summered there over a thousand years ago to its discovery by famous explorers Samuel De Champlain and Captain John Smith in the seventeenth century, it has seen fishermen, shipwrecks and piracy. From 1835 to 1935, there were three lighthouses built there, each with its own fascinating story of the lighthouse keepers and their families. St. Germain recounts the lives of many of the fifteen keepers who lived on the island from 1835 until 1933. Thanks to tireless restoration efforts by the Thacher Island Association and Massachusetts Audubon Society, the island is now once again open to the public for the first time in 180 years.

This 150-page book includes over 70 photographs. Published by The History Press, it is now available on the Thacher Island website (www.thacherisland.org), on Amazon and in local bookstores.

Price: \$25.00 includes shipping. Proceeds to TIA.





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NEW FISH & WILDLIFE MANAGER VISITS THACHER



Matt Hillman toured the island in September with Sharon Ware, Deputy Refuge Manager.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service, which owns the northern one-third of Thacher Island, recently appointed Matt Hillman manager of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, under whose aegis the Thacher Island National Wildlife Refuge is supervised. Before his arrival at Parker River in late June, Hillman spent five years managing the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge on Cape Cod. He has a master's degree from Virginia Tech with a focus on beach-nesting birds.

www.thacherisland.org

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