

Cloud Bridge from Straitsmouth to Thacher" by Sharron Cohen

Thacher & Straitsmouth Island News

April 2021 Newsletter | VOL 21 ISSUE 01

1918 PANDEMIC ON THACHER ISLAND

In the fall of 1918, 183 people died of influenza in Gloucester. The final number would reach 250 and might have gone higher had Gloucester not acted with an immediacy that served as a model for other communities. All indoor and outdoor activities, including church services, were closed by the end of September. An extensive tent hospital constructed on the grounds of Addison Gilbert Hospital was designated a State Emergency Hospital Post and placed under the command of a Major Thomson, an epidemiologist from the US Army Medical Corps.



George T. Gustavus (1884-1976) circa mid-1920's served as principal keeper on Thacher Island from 1918 to 1919. He joined the U.S. Navy at the age of 18 in 1903. He spent four years on the battleship Iowa, and it was while the vessel was anchored off Rockport, Massachusetts, that he met his wife-to-be, Mabel Norwood. They were married in 1907 and eventually had ten children. Photo is courtesy of his granddaughter Joan Kenworthy.

It was a bad time to fall ill on Thacher Island. Lightkeeper George Gustavus suffered from the characteristic fevers and chills that too often ended in a fatal pneumonia. His wife, Rockport native Mabel Norwood Gustavus, and their six children were ill to a lesser but still worrisome degree. When Major Thomson learned that no local doctors were available to attend them, he prevailed on his assistant, Lieutenant John Radcliffe, and staff physician Lieutenant Edward Burbeck, who made a wave-soaked passage in a motor dory from the Rockport Coast Guard Station to Thacher. On October 2 the family was treated, probably with Dover's powder, salts of quinine, and aspirin, the prevailing medications of the day. Radcliffe and Burbeck were back at the Emergency Hospital Post by midnight, and the lighthouse authorities were notified to provide further relief to the island's keepers.

Continued on Page 5, Pandemic

Spreading Their Wings

One group of Thacher residents may have benefited most from the decrease in human activity on the island last summer: birds.

Because Covid-19 restrictions prevented the US Fish & Wildlife Service from carrying out its annual population control efforts, all gull eggs were left undisturbed. While no official count was made, keepers reported three to five Herring and Black-backed Gull hatchlings per nest. Canada geese also appeared to have a prosperous

summer on the island. Keepers estimated that the daily goose parade between the keepers' houses and the boathouse consisted of 20 adults trailed by four to ten goslings per pair.

Continued on Page 4, Wings



TOURIST TRIPS TO RESUME

Tourist trips to Thacher and Straitsmouth islands aboard the island launches will resume in the spring, with masks and social distancing required.

Group size will be limited in the Straitsmouth lighthouse and Thacher's South Tower. The privies will be open and stocked with hand sanitizer.

Launches, which are limited to six passengers per trip, are scheduled to carry visitors to Thacher on Wednesdays from June 9 through September 1 and on Saturdays from June 12 through August 28, weather permitting. Tuesday launch landings on Straitsmouth are tide-dependent, making times and dates variable. Check the Thacher Island Association website or call the reservation information line (617-599-2590) between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM daily for schedule updates.



Docents are masked up and ready to serve.

Launch fees for both islands: Adults, \$30; Rockport residents and nonresident children 12 and under, \$10. Launch fees are waived for Rockport children 12 and under and Thacher Island Association members. Children under 3 are not permitted on the launch per Coast Guard regulation.

Landing fees are included in the launch price, but individuals who arrive by other means will be asked to pay a landing fee of \$5 on both islands. Landing fees will be waived for Rockport residents, children 12 and under, Thacher Island Association and Mass. Audubon members, and holders of America the Beautiful passes and federal duck stamps.

Visit the Thacher Island Association website thacherisland.org for complete information on visiting the islands.



Thacher I and II will be ready for 2021 summer season.

THACHER ISLAND VOLUNTEER WORK CREW

WORK CREW PROFILE

Dave Murphy

A Man for All Seasons

Thacher and Straitsmouth volunteers fill a variety of roles. Some serve as keepers. Others are docents, boat crew, trail crew, or carpenters. Still others fill shore crew functions, serving on the board of directors, manning merchandise sales, or providing tech services. Dave Murphy has filled many of those functions, readjusting his role in the Thacher Island Association as his circumstances have changed over the years.



Dave Murphy, left, with Peter Chick aboard Thacher I.

Dave and his wife, Susan, began their relationship with the association as Thacher intern keepers in the summer of 2008. They were both accountants at the time, he for Grant Thornton, LLP and she for the Massachusetts General Hospital finance office. Dave's retirement from Grant Thornton in 2009 allowed him to finish "Walker's Cove," the first novel in a historical trilogy, and to take a more active role in the association. He crewed on the Thacher launch, volunteered for weekly work crew assignments, and served on the association's board of directors. The Murphys' daughter, Ashley, fulfilled her Rockport High School community service requirement by serving with them on the island from 2012 to 2014.

When Susan became ill in 2017, Dave volunteered as a single assistant, helping keepers open the island in May, maintaining trails, plastering walls and ceilings in the keepers' houses, and stripping and painting the South Tower entryway.

His situation changed again when Dave took a job at the US Post Office's distribution facility in Reading to improve his family's financial situation. His night-shift hours led him to resign his position on the island association board of directors and to give up his

summer week as a keeper assistant.

Eventually, corneal edema as well as back pain and foot neuropathy stemming from 40 hours a week standing on 70-year-old bones ended Dave's tenure at the Post Office.

Despite physical problems, Dave Murphy has remained active. Unable to climb, he pursues a lifelong interest in ham radio by stringing antenna wire with a bow and arrow, and he has found a way to contribute to the Thacher and Straitsmouth community as its clocksmith. Until he can rejoin the islands' work crews, he continues to repair and maintain the clocks in Thacher Island's museum and keepers' houses. His most recently restored timepiece is described in a companion story in this issue.



Dave Murphy rescues bird from Thacher launch.

HUMPBACK WHALE CAMP

Humpback Whales like this were studied on Thacher in 1987 and 1988.

In the 40 years since the US Coast Guard transferred management of Thacher Island to the town of Rockport, the island has hosted Boy Scout camping trips, ham radio retreats, Coast Guard picnics, and family reunions. But the most ambitious use of the island may have been a college course offered twice a summer in 1987 and 1988.

Humpback Whale Ecology, designed by the School for Field Studies in Beverly and accredited by Northeastern University, attracted college students from across the country. Each group of 15 spent four weeks in the program. During the first week,



Keepers Dottie and George Carroll, c. 1988. Courtesy of Beth Ann Mathews

students stayed at the island's newly created campground while attending

open-air lectures that ranged from oceanography and the evolution of marine mammals to the life history and ecology of the humpback whale.

The second and third weeks were spent on tall ships, learning to sail while doing research on whales. The final week of the course was spent back on Thacher, where students analyzed their data, wrote reports, and gave presentations.

"It was intense," former instructor Beth Ann Mathews remembers. "We had to cover a lot of material in a short time. . . . But the students were very motivated and great to work with. There was a lot of camaraderie living and working together so closely those four weeks."

Mathews remembers, in particular, the kindness of the Thacher keepers. "My co-instructor, Jim Taggart, and I so enjoyed and appreciated Dottie and George [Carroll] during our time there and loved being on the island. In fact, that experience led to us getting married many years later."

VOLUNTEER RESTORES ISLAND CLOCKS

Time does not stand still on Thacher Island. It ticks along efficiently on several clocks renovated, maintained, and donated by David Murphy. An accountant by trade, Murphy began repairing clocks more than 20 years ago, having learned the craft from Michael Poisson, a third-generation horologist who specializes in antique timepieces.

When Murphy began serving as a Thacher keeper in 2008, he outfitted the keepers' houses with several United States Light House Service clocks from his home collection. He later donated a circa 1930s USLHS timepiece from Salem's Baker Island Light Station; that desk clock is currently on display in the Thacher Island museum.

Murphy recently restored a clock that was brought to the association by work crew member Jeff Taylor. Built between 1902 and 1920 by the E. N. Welch Clock Co. after the company's purchase by William Sessions, the clock was a popular style for use in dry goods stores, taverns, and hardware stores. Commonly referred to as "store clocks," they were also used by the Light House Service.

In addition to reconditioning its mechanism and replacing its face, Murphy made the clock an official



Former Baker Island Lighthouse clock on display in Thacher's visitor center parlor.



Gold leaf was incorporated into the logo for the most recently renovated clock.



Canada geese with goslings.

Continued from Page 1, Wings

The two pairs of American Oystercatchers that nested on Thacher in 2019 returned and were occasionally joined by a third pair that keeper Peg Brady conjectured may be nesting on a nearby island. Brady, who works for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, noted that one oystercatcher was banded. US Fish & Wildlife records show that the bird had been banded on Long Beach Island, NY, in June 2018 and sighted on Brigantine Island, NJ, in December 2019, before making its way to Thacher last June.

Brady also noted a pair of Black-crowned Night-herons nesting along Anne's Way. Their single chick was found dead, presumably killed by a fall from a nest located 10 to 12 feet above the ground. Brady thought the pair, which abandoned the nest after the hatchling's death, might have been inexperienced breeders. This was the first known nesting of Black-crowned Night-herons on Thacher Island.

Straitsmouth volunteers continued to see Wild Turkeys and songbirds. The trill of the American Oystercatcher was heard, but, since no nests were sighted, it's uncertain whether the birds' breeding territory has expanded or they were conducting a flyover from Thacher.



American Oystercatcher.

Nathan Ives was part of the crew that erected an Osprey nesting platform near the Straitsmouth boat ramp.



The Gustavus family gathered for a Christmas card photo at Dumpling Rock in 1935. Front, left to right: Son Edward (lost in the 1938 hurricane), Keeper George Gustavus, Wife Mable Norwood Gustavus, daughters Martha and Florence. Rear, left to right: daughter Mabel, son Roy, daughter Helen, son Frank, daughter Lillian, son George (in Army uniform) and daughter Marian. Courtesy of Joan Kenworthy.

Continued from Page 1, Pandemic

George Gustavus and his family survived the pandemic. He and Mabel had four more children while they moved through a series of lighthouse postings, starting at Cuttyhunk in 1919 and ending at Prudence Island, RI in 1937. By then their older children were grown and living elsewhere, leaving only George, Mabel, and their 12-year-old son, Edward at the Rhode Island station. In September 1938, as a dangerous storm barreled toward New England's southern coast, the Gustavus family took a former assistant keeper and a neighboring couple into their sturdy keeper's house.

What would become the deadliest hurricane in New England history struck the Prudence Island light with a 17.5-foot storm surge.

"We all rushed upstairs," George Gustavus later told The Boston Globe, "and when the house broke up, we were all thrown into the

rushing waters. . . . A lad living on the island followed me down the shore. When he saw me near the cliffs, he stuck a timber down into the water and I clamped the death grip on it. Then he and others hauled me out." The bodies of Gustavus' wife, neighbors, and former assistant keeper eventually washed ashore, but his son Edward was never recovered.

With the help of the owner of the island's power plant, keeper Gustavus reactivated the light during the storm by running a cable from the plant to the lighthouse and installing a light bulb, electrifying the Prudence Island Light for the very first time.



"Tent Hospital" was erected by the Army on the grounds of Addison Gilbert Hospital, Gloucester, MA in 1918. At the time the hospital had just 30 beds and was unable to match the demand. Courtesy of Cape Ann Museum.



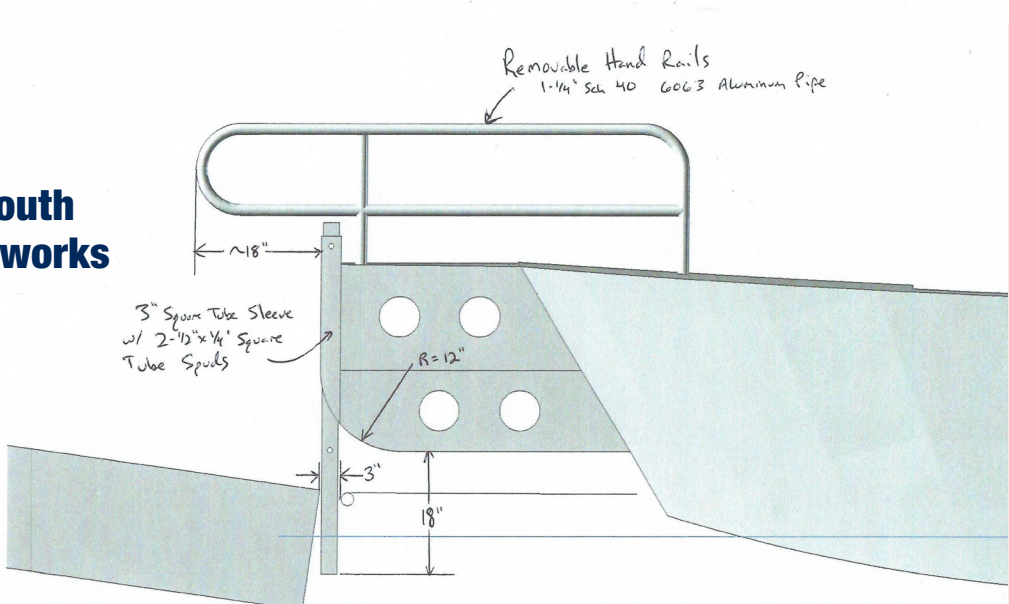
Prudence Island Lighthouse in Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay just after the hurricane of September 21, 1938. The entry door seems to be the only visible damage yet the entire keeper house was swept into the ocean and destroyed. From the collection of Jeremy D'Entremont.



The entire keeper house shown on the left in 1884 was swept into the sea along with its five occupants. Gustavus's wife Mabel and youngest son Edward were drowned. Courtesy of National Archives.

The Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands’ fleet commander works to refit Thacher I launch.

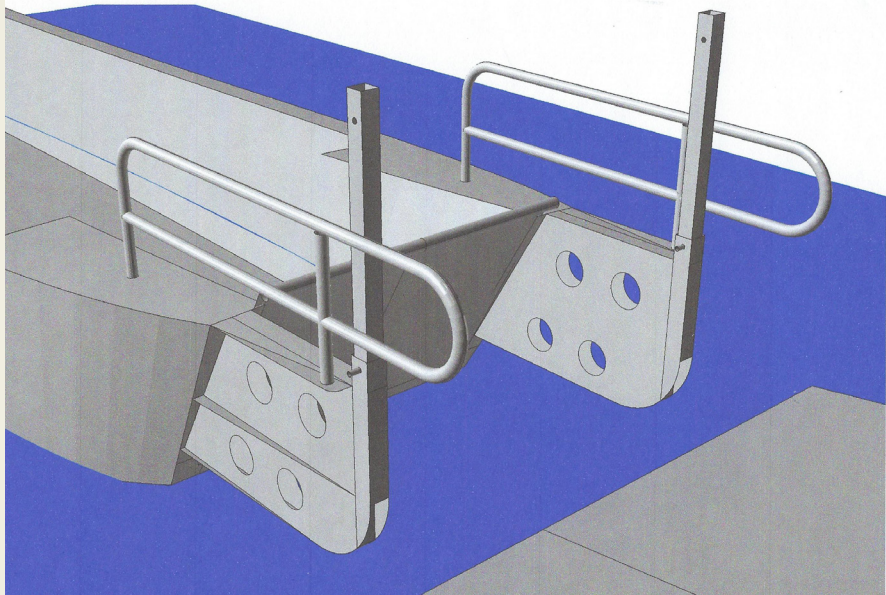
Two of a series of initial mechanical sketches done by Viking boat builders.



The blunt end of the ramp is exposed here at low tide, which the boat will be able to rest against to allow easier and safer boat entry and exit.

Since building the new boat launch ramp on Straitsmouth, we have determined that we need some refitting adjustments made to Thacher I. Because the ramp does not go as deep into the water as the one on Thacher, the tides limit the number of landing time slots. The ramp has a blunt end that precludes our landing anytime we want. To give us a wider window of landing times, our fleet commander, Tom Eldridge, with the help of boat captain Bob Krause, has devised a new design and engaged Viking Welded Boats of Kensington, NH to reconfigure the bow. Viking built our launch

boat four years ago and it continues to serve us well. The new work will include the addition of “push-knees” that will allow us to butt up against the blunt end of the ramp at lower tides. These knees will allow us to lower the passenger boat ramp door and, with the addition of an electric winch and new passenger handrails, enable our work crews and tourist visitors to access the island more frequently and more safely. Viking engineers have created shop drawings, and their builders hope to have the boat ready for this summer’s use.



“I thought you might like to know about the new documentary film entitled ‘The Last Lightkeepers,’ produced by my friend Rob Apse. He and I worked together on a portion of it on Thacher in June of 2016.

Rising at 4:00 AM, he got some great footage as we filmed in a raging lightning storm at the top of the North Tower light,” said Paul St. Germain, President Emeritus of the association. Rob also went to other New England lighthouses and has worked over the last five years to create this hour-long film which is a tribute to all volunteer lighthouse workers. Rob stated, “The idea of the film was to inspire younger generations to get involved to continue all the work everyone is doing. Being an official selection of the Providence Children’s Film Festival certainly is a step in the right direction.”

His hard work has been rewarded with three additional film festival awards to date: 2020 Gold Award - Spotlight Documentary Film Awards, 2021 Award of Merit - Impact Doc Awards, and 2021 Official Selection - International Ocean Film Festival.

Do you know why Thacher Island has not one, but two lighthouses? At about ten minutes into the documentary, Rockport author and historian Paul St. Germain reveals why. Thacher Island’s Twin Lights are featured prominently in the film, as are a number of other familiar New England lights.

“The Last Lightkeepers” is filmed beautifully, telling different aspects of the history of lighthouses as well as their current status. A quote from one of the interviewees, author Eric Jay Dolan (Brilliant Beacons), especially resonated: “Lighthouses are there to benefit everyone regardless of where they come from, their race, nationality, creed, or beliefs. Lighthouses are a manifestation of a government’s desire to make navigation for everyone safer. In today’s turbulent political times, I especially like to think about lighthouses being a beacon for the world, a welcoming embrace for those that are choosing to come to our country...”

Some reviews on Amazon.com:

Amazing Documentary
A tremendously beautiful and important film about the history of coastal New England. I was moved by the amazing stories of these individuals who have made historical preservation an important part of their life. Rob does a beautiful job letting their stories teach us how much we can all still learn about the world around us. Loved it!
- Steve

Breathtaking Cinematography
Beautiful documentary that captures the soul of New England through lighthouses and those who dedicate their life’s mission to restore and maintain them.
- Veronica 99

We highly recommend viewing this film, which features significant historic information about Thacher Island. Go to Amazon.com and type the words “The Last Lightkeepers” in the search box, where you may rent it for \$2.99 or buy it for \$9.99.

We Are GRATEFUL

Despite one of the most unusual years in the 40-year history of the Thacher Island Association, we have so much to be grateful for as we look back at 2020. Even though we were not able to operate our launch service to Thacher and Straitsmouth, and both islands were closed early in the season, there were a number of positive things that were very gratifying.

First was the amazing generosity of our members and other donors which led to a 33% increase in donations over 2019. In addition, our membership total grew by 4%. And, this was in a year in which there were few membership benefits. To all of you who donated or joined or renewed your memberships -- thank you.

Second was the support that we have received from the citizens of Rockport and in particular the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) who

approved our \$30,000 application to restore and paint the assistant keepers' house on Thacher. Since 2003 the grants provided by the CPC have been instrumental in funding a considerable amount of the preservation work on both islands. We simply can not thank them enough.

Third, like most non-profit organizations, we would not be able to operate without a considerable amount of help from our volunteers. Even in a year with minimal tourist traffic to the islands, our boat crews and the Wednesday group of carpenters, painters, trail workers, mechanics, etc. spent thousands of hours last summer on both islands doing the important things needed to keep everything in good working order. The



Boat driver Larry Libert is masked up for this coming summer to safely deliver tourists to the islands.

volunteers did not disappoint as they put in over 3850 hours.

Better days are ahead -- we know this to be true. While 2021 promises to be a very good year for us, we are most appreciative for everything that everyone has done for us throughout all of 2020.

YOU CAN HELP Thacher and Straitsmouth islands return to normal in the following ways:

- Become a member of the Thacher Island Association or renew your membership. Your renewal date is on this newsletter's mailing label, and an envelope is included with this issue.
- Make a donation through the website, <https://thacherisland.org/product-category/donations/>, or mail it to the Thacher Island Association, PO Box 73, Rockport, MA 01966.
- Designate Thacher Island as your charity when you order merchandise through amazon.com.
- Purchase island products from Katie's Gift Shop, 3 Mt. Pleasant St., Rockport, or the Thacher Island online gift shop, <https://thacherisland.org/about-us/shop/>.
- Consider making the Thacher Island Association a beneficiary in your estate planning.

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT-FIND YOUR MATCH

Many corporations match charitable donations made by their employees. Provisions vary widely from company to company. Some match direct donations dollar for dollar, with money spent for membership in the Thacher Island Association eligible for the match. While some limit the matching grants to donations by their active employees, others match contributions made by retirees, spouses, and domestic

partners. Work-crew time spent on the islands might also qualify. Check with your company's financial office to see if, and how, it participates in matching contributions.

No matter how you help the Thacher Island Association continue its efforts to preserve the islands while making them accessible to the public, thank you.



HELP Comes in many forms

The Thacher Island Association is emerging from the past year's lockdown with an acknowledgement of lost time, resources, and revenue, but with an even keener sense of hope. The launches will be transporting visitors again. Keepers and docents will be welcoming boaters and campers. Even with mask and distancing precautions in place, there is a sense of life returning to the islands, a welcome whiff of normal in the air.

"Normal" means returning to our former level of revenue. While people responded generously to last fall's appeal for donations, income from fundraisers and launch tickets, as well as landing and camping fees, was non-existent. Grants and merchandise sales were greatly reduced.

New Straitsmouth brochure includes a self-guided walking tour and map of the island.

The brochure is full of facts about the island, some history, and several full-color photographs along with a detailed map on how to get around its mile and a half long trail system. Come and visit, walk the trails, climb the lighthouse, visit the circa 1878 recreated Victorian parlor at

the keeper's house Visitor Center, and have lunch on the many picnic benches scattered throughout the island. There are plenty of birds to view and tranquil viewing options along Straitsmouth's rocky shores.

If you would like a free copy, send along a self-addressed, stamped #10 envelop to Thacher Island Association, Box 73, Rockport, MA 01966.

Straitsmouth Island Visitor Map

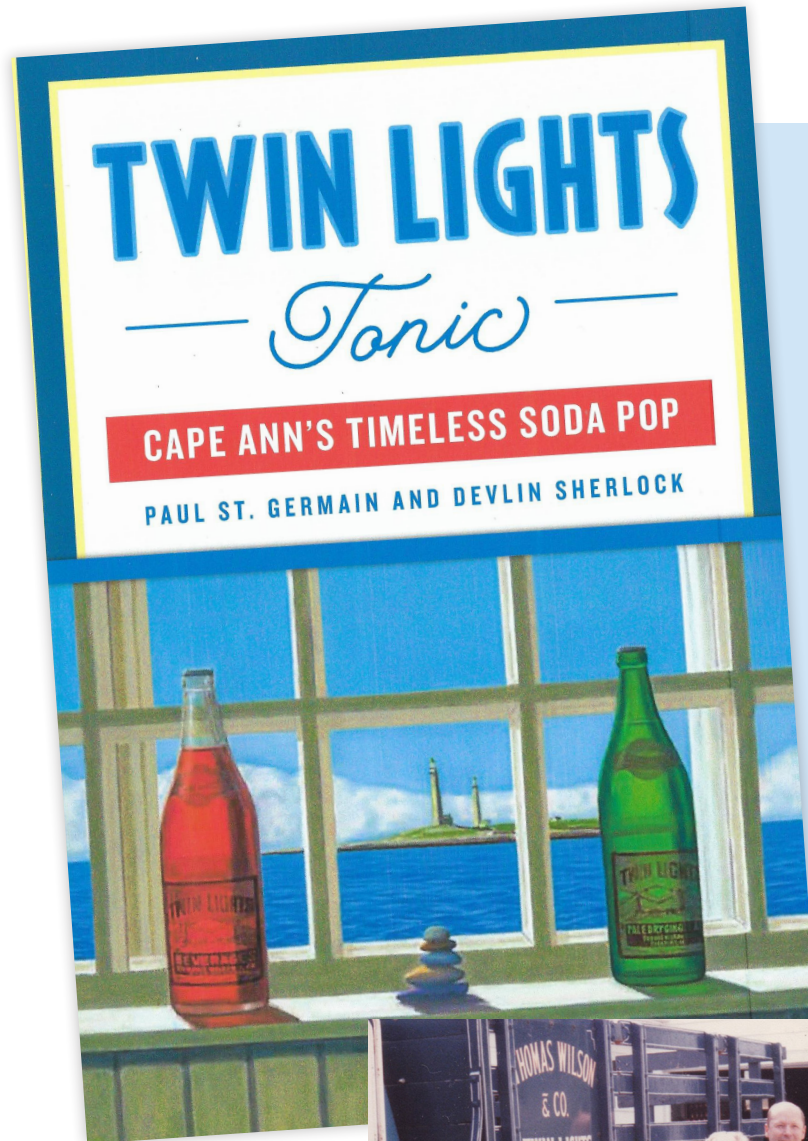


SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR

1. Start at ramp site #6 past Winch House #20 and Public Compost Toilet #15.
2. Walk eastward on Manton Trail #7 toward Keeper House/Visitor Center #2 and Maintenance Barn #4.
3. To Lighthouse #1 past the Oil House #3 and Footbridge #5.
4. To Seal Sunning area #14.
5. To auxiliary boat landing area #9 and old derrick site #10.
6. Note the many stone walls #13 built as gardens and farm animal enclosures by the keepers.
7. Proceed back westward on Manton Trail #7 and split off at Kubota Beach Trail #8 to PI Trail #18 to picnic area at Outlook de St. Germain #17.
8. Return to PI Trail #18 to Kubota Beach Trail #8 junction, walk south along Kubota Beach Trail to Kubota Beach #8.
9. Walk north back along Kubota Beach Trail and split off to Osprey Nest Trail #16.
10. Continue past Osprey Nest #16 to Boat Launch Ramp #6.

NEW BOOK:

Twin Lights Tonic Cape Ann's Timeless Soda Pop



Paul St. Germain, President Emeritus of the Thacher Island Association, has written a new book, his sixth, on the history of one of the most popular soft drinks around the Cape Ann area Twin Lights Tonic. He combined with another author, Devlin Sherlock, to produce an interesting look at this 115-year-old Twin Lights Bottling Company (originally called Thomas Wilson Bottling Company) and the families that were involved in its creation. Together they have researched the history and development of carbonated soft drinks, explained how Twin Lights Tonic is made, and traced the history of one Rockport family of Portuguese immigrants who began producing the tonic in the back of a small-town grocery store in 1907. The authors tell the fascinating story of one of the last family bottlers still in operation with over 70 photographs.

Check the Thacher website to purchase the book after April 26.

Price: \$25.00 each includes shipping.



Pierce Sears stands behind his father the original owner/operator George Sears standing with their new "Big Blue Truck" in 1990.



Pierce Sears tips each bottle over as they come off the filling machine to make sure the flavoring is properly mixed with the carbonated water.

NEW BOOK

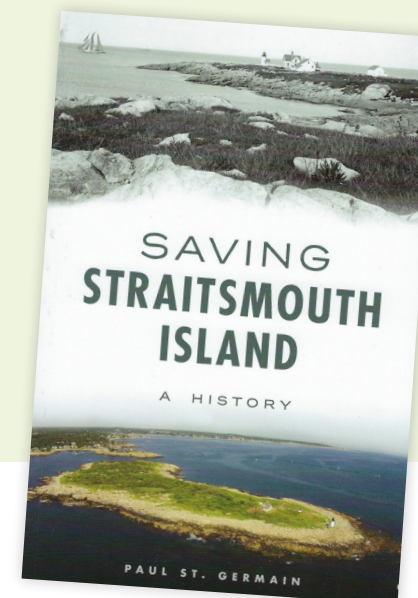
Saving Straitsmouth -

President Emeritus 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.*



Island Masks with Filter pocket now available.
It's never too late!

FEATURES:

- 3 layers: 100% Polyester exterior and 2 inner layers of 100% Cotton
- Filter Pocket offers option to add your own filter for extra protection
- Metal adjustable nose piece prevents fogging
- Adjustable bead on the strap to tighten or loosen straps
- Reusable and washable
- Nylon adjustable ear loops for comfortable fit
- Fits 12x8cm five-layer charcoal filter, included.

Not intended for medical use, for personal protection only.
Size: 8-3/8" x 6" x 1/8" (Open)

Price \$9.50 includes shipping.



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