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Melissa Cox Photography, Gloucester MA

## ISLAND DOCENTS

**Our volunteer docent program is probably the best-kept secret at Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands.**

Joanne Sullivan started our docent program six years ago to complement the work of our lighthouse keepers. Keepers frequently get preoccupied assisting in landing and launching the tourist boats, so Syd Wedmore recognized the need for someone who could focus more exclusively on the visitor experience. Karen Wise also came onboard that first year with Paul St. Germain's encouragement, and we have now grown to over a dozen volunteer docents. Our docents are like tour guides, except you don't have to follow them around, and they don't use a script – they really know what they're talking about.

Docents staff each island on boat launch days: Wednesdays and Saturdays on Thacher and Tuesdays on Straitsmouth. After you arrive, they remind you to sign the Visitor Log, and they provide a short orientation, including tidbits of history and suggestions about what to do and see. They can help you select souvenir merchandise from our collection of clothing, books, and other commemorative items. And at the top of the South Tower on Thacher, they provide interesting facts, answer questions, and give certifications of achievement to younger visitors.

*Continued on page 4*



### 2022 DOCENTS

Joanne Sullivan, Head  
Nicole Bannerman  
Linda Berard  
Linda Byrne  
Diane Cartwright  
Cate Cahill  
Betsy Eck  
Jane Flynn  
Judy Leach  
Fischer LeVasseur  
Karen Maslow  
Gigi McGrail  
Sue McGrath  
Karen Wise

Joanne Sullivan  
hiking around  
Thacher Island

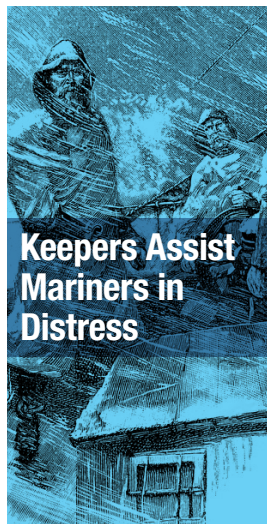
## WELCOME

The Thacher Island Association encourages people to visit Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands, but our volunteer keepers want to remind anyone contemplating a visit in their own vessel to:

- Check the marine forecast and sea conditions
- Be aware of the tide tables
- Always wear personal flotation devices



A right whale breaches. Credit: NOAA Fisheries



## Keepers Assist Mariners in Distress

Ever since lighthouses were established on Thacher Island in 1771 and Straitsmouth Island in 1835, their lights have guided mariners. The keepers who were stationed on the islands to ensure proper operation and maintenance of the lighthouses were often called into action to assist distressed mariners as well. In 1839, Straitsmouth keeper Benjamin Andrews was awarded a medal for heroism by the Massachusetts Humane Society for rescuing two men clinging to the mast of their sailboat after having been washed overboard. In 1893 Thacher keepers Albert Whitten and E.C. Hadley's heroism was similarly recognized after they risked their lives to save the four-man crew of the schooner *Lottie B*<sup>1</sup>.

Since the arrival of automation, lighthouses' beacons no longer require daily management. But, although they are not official rescue personnel, keepers are still tasked with aiding mariners.

During the summer of 2022, keepers were called on several times to serve in this capacity. *Continued on page 4*

## Descendant of Former Thacher Island Owner

This summer's visitors to Thacher Island included Nancy Morrow and her husband Bob Morrow. Bob is a descendant of Rev. John White, who owned the island from 1714 to 1727. He purchased it to graze livestock for £100 and sold it for £175. Nancy asked me, "Why would anyone use this island for their cows?" They were both impressed and appreciative of all the association's work to preserve this small refuge of history.

## Endangered Whales Feed Near the Islands

Living on Cape Ann we are very lucky to observe unique wildlife whether exploring upland vernal pools or voyaging offshore in the Gulf of Maine. This year Cape Ann residents were very fortunate to see one of the world's most treasured marine mammals feeding near Thacher Island. The North Atlantic right whales (NARW) (*Eubalaena glacialis*), an endangered marine mammal, are baleen whales that feed on copepods (tiny crustaceans) by straining seawater through their baleen plates, which act like a sieve.

## What do they look like?

The NARW body shape is stocky and black in comparison to other whales commonly seen in the Gulf of Maine. When searching the horizon for whale blow spouts, the NARW spout pattern is "V" shaped, in contrast to other whale blow spout patterns. Their tails are broad, deeply notched, and all black with a smooth trailing edge. Their flippers are paddle-shaped. Calves are about 14 feet at birth and adults can grow to lengths of 52 feet. *Continued on page 5*





Jeannette & Larry Haynes

## THACHER ISLAND VOLUNTEER WORK CREW

### WORK CREW PROFILE

#### Jeannette & Larry Haynes

“Welcome to Thacher Island!” For 17 years, these have been the first words heard by visitors arriving on Thacher Island when Jeannette and Larry Haynes are keepers.

In 2005 Jeannette applied with her father, former Rockport resident Bob Joseph, to be island keepers. Together they interviewed with longtime keeper Dottie Carroll, Town Committee Chairman Syd Wedmore, and Thacher Island Association President Paul St. Germain and were approved for duty! Husband Larry joined Jeannette nine years ago and Bob retired in 2016. Jeannette has served continually for 17 years.

Jeannette and Larry have been a couple since they met while both were working for Duke Power Company. Jeannette was an engineer working in the corporate office in Charlotte, NC, and Larry was working not far away in the radiation protection group at the McGuire Nuclear Station in Huntersville, NC. Larry likes to tell the story that when he first saw “hippy-ish” Jeannette, he thought, “I want to get to know that girl.”

When asked to share her favorite thing about being a Thacher Island keeper, Jeannette cheerfully replies, “When I wake up in the morning, I have no idea what is going to happen that day.” During their keeper tenure Larry and Jeannette constantly monitor the island for repair and maintenance tasks. For the safety and comfort of Thacher Island visitors, awareness of poison ivy on trails is important. Larry regularly drives the tractor along the island trails with Jeannette riding shotgun in the trailer behind to search for this noxious plant.

Jeannette and Larry also provide a valuable service as mentors to novice keepers, generously imparting their years of accumulated knowledge about the islands and the daily requirements to live and serve there. Jeannette is the go-to person for a variety of island information such as tool location, plant identification, composting toilet operation, and chicken care. For emergencies, Jeannette is on a first name basis with the Rockport Harbormaster. Larry is a natural teacher, whether he is dealing with water systems, island power, or the mechanics of everything from small engine weed whackers to the Kubota commercial tractor.

Jeannette and Larry travel from Gatlinburg, Tennessee each summer for their six week keeper tour, usually spending one of those weeks on Straitsmouth Island. Jeannette clearly loves not just the work, but everything about the islands. One day, while watching a group of female eiders corral their communal raft of chicks, she enthusiastically exclaimed, “Girls rock!” She and Larry harvest mussels and lobsters, which they readily share with the other keepers. After a day’s labor, Jeannette takes out her songbook and ukulele, and shares her music.

Watch out. When Jeannette says she is “fixin’ ” to do something, you can bet it will get done and be done well.

*George Langer*

### Islands’ Keepers Contribute to Avian Flu Research

Throughout the 2022 summer Thacher Island Association volunteers observed an unusual number of sick and dead shorebirds on both Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands. As a result, TIA representatives contacted researchers at the Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Dept. of Infectious Disease and Global Health. After sharing the volunteer keepers’ observations, we learned that shorebirds throughout the Gulf of Maine region were heavily impacted by avian influenza.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) viruses have been spreading around the world since 2020. Once thought to be associated with high-density poultry production farms, the viruses can infect wild migratory shorebirds. One type, H5N1, which is responsible for the 2022 summer’s deadly impact on shorebirds, has raised concerns among wildlife experts. The virus has caused mass mortality events in wild birds, and poses a threat to endangered populations.

Throughout the 2022 summer TIA keepers carefully tracked and recorded sick and dead birds on both islands. Thanks to the technical support and supplies provided by Dr. Wendy Puryear and her team of Tufts University researchers, the TIA volunteers carefully collected samples from dead birds using protective equipment. Once sampled, the dead birds were buried on the islands to reduce the transmission of the virus to healthy birds. *Continued on page 5*



Love those boots! Jeannette and Larry Haynes take a moment on the Thacher Island boat ramp.



Larry Haynes on one of the smaller tractors on Thacher Island; just imagine Jeannette in the trailer. “Team Haynes” tackling the poison ivy on the trails.



Healthy Herring gull

## Keeping the lights on!

As we wrap up 2022, let me first thank all of you, as members, who continue to be so supportive of the Thacher Island Association efforts on Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands. This year we approached a record number of members, almost 1,000! You are truly the backbone of the Thacher Island Association and your continued support over the last 42 years is most appreciated.

Then there are the volunteers. We are so fortunate that year in and year out we can count on the over 5,000 hours of volunteer labor which allows us to continue our mission on the islands. Our boat crews, docents, keepers, carpenters, painters, masons, trail workers, etc. do a great job, both in helping the association run and in preserving the historic properties that we are honored and privileged to oversee.

Finally, we are most grateful to the Town of Rockport and especially its Community Preservation Committee for their financial support on so many of our major projects on both islands.

In this issue we share the progress that was made on a number of important projects on both islands this summer. We are also very pleased to announce the results so far of our two-year capital campaign to raise \$400,000 for the critical work needed on the South Tower: we are now at \$317,000, which is 79% of our goal. We will, of course, continue to raise funds, hoping to surpass our goal as we expect the cost of the job to exceed the initial estimates due to the current and projected level of inflation. As a reminder, work on this project will begin in 2024 as we are coordinating this job with the similar work needed on the North Tower, owned by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Without reservation, I can truly declare 2022 a great year! Thanks again to all of you.

Warm Regards,

*Bill Whiting*

*President Thacher Island Association*



### PICTURE THIS 2023 CALENDAR PHOTO CONTEST

This year the Thacher Island Association conducted an inaugural photo contest for its 2023 calendar. In all, 28 talented photographers submitted 72 photographs of both Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands. Professional photographer Skip Montello kindly donated his services as judge as well as a beautiful cover photograph: Straitsmouth Rising. While all of the submissions were striking, 12 photos were selected and will appear in the 2023 Thacher Island Association calendar.

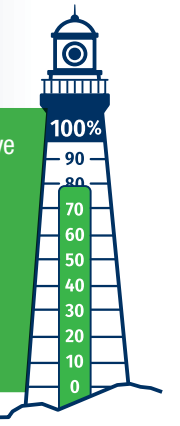
This beautiful calendar will be available on the TIA website for the holiday shopping season at a cost of \$20.

Many thanks to all who shared their talents for this effort!

#### Photos taken by the following photographers will be featured in the calendar:

Julie Bisgaard - Clarksville, TN  
Scott Bisgaard - Clarksville, TN  
Jeff Corliss - North Andover, MA  
Melissa Cox - Gloucester, MA  
Dave Dougherty - Rockport, MA  
Camille Glick - Mt. Holly, NC  
Larry Haynes - Gatlinburg, TN  
Peter Mowschenson - Rockport, MA  
Joel Swan - Gloucester, MA

The vast majority of our members have already donated to this fundraising campaign, but if you haven’t had a chance to do so yet, please consider sending in a donation in the enclosed envelope or donate online at [www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org)



Marketing material distributed by email to 1,435 individuals, displayed in over 60 Cape Ann shop windows, and 32 Inns-Motels-Hotels-B&Bs across Cape Ann. Source: Sunset Cruise marketing materials, all logos used with permission of their owners.

## Sunset Lighthouse Cruise 2022 was a Grand Success

This summer a Thacher Island Association fundraiser, the Sunset Lighthouse Cruise 2022, brought in \$28,000 toward the restoration of the South Tower on Thacher Island. Bill Whiting, President of the Thacher Island Association said, “I believe that this was the most successful fundraising event in the 42-year history of the TIA and it was due in large part to George (Langer)’s leadership.” Additionally, 19 TIA volunteers supported the cruise with 190 hours selling corporate sponsorships, supporting our reservation phone, processing tickets, narrating the Cruise, and selling merchandise on board the ship.

It was a sold-out crowd for all four cruise dates. Over 500 passengers enthusiastically enjoyed warm summer air and sometimes choppy seas to view the six lighthouses around Cape Ann. Many passengers were groups of neighbors, or families, or friends, bringing picnic dinners and beverages, relaxing together for three hours of cruising on the 7 Seas Whale Watch *Privateer IV*.

The Thacher Island Association also recognizes and is grateful for the generosity of our 13 Corporate Sponsors. Every sponsorship dollar received will support the repairs required to ensure the iconic Twin Towers will be preserved for future generations. Please show your support by patronizing these businesses.

We look forward to more adventures next year; go to our website, [www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org) which will list details as they become available.

And of course, Thacher Island Association is so grateful for your support.



ISLAND DOCENTS

Continued from Page 1

The overarching goal of our docents is to ensure that everyone has a safe and enjoyable visit to the islands. If you feel intimidated by screeching seagulls, they will advise you to walk softly and carry a big stick - literally: they have a supply of big sticks. They will also recommend activities suited to varying levels of physical exertion and instruct you on how to stay safe while wandering around the island or climbing up to the lantern room at the very top of the lighthouse.

Visitors come to the islands with diverse interests: avid lighthouse aficionados, bird and wildlife lovers, maritime history buffs, and outdoor adventure enthusiasts. Our



Karen Wise (right) greeting Thatcher Island visitors

docents match visitor interests with the many attractions of the islands. Karen says, "I've never seen an adult who wasn't moved by their island experience." It might be the thrill of the boat ride, the power of the sea, the historical importance of lighthouses, immersion in a bird sanctuary, or the breathtaking vistas and natural beauty.

Our docents also perform many behind-the-scenes tasks. They clean and open the Keeper Houses at the beginning of the season and

help to winterize them in the fall. Throughout the season, they ensure the islands are stocked with cleaning supplies, paper products, merchandise for sale, and other items needed by the keepers.

Assisted by Diane Cartwright and Karen, Joanne recruits, selects, and mentors new docents. The docents will continue their training this winter with an in-depth seminar series on the islands' history hosted by Syd Wedmore.

When I asked Joanne what she likes the most about being a docent, without hesitation, she said it was all about meeting with the many interesting people who visit the islands. "I want them to love the islands as much as I do."

Norm Delisle

Keepers Assist Mariners in Distress

Continued from Page 1

A Family of Capsized Kayakers is Pulled from Turbulent Waters:

Because a Small Craft Advisory was in effect, Thatcher keepers Jeannette and Larry Haynes, Karen Wise, and George Langer were surprised by what they observed from the boat ramp one day: four people aboard a sit-on-top-kayak were making steady progress toward the island.

As the craft approached, heavy waves breaking across the end of the ramp capsized the kayak, dumping two adults and two children into the choppy waters.

George, wearing crampons to keep from falling on the slippery ramp, waded into the surf, grabbed a child, handed him to the other keepers, then returned to retrieve the second child from his parent's arms. Despite cuts and abrasions, the adults made it to the ramp unaided with their kayak and one paddle. The Harbormaster was called to return the family safely to the mainland.

A Knock on the Door:

For safety reasons, visitors are not allowed on the islands after dark, so Straitsmouth keepers Meredith Glaser and Chris Lovgren were surprised when a young couple knocked on the Keeper House door one evening. The couple had pulled their boat high up onto the rocks, then

discovered that the receding tide had landlocked it while they enjoyed a swim. Chris called the Harbormaster, who suggested the couple wait until the tide came back in, but the next high tide would not arrive until 6am. Instead, Chris and Meredith lent the couple their own life jackets and kayaks, and the stranded mariners paddled to the mainland with an assist from the Harbormaster boat's floodlights.

The following morning both keepers arose before dawn to greet the couple when they paddled back to the island to retrieve their boat. But the boat was gone! After a search of the horizon with binoculars, the boat was located floating in the distance and once again the keepers lent their equipment to the couple, who



successfully retrieved their getaway property, gratefully returned kayaks and gear to Chris and Meredith, and finally headed home.

Keepers Assist a Fisherman Whose Boat Grounds on the Straitsmouth Island Rocks:

On a windy day with rough seas, Nate Ives and Randy Saville were surprised to meet a visitor on a trail to the Keeper House. While fishing on the southeastern side of the island, the man's outboard motor had become fouled by his anchor line and he and his boat had been left stranded on the rocks by the outgoing tide. He had already called the Rockport Harbormaster for assistance, so Nate and Randy helped the stranded mariner safely down the rocks on the calmer Sandy Bay side of the island, where the Harbormaster picked him up.

Although some equipment was damaged or lost, none of the three incidents resulted in serious injuries, thanks to the assistance of the islands' volunteer keepers.

<sup>1</sup> If you'd like to learn more about the early keepers, we recommend Paul St. Germain's *Saving Straitsmouth Island* and *Twin Lights of Thatcher Island, Cape Ann*, which are both available at [www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org).

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Endangered Whales Feed Near the Islands

NARW heads are covered with white patches of rough skin. The white patches covering their black skin are actually whale lice and are called callosities. Each NARW has a unique pattern of callosities that observers use to identify individual whales, enabling researchers to track the size and health of the population. Since 1986 North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium (<http://rwcatalog.neaq.org/#/>) has tracked and monitored NARW.

What is their behavior?

NARW migrate seasonally, traveling alone or in small groups. In the spring, summer, and into fall, many NARW can be found in the Gulf of Maine and further north into Canadian territorial waters, where they feed and mate. Each fall, some NARW travel more than 1,000 miles from these feeding grounds to the coastal waters of their calving grounds off the southeast US coast. These were the "traditional" migration patterns until recently, when the NARW shifted their migration patterns, likely in response to changes in food availability due to warming oceans. As their food (prey) move, the NARW are spending more time in areas with fewer protections from threats (e.g. vessel strikes and gear entanglements). Recent studies have shown that the rapid warming in the Gulf of Maine during the 20th century has reversed 900 years of cooling, thus affecting the location of NARW food (prey).

What are the challenges and conservation efforts?

NARW are approaching extinction. As far back as the 1600s the NARW were heavily-targeted by European whalers until 1935 when the League of Nations banned hunting right whales species in all oceans. Today the NARW remains vulnerable to human activities which include vessel strikes and gear entanglement. For the 10th straight year, the population has declined and it is currently estimated that only 336 remain. In addition to human impacts, the species' recovery is affected by low reproduction rates, habitat loss, disease, and environmental contaminants.

Margaret (Peg) Brady



Actions being undertaken to reduce ship strikes include:

- Require vessels to slow down in specific areas during times when NARW are present.
- Implement alternative shipping routes and areas to be avoided.

Actions being undertaken to reduce gear entanglement include:

- Implement closures to fixed gear fisheries in areas where NARW are present.
- Require fewer vertical buoy lines in fisheries in areas where NARW are present.
- Develop "ropeless" fishing gear to reduce the need for vertical buoy lines that are the cause of entanglements.

Islands' Keepers Contribute to Avian Flu Research

Continued from Page 2

The Tufts University researchers are examining the presence of the virus among different bird species and which types of birds are involved in spreading the virus within the Gulf of Maine and throughout North America. This strain of virus, originally detected in China in 1996 and since mutated, has been tracked for its presence globally.

The mutated virus was first detected in the US in 2014 in the Pacific Northwest, and was assumed to be introduced via duck species. Researchers are taking a closer look at the bird species to determine which may be spreading the virus more effectively. The recent outbreak via the Atlantic Ocean among wild bird populations may be attributed to a larger extent

to Greater Black-backed gulls and to a lesser extent to duck species.

The size and scale of the recent outbreak, which has affected approximately 40 species of birds, has never been seen before in North America. The virus has affected some song birds, raptors and hawks. There is a risk of the virus spilling over to mammals such as dogs, foxes, or coyotes that feed on infected birds. HPAI is a "zoonotic disease" that has the potential to spread between animals, people and their pets.

In July 2022 NOAA Fisheries declared an "Unusual Mortality Event" (i.e. significant die-off of a marine mammal population) for harbor and gray seal found stranded and dead in Maine. The US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's National Veterinary Services Laboratories confirmed that samples from four stranded seals in Maine tested positive for HPAI (i.e. H5N1).



What to look for?

Infected animals exhibit symptoms including lethargy, coughing, discharge from the eyes and nose, seizures, and death. According to the CDC, the health risk posed to the general public is low. However, precautions are recommended for people and their pets. The public is advised not to touch sick or dead animals; to keep pets away; and to notify local animal control officials of any sightings.

Margaret (Peg) Brady





## Straitsmouth Island Accomplishments: Summer 2022

During the summer of 2022, the hard-working Straitsmouth Island keepers and Wednesday work crew made significant progress on several important projects.

Notably, the framing and all 32 granite support columns for the 200-foot elevated walkway between the Keeper House and the lighthouse were installed. In addition, all but the last few feet of the walkway decking was laid down. Weather permitting, the new walkway will be opened to the public early in 2023. This has been a three-year project and it will be great to finish this up. Many thanks to the Rockport Community Preservation Committee and Cape Ann Saving Bank for providing funds for this important project.



The original walkway was built in the mid 1800s to facilitate the keepers' ability to enter the lighthouse door, which is ten feet above the rocky ledge. Despite being rebuilt several times over the years, by 1910 it had fallen into complete disrepair.



The new walkway was built on the 32 original granite posts, some of which needed repairs or height adjustments.



Nate Ives, Ray Moss, Bill Helmuth, Ed Hand, Joseph Napolitano, and Bill Whiting secure a section of the walkway.



Members of the granite crew prepare a post for installation. Randy Saville, Ray Moss, and Peter Chick.



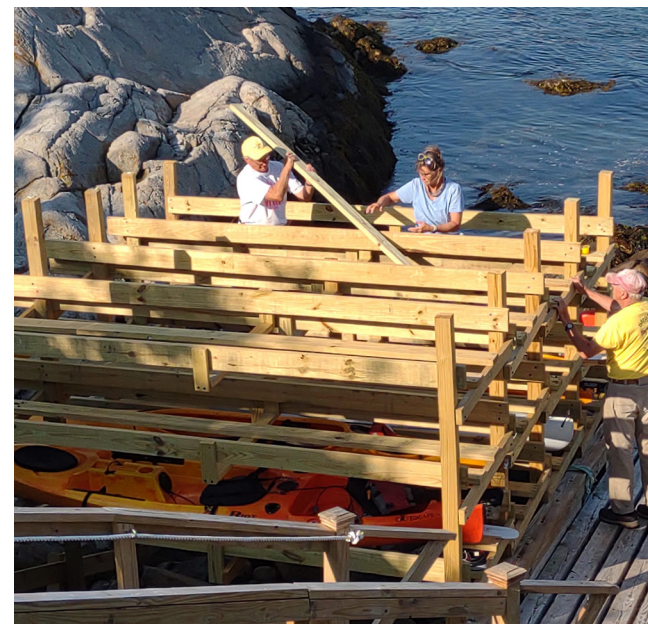
Bruce Perkins, Ed Hand, Bill Helmuth, John Doue, and Paul Sena confer.



The walkway in various stages of construction.



After three years of work, the new walkway will make the lighthouse more easily accessible to visitors.



Bill Sciafani, Meredith Glaser, and Peter Bergholtz in the latter stages of kayak rack construction.

Straitsmouth Island is a popular destination for kayakers and paddleboarders. Unlike Thatcher Island, until this year there was no dedicated space for visitors to store their equipment while touring the island, which resulted in a crowding and safety issue on the boat ramp.

This summer a new rack was constructed which allows for storage of up to 12 kayaks and/or paddleboards above the high tide line and off the ramp, leaving the ramp clear for the launch boats and emergency access if needed.

**Finally, as always, trails were maintained, new signage erected, and maintenance performed on all the existing structures.**



Why we needed the kayak rack!



Mass Audubon employee Susan Hargity wielding a weed whacker.



Peter Chick grooms trails with the DR Mower.



# Thacher Island Accomplishments Summer: 2022

2022 was a busy summer on Thacher Island. Work was done by keepers, work crew volunteers, and contractors.

## More Sunshine, Please

For volunteers who spend the night on Thacher Island, it is not unusual to wake up early and discover that the lights don't work. Before making the morning coffee, you have to get dressed and take the long walk across the island to the utility building near the Boat House to start the backup diesel generator, restoring electrical power. When there are clouds or high energy usage days, our solar batteries run out of steam, so to speak, before our solar system can start producing new power. And every time we use the diesel generator, our costs and carbon footprint increase.

Our existing solar panels sit in a hollow shaded from the early morning sun. Most mornings, energy production is delayed until about 9 or 10 AM. Our solution is to construct a new solar array on a knoll

behind the Keeper Houses that receives direct sun exposure from dawn to dusk. Easier said than done - you might be thinking if you ever tried to erect a large windproof structure atop a granite ledge.

The current solar array consists of 18 panels with the potential to produce about 3.1 kilowatts of power on a sunny day. The new array will consist of 16 panels with almost three times that output power capability. We cheat a bit to achieve this higher power level; the new panels are bifacial, meaning their backside can absorb sunlight reflected off the ground.

This summer, work started to determine the best placement of the new array, make precise site measurements, clear and excavate the site, drill holes in the granite for rebar (i.e., steel rods that will anchor and strengthen the



concrete), and pour the cement foundation bases. Next summer, the team will complete the pier foundations, assemble the support frame, and install the panels.

With wind speeds reaching 100 mph or more, the support structure must be super sturdy. Pause a second to think of the knowledge, skills, and hard work our volunteers bring to plan, design, and implement this ambitious project.

*Norm Delisle*



Syd Wedmore, Paul Sena, Peter Chick, and Ray Moss inspecting the new solar panel site



The shadow of the South Tower blocking the existing solar array



For the comfort of visitors, covered picnic tables were installed on stone pads near the Boat House. Volunteers who participated in this project were Sue McGrath, Fred McGrath, Tom Mikus, Dave Anderson, and Norm Delisle (none pictured).



Keeper Heidi Delisle refinishes one of the shaded picnic tables behind the Principal Keeper House.



George Grimes proudly displays a spliced winch rope used to pull boats onto the ramp. George had just finished fascinating a group of work crew volunteers with his skills.



One benefit of being a keeper is that occasional fresh-from-the-sea lobster. Here Grace Teborek and Gail Zeman spruce up the buoys for our traps.



Heavy winter storms took their toll on aging shingle roofs on the Thacher Island dwellings. Donna Cusick assists contractor Fred Stoddard repairing the roof of the Assistant Keeper House.



The northeast corner of the Boat House takes very heavy weather and requires annual maintenance. George Langer, Dave Anderson, and Tom Mikus make roofing repairs.



Landing about 25 boats a week means the boat ramp requires constant care and attention. Keepers Rich Lorigan and Julie Bisgaard cut replacement planks.



Our volunteer docent crew greets visitors and orients them to Thacher Island. Diane Cartwright (right) speaks to some newly arrived visitors.



Fred McGrath completes a repair on a ceiling in the Principal Keeper House with the North Tower in the background.



The Whistle House needed masonry repointing on a side wall and the chimney. Donna Cusick is again on the roof while Tom Mikus and Fred McGrath work from ground level.

Arch Painting, Inc was contracted to paint both Keeper Houses and the South Tower entryway. Here are before, in-progress, and after photos of the Keeper Houses. Arch Painters are Dina, Eddy and Michael.



Before



During



After



# Drought Stress Tests Islands' Water Supplies

This past summer Cape Ann experienced its second extreme drought in six years, as determined by the National Drought Mitigation Center, which maintains the US Drought Monitor website.

Both Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands rely on rainwater stored in cisterns for fresh water. Thacher has a stand-alone cistern with its own roof and collection system with a capacity of about 25,000 gallons. Straitsmouth's cistern receives rainwater from about half of the Keeper House roof and its dual tanks store about 6,000 gallons.

Thacher's cistern, which dates to the days of full-time keepers, is a conical concrete tank, broadest at the top, designed to deliver water by gravity to the Keeper Houses. In the summer of 2014, the underground gravity supply line ruptured, and the water level dropped almost out of sight.

When duty called, Dr. Syd Wedmore donned snorkel equipment and managed to plug the drain leading to the ruptured pipe in preparation for a new above-ground water line, earning from keepers John and Darlene Fulton the nickname "Doc Cousteau." Water is now pumped from the cistern to the existing storage tanks in the Assistant Keeper House. In 2015, with the cistern roof and its elaborate wrought-iron support structure showing severe signs of aging, both were rebuilt by Thacher Island Association volunteers. Two brick-lined wells, dug to serve Thacher keepers during the 2014 emergency, are currently retired and covered, saved as "plan B."

Dr. Wedmore has also spent time at the bottom of Straitsmouth's cistern,



2022 Drought on Straitsmouth Island

which he and other volunteers laboriously mucked out as part of the 2018 renovation work on the Keeper House. The tanks, which have been fitted with a custom liner, now supply, through TripleClear filters, potable water to the Keeper House, although some keepers still prefer to drink the Rockport town water delivered via launch in gallon bottles to both islands. Grey water from the Keeper House is collected and filtered through a tank filled with sand and gravel and used to water the gardens. Water from the half of the roof that does not deliver to the cistern storage is captured in rain barrels and finds a variety of uses.

So how did the islands' fresh water supply infrastructure fare under this summer's stress? Joseph Napolitano, who did the last keeper duty of the summer on Thacher, reported that the cistern water level had receded only about 2-1/2 feet. James Kennedy, in the same role on Straitsmouth, reported that one of the dual tanks had been emptied, but five feet of water remained in the other, leaving about 20% of capacity.

This encouraging result is, at least in part, a tribute to the keeper tradition of water conservation. The second week of September brought an intense rainfall of 3-5" to most of Massachusetts, and both cistern levels have now increased. More frequent droughts, punctuated by excessive rainfall events, is just what climate modeling predicts climate change has in store for New England!

Harry Newell



Our visitor boats, *Thacher Island I & II*, landing craft used to transport 6 visitors per boat. Visible on each boat are members of the 2022 boat crew.

## Visitor Boats to Islands Continue to be Popular

Adverse climate conditions gave rise to a difficult summer for visitor boat operations in 2022. Poor weather, or high seas, or both, resulted in 21% of planned trips being cancelled. Although the Thacher Island Association was sorry that so many potential visitors had to be disappointed, we always consider passenger safety to be the highest priority.

Thanks to more favorable conditions on other days, however, our visitor boats were able to

deliver 627 smiling passengers to Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands, and we received lots of compliments on our volunteers' efforts to maintain both National Historic Sites.

Every year, the TIA schedules 155-160 visitor boat trips to the islands during the summer season. And the demand for those rides continues to be high, as more than 85% of available seats were filled in 2022.

Due to increased operating costs, 2022 ticket prices increased to \$35 for non-

member adults. Many potential visitors chose to become members, thus benefiting from the free ticket member benefit (the number of free tickets varies with membership level).

We also offer special thanks to volunteer Camille Glick, the helpful person who answers the visitor boat reservation phone.

And, as always, the TIA is grateful for our members' support.

# Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands Merchandise Perfect for Holiday Gift Giving!



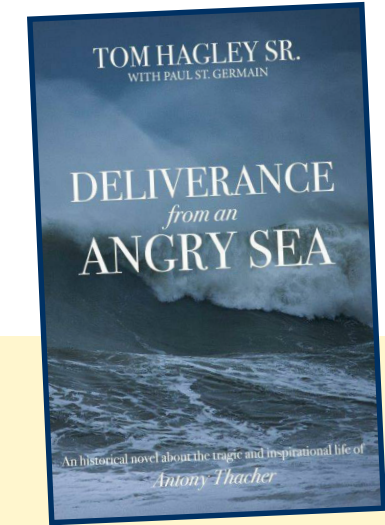
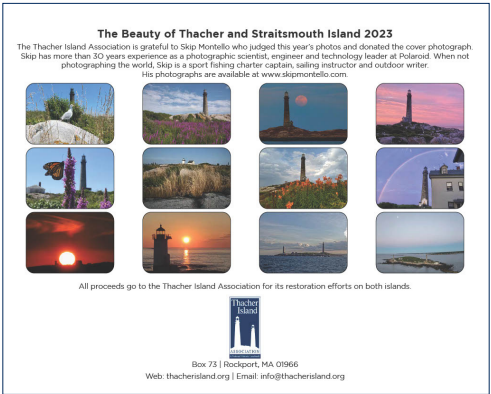
NEW Mesh Back Hats in Royal Blue, Charcoal, or Rockport Red. These are unstructured, vintage washed cotton twill and soft khaki mesh with an embroidered Thacher Island Twin Lights logo and are adjustable. \$24.00.



Thacher Island and Straitsmouth Island Pewter Ornaments. Each ornament measures 2 3/4" by 2 1/2", comes with a red ribbon, and is highly detailed on both sides. Packaged in a gift box. Made by Hampshire Pewter. \$20.00 each.



NEW 2023 Thacher Island Association Calendar is now available. The Beauty of Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands 2023 features spectacular photography by winners of our inaugural Calendar Photo Contest. \$20.00



## New Book About Antony Thacher's Life

I am pleased to announce the publication of a new book, *Deliverance from an Angry Sea*, about the life of Antony Thacher. I was honored to work with the author as chief collaborator in writing, researching, and editing this first complete history of the remarkable Antony Thacher.

The author, Tom Hagley, and I will donate \$5 to the Thacher Island Association for each book sold.

If you would like to purchase your own copy, go online to Amazon.com and search for Deliverance from an Angry Sea. Available on December 1 just in time for holiday giving.

Paul St. Germain





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## YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION DATE IS ABOVE THE ADDRESS LABEL.

### IS IT TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

We depend on Membership Dues and Donations to help fund our vital mission of preserving and promoting public access to Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands. Please check the address label on this newsletter to see if your membership is due to be renewed. Renewing is easy! Simply return the attached reply envelope with your check or credit card information. Or if you prefer, renew online at [www.thacherisland.org/join-us](http://www.thacherisland.org/join-us). If you'd prefer not to worry about annual renewals ever again, perhaps consider becoming a Life Member.

Thank you for your support.



### A THACHER ISLAND ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP MAKES A GREAT GIFT!

Thacher Island Association memberships make a great gift! A thoughtful gift for friends and relatives, membership comes with two issues of this newsletter each year, a car/boat sticker, free rides to Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands, and the knowledge that you are helping to preserve two unique National Historic Sites. To order, go online at [www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org) and provide the lucky recipient's info in the "Order Notes" box.



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