



# Thacher & Straitsmouth Island News

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This Jason Kennedy photograph took top honors at the Essex Heritage Photography contest. Used with permission.

## Thacher Island Lights Take 5,000-Mile Trip to Key West, Florida

The story of the Boosters Car is one of the most entertaining methods used to market Gloucester summer hotels, c1920s. It was a joint venture with the Gloucester Chamber of Commerce and three East Gloucester hotel managers, including A. Simpson Lyle of Hotel Delphine, William Publicover of the Rockaway, and George Crosby of Merrill Hall. The goal was to promote the “lush rocking chair era of the summer hotel business” which had begun to sag. It was an idea thought up as a lark, and to everyone’s surprise, it was only 6-8 weeks before it was executed.

The Chamber of Commerce authorized \$500 (\$~8,000 today) with a guarantee to underwrite further expense up to \$1,000 (or, \$16,000 today). They traveled from Gloucester to Key West, Florida leaving Gloucester on January 28 and returning on March 21, 1925, covering over 5,000 miles in 50 days and passing through 11 states and 45 cities. They used Publicover’s REO Sedan, overhauled for the trip, making dozens of stops and distributing thousands of pieces of literature.



Photos courtesy of Cape Ann Museum and Susan Morreale

On top of the car was a realistic reproduction of Thatcher Island and its twin lighthouses—with the lights twinkling at night with a 20-candle power lamp in each tower! Thacher Island was apparently a popular tourist attraction even in 1925. (Note the misspelling on the car.) The REO was painted with slogans in silver on a red background, “Gloucester’s 40 hotels, 26 beaches, drives of surpassing beauty, ideal climate, golf, boating, bathing, fishing. Largest fishing port in the world, summer home of American Art.” Rockport was included with “Rockport home of Sea-Green Granite.”

Their send-off included a parade of Gloucester’s high school band, an escort of



two motorcycle police, and 50 motor cars with a trumpeter in the lead car. Film companies such as Pathé News took footage of the departure to show in movie houses of that era. In Boston, the front of the State House was cleared for the motorcade—and the governor and entire congressional delegation came out to greet them. In NY, the mayor came out; while in Washington, they had an audience with President Coolidge, arranged by Congressman A. Piatt Andrew, for whom the Annisquam bridge is named. Upon their return to Gloucester, they were greeted by another parade and much fanfare.

—Susan Morreale and Paul St.Germain

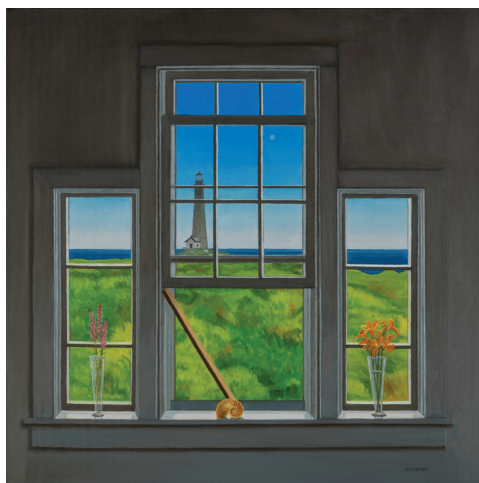
## An Artist’s View of Thacher Island

Rockport has attracted artists for generations to capture the many elements it offers. While the light and the ocean undergo continual changes, the townscape and its many old weathered buildings seem to never change.

For David Arsenault, a local artist of renown, the lighthouses on Thacher Island are what sold him on moving here in 2013. Given his lifelong love of lighthouses, the island offered not one but two. He describes them as a couple, each standing resolute and unmoving, yet working together to protect mariners from the fate of the Thacher family in 1635.

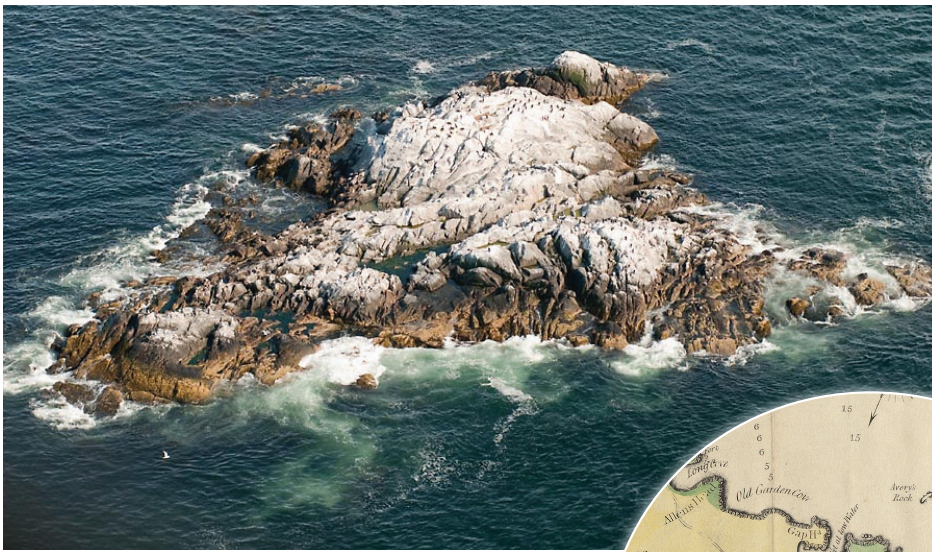
Thacher Island, in David’s eyes, is like a compact version of Rockport. It has the granite rocks, the waves, the many footpaths, and the shoreline. He has completed four paintings where Thacher Island is the dominant theme. More often, he has captured it as a background element: a feature in a seaside neighborhood that connects him to its presence and he hopes he conveys that in his paintings.

David usually travels to the island once a year. As a studio artist, he photographs and captures perspectives that “speak” to him in a direct yet compelling way that (*cont. page 5*)



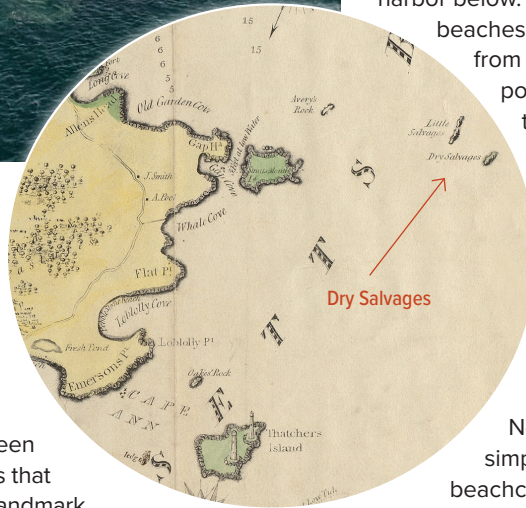
*The Keeper's View*, a painting by David Arsenault





## The Dry Salvages: Marine Hazard or Literary Prominence?

The Dry Salvages, subject of T.S. Eliot's poem by the same name, are a group of rocks protruding above the surface of the ocean located off the coast of Cape Ann. Referred to as "Dry", this rocky eminence can always be seen above the waves as opposed to the nearby Little Salvages that are often below the waterline. The Salvages are the final landmark seen before entering the open sea and the first upon safe return. However, in conditions with stormy weather or fog, they can become an area of unseen shallows upon which boats have run aground over the years. These rocky ledges, along with nearby Straitsmouth and



Thacher Islands, are considered marine hazards for boats approaching Rockport and Gloucester Harbors. It was the tragic loss of Anthony Thacher's family in 1635, their vessel foundering on the rocks and broken apart by the waves, that gave the name to the larger island, upon which our historic lighthouses mark the land.

To escape the heat of St. Louis, the Eliot family summered on Cape Ann from 1890-1919, first at the Hawthorne Inn and later at a "cottage" they built in Gloucester. The view from their large wraparound porch afforded a glimpse of the harbor below. Photos of a young Tom walking the beaches, climbing the rocks, and smiling from various seaside idylls support the poet's declaration that here he was the happiest. As a young man his adventures included sailing his own boat, the Elsa, in which he learned to circumnavigate the Dry Salvages, marked by a beacon in those days.

Deeply etched in his memory, Eliot's boyhood experiences are evident in the verses penned for "The Dry Salvages" late in his Noble Prize winning career. The simple joys of tidepool exploration and beachcombing along sandy beaches are artfully juxtaposed against the treachery of the rocks and the waves of this volatile world bringing deeper meaning to his written word about the "ragged rock in the restless waters".

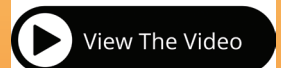
—Denise Farnsworth



Eric Freeman films Beckett Burchard, Jaelyn Conrad, Lilliana Cunha, and Benji Koeplin near the North Tower Cape Ann Light Station.

## Of Sea, Stone, and Students

Thacher Island's granite shares the spotlight with Italy's iconic Carrara marble in a music video filmed this past spring. A grant from the Educational Foundation for Rockport funded a composition by Steve Snowden tailored to the band, chorus, and orchestra ensembles of Rockport High School, as well as the filming of music students on Cape Ann and during their performance tour of Italy in April. More than 70 musicians perform "Of Sea and Stone," a four-minute video that links the Cape Ann quarries and the marble quarries of Italy while contrasting the fleeting nature of human life with the enduring nature of the earth. Scan the QRCode to view this video.





## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Thacher Island Association is dedicated to preserving Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands and to facilitating visits to these two exceptional historic sites. This summer we made significant progress on the preservation part of our mission, but sadly two factors, each beyond our control, significantly interfered with our ability to bring people to the islands.

On the plus side, the TIA work crew was able to complete several major multi-year projects on Straitsmouth, and made great headway on many other important undertakings on both islands. For more on this, see the Summer 2023 Accomplishments article elsewhere in this issue.

On the minus side, all of us at TIA offer our sincere apologies to the many who were inconvenienced by having their trips to Thacher or Straitsmouth Islands cancelled. We take visitor access to the islands very seriously. Our dedicated core of boat crews, docents, and keepers work tirelessly each summer to enable as many tourists as possible to travel safely to and from the islands.

But this summer, mechanical issues took both of our launches out of service at different times, so for several weeks only one launch was available for a schedule designed for two. (For more about our launches, see *Launch Fleet Upgrades*, page 9.) In addition, an unusual number of storms caused hazardous maritime conditions (high seas and winds) forcing us to cancel trips.

Once both launches were back in the water in mid-August, we scheduled additional trips. Nevertheless, we are truly sorry that these issues happened and that so many of you were disappointed.

As TIA President, two of my most important responsibilities are ensuring that we raise enough funds to accomplish our mission, then making certain that our members and donors understand how very grateful we are.

I will sign off by first reminding you that all of our preservation efforts cost money, and although we do our best each year to balance our budget, we inevitably encounter unexpected expenses. (For example, the two new engines for our Thacher II launch cost almost \$50,000!) So as we approach the end of the year, please consider making a generous gift and/or renewing your TIA membership.

Secondly, I extend my sincere thanks to all of you -- the TIA volunteers, members, and donors, as well as Rockport Community Preservation Committee and the citizens of Rockport, Essex Heritage, and the corporate sponsors of this year's Lighthouse Cruises.

Warm Regards,

Bill Whiting

## First Endowment Fund Looks to the Future

During its 45-year history the Thacher Island Association has raised more than \$3.5 million, which has been used to finance the historic preservation and operation of Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands. Those funds have come from a variety of sources: merchandise sales, fundraising events such as the Lighthouse Cruises, donations, memberships, and grants.

Thus far, we have been fortunate to meet our annual spending requirements with either general operating income or special purpose campaigns (such as the current Save Our Lights Capital Campaign to raise funds to restore the Thacher South Tower).

Despite this successful work it has become apparent that we could do more to ensure the long-term financial stability and viability of the TIA. Thanks to a very generous donation from the estate of Russ Sandfield, DDS, we have just established the Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands Endowment Fund. The Fund, which is being managed by a professional investment advisor, will be used to sustain the TIA and its mission in perpetuity. As is common with endowment funds, our goal is to grow the principal and we will annually vote an amount to be withdrawn according to our established policy.

In the words of Randy Saville, TIA Vice President and Chair of the Finance Committee, "The new endowment fund will enhance this organization's long-term financial stability. The endowment fund is a wonderful way for supporters' donations and bequests to benefit TIA for the longer term."

Members and others are invited to donate to this fund by sending gifts to PO Box 73, Rockport, MA 01966. Please indicate that the donation is to be earmarked for the Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands Endowment Fund. Alternatively, you can easily donate online at [www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org) and enter "Endowment Fund" in the Order Notes section of the Checkout page. If you have any questions, please email us at [info@thacherisland.org](mailto:info@thacherisland.org).

And, as always, thank you for your continuing support!

—Bill Whiting



A plaque honoring longtime TIA supporter Russ Sandfield is mounted at the entrance to the Thacher South Tower.

## Searching for Volunteers

Looking for a rewarding volunteer opportunity?  
Join our marketing & communications team!

If you have experience in marketing and communications, TIA would welcome your assistance in communicating with our 1,000+ member base and enhancing our efforts to raise funds to support the TIA mission through the TIA website, twice-yearly newsletters, and email and direct mail communications. Supported by world class applications such as Salesforce and Constant Contact, you would work collaboratively with our current team, generally online and virtually via Zoom. TIA volunteers self-manage the amount of time spent on their work.

This volunteer work is rated as fun and rewarding. No one is harmed in the process.

To learn more, please contact [info@thacherisland.org](mailto:info@thacherisland.org) or visit [www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org).

# Cape Ann's 2023 Weather Presented Challenges

Local weather conditions presented challenges for the Thacher Island Association in 2023. Volunteer work crew and visitor trips to Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands were adjusted - and sometimes cancelled - to ensure the safety of passengers and crew based on marine weather forecasts. The TIA team examined numerous forecasts that were available in order to plan each day. These forecasts are so critical when decisions must be made regarding whether to cancel visitor trips or adjust plans for the many island projects that are underway.

Weather is controlled by changes in air pressure: the weight of air molecules in the atmosphere. High air pressure causes air to flow downward and fan out as it nears the ground, leading to cloudless blue skies. Low air pressure allows air molecules to flow upward, where they cool and form clouds. It is impossible to say whether any one day of weather is caused by climate change, but patterns of weather appear to be changing, leading scientists to predict more severe weather in the future. Meteorologists examine weather events happening over a broad area to forecast local weather. Knowing where storms are

today can help predict where storms will be tomorrow, but the dynamic nature of the atmosphere means that it is impossible to predict the weather more than two weeks ahead, and often far less than that. The TIA team considers the weather forecasts, the tidal predictions, and

their knowledge of the local coastal waters. Ultimately the decision to adjust the schedule is based on a combination of scientific forecasts, experience, and well-honed intuition.

Decisions involving billions of dollars are made daily based on the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service forecasts and warnings. NWS gathers the data from satellites, Doppler radar, buoys, computer models, and high-speed communication systems. Then the data is combined with observers' information and visual confirmation of weather events from trained community volunteers (storm spotters) to aid in making accurate outlooks, forecasts, and warnings.

Cape Ann residents are fortunate to have a local resident, Chris Spittle, who devotes his time to providing "unofficial" forecasts. Chris is the founder of Cape Ann Weather. Descended from William C. Daggett, a 1st Assistant keeper on Thacher Island in 1921, Chris' fascination with the weather began as a child, when his mother, Shirley (Daggett) Boucher, logged the daily weather conditions on their home calendars.

Chris makes no claim to be an official weather source. The CAW posts and opinions are extrapolated from NWS, NOAA and another, very local, source: the Thacher Island weather station. Believing that "a picture is worth a thousand words," Chris (*cont. page 5*)



## In Memoriam

Ann-Patrice Hickey

March 23, 1953 - August 7, 2023

Ann-Patrice Hickey was a force. Whether it was the power of her mind, the passion of her opinions, or the sheer physicality with which she landed launches, the former Thacher Island keeper and boat and work crew member exuded strength and confidence. She was "forceful and able," remembered Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Town Committee chair Syd Wedmore. "...

a good worker who took readily to island life." "She was a walk the walk and talk the talk kind of woman," said her wife, C. Lynn Chambers, referring to Ann-Patrice's political activism around the issues of social and environmental justice, women's reproductive rights, and transparency in government.

Despite an undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering, a master's degree in Socio-environmental Engineering, a Ph.D. in Psychology/Neuroscience and a career that stretched from an interest in the development of artificial limbs to the creation of software that allowed children with disabilities to participate in math curricula, Ann-Patrice was most well-known to the Thacher community as the videographer, director, writer, editor, animator, and musician for Thacher Island: A Video History of the Twin Lights. It plays in the island's museum and in Cape Ann Museum's exhibit of the South Tower fresnel lens. It is for sale on the Thacher Island Association's website and the island's gift shop, and continues to be one of the most important ambassadors of the island's history and mission to the public.

Ann-Patrice Hickey died of an unexpected cardiac arrest at the age of 70.



Assistant Keepers Ann-Patrice (on right) and Lynn on Thacher Island in 2015.



Martha & Gregg Fox.

Gregg Alan Fox

February 5, 1946 – July 26, 2023

Indiana native Gregg Fox first saw Rockport in a Circle-Vision documentary at Disney World. "I love this place," he whispered to the girlfriend beside him. "I grew up there," his future wife whispered back.

After ten years of working as writer and creative director for advertising agencies in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Tokyo, he and Martha settled permanently in Rockport, where Gregg designed and built a passive-solar home on the site of Martha's grandmother's summer cottage, originally a henhouse with a sweeping view of the Atlantic. For the next five decades, while raising two children and

working for an advertising agency in Boston, Gregg immersed himself in the community of Rockport.

In July 2003, Gregg and Martha were one of a handful of hardy couples who spent one month on Thacher Island during a crucial period of change. They spent their days cutting back growth along the trails and attending to the boat ramp, landing work crew volunteers who were in the process of renovating the dilapidated Principal Keeper House. They spent their nights in the old US Coast Guard house, which Martha remembers as an "abandoned and falling-down structure with beautiful bones but inhabited by messy rodents."

"We loved putting our bodies and minds into the work during that magical month," continued Martha. "We never forgot... feeling like the luckiest people on earth."



# Keeping the lights on!

## The Skies Shone Bright Upon our Lights

The Summer Sunset Lighthouse Cruises of 2023 both set sail under clear blue skies, passed all five lighthouses as the sun descended, and, on the August 1st cruise, saw the Full Sturgeon Moon rise over East Gloucester. Few will forget these voyages on Cape Ann's inshore waters and under such brilliant skies.

Adding stars to the events, the Thacher Island Association is pleased to report that both were fully sold out with 300 patrons and, with the support of 12 corporate sponsors, netted over \$19,000 for the Thacher Island South Tower restoration project. When combined with last year's total, the cruises have now generated over \$47,000 for the Save Our Lights Capital Campaign. Work on that project is expected to begin in 2024.

The cruises were organized and staffed by leader George Langer and his hearty, seafaring volunteer crew. The TIA thanks them and all who made the trips, along with our generous corporate sponsors who made it possible.

—Bill Whiting

### An Artist's View (cont. from page 1)

implies a story to share. He looks for the light and moment in time to inspire the paintings he creates.

One of his favorite memories is a visit with volunteers Peg Brady and David Condino, who invited him to tour upstairs in the Principal Keeper House, usually unavailable to visitors. He was able to study the structure and light through a second-floor window. He painted that view, capturing the experience of a volunteer lighthouse keeper looking out from his bedroom onto his workplace and the tower.

David trained as an artist in upstate New York, inspired by the work of Edward Hopper to whom he is often compared. He describes himself as an American realist. His goal is to present the world as filtered through his imagination and emotions. A painting is a success for him when he connects with the viewer.

When asked what attracts him to settings without people, particularly Thacher Island, he explained that it can be harder for the viewer to put himself in a painting when there are other people in it. Simply put, "an empty chair invites others in." An empty lighthouse beckons others to come closer.

He has yet to paint Thacher Island during a storm; winter storms are too cold and violent so he said he would prefer a summer scene. His reluctance to paint outdoors was confirmed when he once set up outside with other students. A storm blew in and sent easels, canvasses and paints flying. He prefers to photograph and return to his studio to paint more carefully and at his own pace, which he describes as "slow and contemplative."

He hopes that more people, especially locals, will visit the island. It has a unique position and character. While Mohegan Island beckons artists to Maine, he feels Thacher Island should beckon more here in Massachusetts. The personality of the island is hard to capture. He describes it as ever changing. "For me, it's welcoming yet exclusive; friendly yet selfish; tame yet wild; beautiful yet intimidating. And what combination of characteristics you encounter on each visit depends both on the island...and on you."

Note: David and his wife Sue celebrated their 15th wedding anniversary with friends on the island in August 2023.

—KL Pell

*The Thacher Island Association thanks  
our Corporate Sponsors  
for their support to restore the  
South Tower, Thacher Island,  
Cape Ann Light Station*



Bass Rocks Golf Club | Cape Ann Savings Bank  
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Treehouse Design



Storm on Thacher Island, July 20, 2023. Photo credit: Nathan Cohen.

### Weather Challenges (cont. from page 4)

often uses images from the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands live webcams to illustrate the local weather conditions. He is now a NWS-trained SKYWARN storm spotter providing observations to the NWS network.

Chris began posting Cape Ann weather information on Facebook after 2006. Currently CAW has 18,782 followers, two-thirds are women! Reflecting on the wild weather of 2023, Chris indicated his belief that we will continue to encounter very different conditions from what we have known in the past.

—Margaret Brady



# SUMMER 2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## MAJOR PROJECTS

### AKH Bathroom Remodeling

Both bathrooms in the Thacher Island Assistant Keeper House were remodeled, including repairs and painting of walls and ceilings, new flooring, and installation of new tubs and showers, vanities, faucets, and lighting.



Above, left: Fred McGrath and George Langer install a shower enclosure panel (photo credit: Norm Delisle). Right: Karl Ramsden installs the new tub (photo credit: Norm Delisle).



Above, top: Tom Mikus paints the bathroom walls. Photo: Peg Brady Below: Bill Helmuth and Joe Napolitano install new bathroom flooring. Photo: George Langer



### Roof Repair

Winter storms blew off a large section of the roof of the Thacher South Tower entry cabin. Because it had more than served its expected lifetime, work crew members replaced the entire roof, as well as the roofs of the adjacent gas generator building and the two kitchens of the Assistant Keeper House.



Clockwise from top: Joe Napolitano, Bill Sclafani, and Mike Hammerl replace the Thacher South Tower entry cabin roof (photo credit: Sharron Cohen). Bill Sclafani, Joe Napolitano, and Jon Conant replace the Thacher Assistant Keeper House kitchen roof (photo credit: Bill Whiting) Lee Marr hauls roof shingles to the Thacher South Tower (photo credit: Camille Glick).



## Solar Site Construction

In its second full year of work, significant progress was made in constructing Thacher's new solar panel array. The reinforced concrete footings were poured, the steel framing was fabricated and erected, the underground conduit to the Assistant Keeper House was laid, and installation of the solar panels was started. We expect the full system to be operational next summer.



Clockwise from top left: Peter Chick trowels a concrete footing for the new Thacher solar array framing (photo credit: Dave Anderson). Dave Anderson, Paul Sena, Ray Moss, and Peter Chick erect framing to support the new Thacher solar panels (photo credit: Peg Brady). Dave Anderson, Jon Conant, and Randy Saville unspool conduit that protects electrical cables from the solar panel site to the Thacher Assistant Keeper House (photo credit: Camille Glick). Ray Moss, Dick MacPherson, Jon Conant, and Mike Hammerl install solar panels (photo credit: Norm Delisle).



## Whistle House Repointing and Painting

The harsh island weather takes its toll on the many buildings on both islands. This year, the Thacher Whistle House got its turn for a facelift.

Left to right: Donna Cusick, Tom Mikus, and Fred McGrath painting the north side of the Thacher Whistle House (photo credit: George Langer). Fred McGrath and George Langer repointing the north side of the Thacher Whistle House (photo credit: Camille Glick). Donna Cusick and Larry Haynes repointing the Thacher Whistle House chimney (photo credit: Jeanette Haynes).

## New Boathouse Doors

The overhead door to the Thacher boathouse was damaged during winter storms. It was replaced by a pair of barn-style doors custom-built by Dick Morris and Peter Bergholtz.

Left to right: Dick Morris, Roy Johnson, and Bill Whiting install the second door (photo credit: Darlene Fulton). Peter Bergholtz and Dick Morris determine hinge placement on new Thacher boathouse doors (photo credit: George Langer).





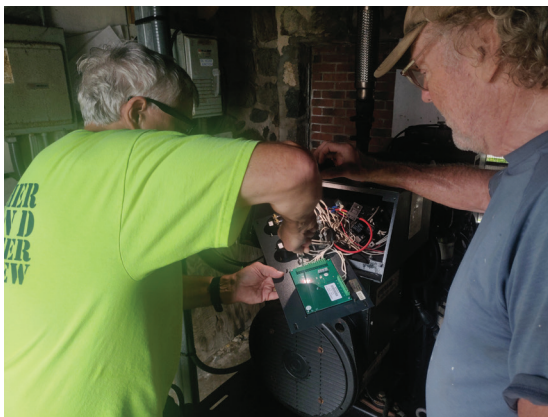
## OTHER PROJECTS



Left to right: Mike Hammerl, Meredith Glaser, and Joe Napolitano put the finishing touches on the walkway to Straitsmouth lighthouse (photo credit: Peter Bergholtz). Bill Helmuth and Peter Bergholtz complete the stairs to the Straitsmouth lighthouse walkway (photo credit: Peter Bergholtz). Norm Delisle installs a solar trickle charger for the Thatcher diesel generator battery (photo credit: Larry Haynes).



Left to right: Christine Lovgren and Joe Napolitano built a rainwater collection system behind the Straitsmouth compost toilet (photo credit: Christine Lovgren). Donna Cusick repaints the trail sign for Anne's Way on Thatcher Island (photo credit: Donna Cusick). Merideth Glaser, Christine Lovgren, and Nathan Ives built a lean-to next to the Straitsmouth Keeper House to protect the generator (photo credit: Meredith Glaser). Not all the projects are on the islands. Here, Seth Cutter and Paul Sena check for leaks in the bilge of Thatcher I (photo credit: Christine Lovgren).



Left to right: Dave Condino replaces the water pump in the Thatcher Assistant Keeper House basement (photo credit: Norm Delisle). Dick MacPherson and Norm Delisle replace the control panel for the diesel generator (photo credit: John Fulton). Long-time keepers George & Dottie Carroll were honored with a granite bench installed in their memory on the south end of Thatcher Island.



## Serious Hazard to Become Splendid Outlook in 2024

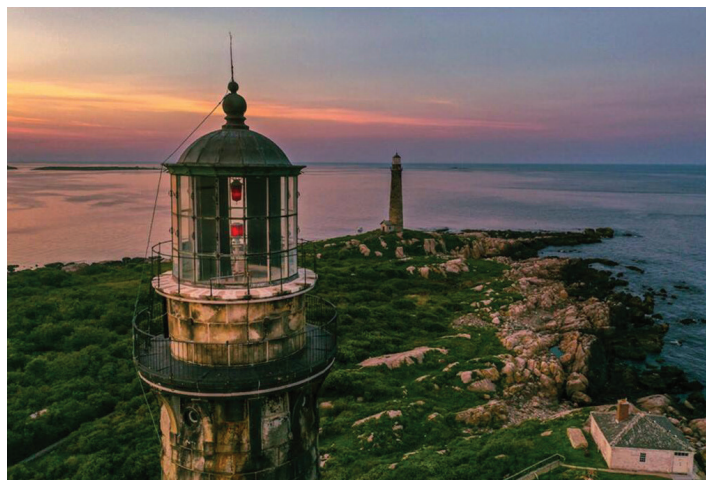
Two years ago the Thatcher Island Association announced that both towers on Thatcher Island were in dire need of repairs in order to preserve the gallery and lantern decks. The decks on both the North and South Towers had deteriorated, creating a safety hazard so serious that the public has not been allowed to walk outside on them for several years. As owner of the North Tower\*, the US Fish & Wildlife Service committed to providing the funds needed to repair it. As owner of the South Tower\* the town of Rockport bears the responsibility for its repair, which is why the TIA launched the Save Our Lights Capital Campaign.

Earlier this year the TIA contracted with Structures North of Salem, MA to prepare an engineering report detailing the specific work that will be required. Based on the report's findings, it was decided that the restoration work will take place in two phases: Phase I will focus on the gallery deck (the lower of the two decks), and Phase II will focus on the lantern room and lantern deck above.

We are currently developing bid specs and plan to put the Phase I job out to bid by the end of this year, with the goal of beginning the work next summer (2024). Phase I is estimated to take ten weeks. During that time, the South Tower will be closed but the North Tower will be open to the public.

Once both phases are completed, both decks will once again be open to the public and, more importantly, the South Tower will be preserved for generations to come.

We deeply appreciate the generosity of everyone whose contributions to the Save Our Lights Capital Campaign will help to make this critical work possible. Donors include the Rockport Community Preservation Committee and the citizens of Rockport, the Manton



Aerial view of the South and North Towers.

Foundation, the estate of Russ Sandfield, friends, visitors, and especially our TIA members.

It's not too late to give to this important project! If you would like to do so, please send your donation – noting that your donation is for the South Tower - to the Thatcher Island Association, PO Box 73, Rockport, MA 01966. Or you can easily donate online by visiting [www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org) and clicking on Save Our Lights Capital Campaign.

—Bill Whiting

\*In 2002, the southern 28 acres of Thatcher Island and its structures (which include the South Tower) were deeded over to the Town of Rockport by the federal government. The north end of the island, including the North Tower, is owned by the US Fish & Wildlife Service and managed by the Town on its behalf as a wildlife refuge.

## Launch Fleet Upgrades

We rely on two launches for safe and reliable transportation to both islands. With more than a decade of service, these boats require regular maintenance and occasional repairs. This summer, *Thacher II* was out of service for several weeks, necessitating the cancellation of trips for both tourists and work crew members. While in the boatyard, *Thacher II* was lucky enough to receive several important upgrades.

First and foremost were the two new 225 HP Honda outboard engines. In the words of boat captain Tom Eldridge: "They are scary

fast!" As a passenger, I can report they are indeed faster, quieter, and smoother. Godspeed to them.

The upgrades also included replacing the drive-by-cable system with a drive-by-wire system for more precise throttle control and shifting, replacing the keyed ignition system with a push-button start, and the installation of a depth sounder to help ensure we can safely navigate the rocky waters at low tide. With these upgrades, *Thacher II* is expected to provide many more years of dependable service.

*Thacher I* was also out of service this summer for major engine repairs, again forcing the cancellation of some scheduled trips. To return the launch to service as soon as possible, the boatyard

performed only necessary repairs. But fleet director Bob Krause is looking forward to making upgrades similar to those made to *Thacher II* before next summer, possibly including a new outboard engine with significantly increased horsepower. Stay tuned.

—Norm Delisle



Left: *Thacher II*'s New Outboard Engines at Work. Right: Tom Eldridge at the Controls of the Upgraded *Thacher II* Launch.

# There and Back Again by Sea

*This year the Thacher-Straitsmouth Boat Crew numbered 21, including a Maritime Operations Coordinator, six launch operators (aka Captains) and 15 crew members. They operated two six-passenger landing craft-style launches, Thacher I and Thacher II, from April through September. It's a small outfit to transport all of the personnel and materiel necessary to maintain the islands' structures and trails and open them for volunteers and visitors. Follow along with snapshots of boat crew life from two crew members.*

## The Calm

It's 6 a.m., low tide, and the crew is prepping *Thacher I* for a dozen round trips to Thacher Island. It will serve as a cargo vessel, sightseeing platform, and transport vehicle.

The captain moves the vessel from its mooring to the floating dock, boat crew members come aboard and motor over to the cargo loading ramp where work crew members are ready to bring construction materials and tools aboard. The boat will be riding low in the water.

As the boat approaches the cut between Straitsmouth Island and Gap Head, all hands are watching the shallow waters overboard for the boulders that currents and tides constantly shuffle in the narrow passageway. One rock has already caused difficulties this year.

The ramp at Straitsmouth is too high above water to land the launch so we head for Thacher where the winch and line will haul it out of the water. (We'll return to Straitsmouth when the tide has risen.) Today there will be an extra quick trip in and out for water jug refill and the all-important donuts to feed the hard-working work crew.

Each time visitors come aboard the captain gives a briefing on safety while underway and at the island ramp. It's comforting to know that all crew members are trained in first aid and maritime communications. When weather and sea conditions permit, crew members may talk about ship designer William Francis Gibbs who built the house atop Gap Head, or the wreck that threw Anthony Thacher up onto the island among many topics.

The seas are relatively calm on this day so a detour is made on one return trip in order to introduce some young voyagers to the seals that inhabit The Salvages, out near the Breakwater. It's always a treat to watch them vie with the seabirds for rock space, then splash into the water when the boat's noise disturbs their peaceful basking. Cameras come out, passengers and crew are in high spirits, and the day ends on an up-note.

—Gail Zeman

## The Storm

Usually the boats don't run if the weather looks bad, but sometimes August just doesn't play by the rules.

It started out a pretty average day — temperature mid-70s, bright sun, bit of a swell but nothing unworkable. So, we started the day as we do any day. We ferried out the workers, docents, and then the tourists. Perfectly normal.

That is, until about 11am...

We had just finished the last "to" trip and were about to start making "back" trips when the weather turned. It got cold, it started to rain, and the seas got BIG.

But of course, everyone was still on the island so we had to complete the job. I was working the bow, soaked by rain, sprayed by each wave and tossed around by swells higher than the freeboard, and I was getting tired just keeping myself aboard.

We did three more trips in the bad weather and I will never forget how utterly spent, and how completely SOAKED I was by 3 in the afternoon when we finished. I remember walking back up to the Granite Pier parking area, taking off my life vest, and just laying down.

On the Gravel.

That was some really comfortable gravel.

So ended the final day of my first season. With such a kick out the door, perhaps it's a wonder I came back for a second. Truth be told, there's nowhere I'd rather be. (I have since picked up a decent raincoat.)

—Sebastian Lovasco



Dock Docent Gigi McGrail greets visitors Kendall Whelton, Bill Bougas, Betty Hurst, and Jean Brandt.

## Dock Docents

For the past seven years docents have assisted visitors on Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands by orienting them to the island, answering questions, supervising activity in the lighthouses, and manning the gift shop. On the suggestion of boat captain Bob Krause, Joanne Sullivan, head of docent scheduling, has added the new position of dock docent.

On the days that the Thacher Island Association launch is scheduled to run, the dock docent is stationed at Granite Pier to greet visitors, clarify concerns about parking, and answer questions about the islands. The dock docent also communicates with boat captains in order to inform visitors of delays and cancellation of trips.

Boat captains and visitors have all appreciated the efficiency and assurances provided by the new docent position.

—Sharron Cohen

## Picture This!

### 2024 Calendar Photo Contest Results

Once again this year, the Thacher Island Association conducted a photo contest for its 2024 calendar.

Over 60 photographs were submitted by 22 talented photographers. In addition to donating his beautiful photograph, Sea Smoke Dawn, for the cover, professional photographer Skip Montello took on the arduous task of selecting the 12 photographs that will appear in the 2024 calendar. The TIA's sincere appreciation goes to all of the photographers who shared their outstanding work.

The calendars are available on the TIA website, just in time for your holiday shopping. Photos taken by these photographers will be featured in the 2023 calendar: Nathan Cohen (Gloucester, MA); Melissa Cox (Gloucester, MA); Jerry Gladstone (Rockport, MA); Rich Lorigan (Rockport, MA); Gail Zeman (Rockport, MA); Camille Glick (Mt. Holly, NC); and Jason Kennedy (Nashua, NH).



Crewman Sebastian Lovasco watches Harry Newell carry construction materials off *Thacher I*.



## Perfect for Holiday Gift Giving!

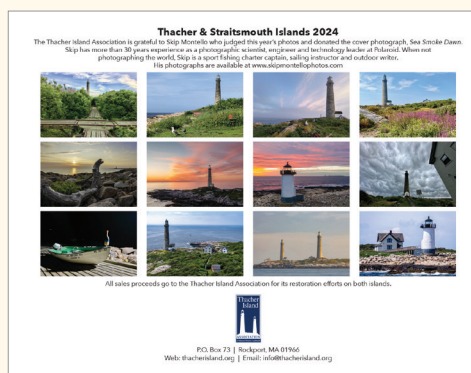
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2024 Thacher Island Association Calendar is now available.  
Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands 2024 features spectacular  
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Thacher Island and Straitsmouth Island Pewter Ornaments. Each ornament measures 2 ¾" by 2 ½", comes with a red ribbon, and is highly detailed on both sides. Packaged in a gift box. Made by Hampshire Pewter. **\$20.00** each



Would you like to learn more about the history of Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands and Cape Ann, MA? A variety of entertaining and informative books, many of them written by TIA President Emeritus Paul St. German, are available on the TIA website.



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### 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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