

# Thacher & Straitsmouth Island News

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Photo credit: Richard Carlson

## WILDLIFE SURPRISES — MASS AUDUBON ON STRAITSMOUTH

With the gift of Straitsmouth Island to Mass Audubon in 1967, the Gibbs family charged the conservation organization with maintaining a sanctuary for “plants, birds, and animals.” Mass Audubon staff became a regular presence on the island during the 2023 season, conducting multiple bird counts and observing other wildlife. Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association volunteers assisted with the surveys, and a pair of Mass Audubon staffers returned the favor by serving as apprentice Keepers! The Mass Audubon observations delivered quite a few surprises.



Harlequin duck caught napping

breeding plumage. The sighting was recorded in the first ever eBird (online database) report from Straitsmouth. Harlequins are seen commonly along Cape Ann’s coast, but typically only during their November to April courtship season.

## Four Feet

Since Straitsmouth is surrounded by water, the appearance of a non-avian, non-aquatic creature is always noteworthy. The shortest distance to the island from the mainland is from Gap Head to the west bluff, about 360 feet. From the beach at Gap Cove to the ramp is about 1,080 feet. It appears the expanse is a less formidable barrier to mammals than imagined. In my previous years of volunteering on the island, the largest mammal I encountered and identified was a tiny, bold shrew that one day joined the volunteer lunch group. Apparently, the shrew has attracted company.

A whitetail doe was seen by several Keepers last June. In the sightings, the doe was leading a tiny fawn. By the end of June, the doe was seen alone; the fate of the fawn is unknown. This was not the first sighting of deer on Straitsmouth. In 2013, a passing ship captain photographed two whitetail does on the rocky south side of the island.

A raccoon was seen and photographed on the lighthouse walkway by Keeper Meredith Glaser in early June. Raccoons are considered good swimmers but not

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## Two Wings

Avian life has always been present on Straitsmouth, but observers were astonished at the number and variety of birds spotted last season. During one multi-day count, staffers identified 36 different species! Some noteworthy single-day counts:

- 7 Wild Turkeys
- 4 American Woodcocks
- 100 Common Eiders
- 13 Tree Swallows

One 2023 Keeper was delighted to come upon a harlequin duck in full

## THE GIRLS IN THE BOAT — SCHOONER ADVENTURE PROGRAM VISITS THACHER

On a beautiful summer day in early July 2023 eight girls from the O’Maley School Academy were transported to Thacher Island for a day of exploration as part of their Girls on Adventure Summer Program. Developed by the educational staff at Schooner *Adventure*, the 122’ fishing schooner moored in Gloucester Harbor, the program’s mission was to inspire young women “to consider a career path related to the sea.”

What better place to experience the lure of the ocean than on Thacher Island surrounded by the waves yet fully grounded by the nautical history preserved on this rocky place. What better way to reaffirm

*(continued on page 7)*



Lunch and poetry reading in the campground, with the North Tower standing sentinel, for the Girls on Adventure Summer Program visit to Thacher Island. Photo: Camille Glick



# VOLUNTEER WORK CREW

## WORK CREW PROFILE

**Peg Brady & David Condino**

*Made for the Islands (in so many ways!)*

Fortunately for the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association, Margaret (Peg) Brady and Captain David Condino were not ships that passed the islands in the night. This couple who, independent of each other fell in love with Cape Ann, have expertise that seems custom-designed to benefit both Islands.

Four years ago, Gloucester, MA residents David and Peg were looking for a new volunteer opportunity when David visited a TSIA booth at a local farmers market about the same time that Peg noticed an ad in the Gloucester newspaper soliciting TSIA volunteers. Soon after an “interview” over coffee with Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands Town Committee Chair Syd Wedmore, Peg and David were recruited to serve as Keepers, and David to captain the launches and serve on the work crew. But their story begins long before then.

Originally from New Hyde Park, NY, Peg has degrees in Marine Biology and Marine Ecology and has spent most of her career in those fields, both in Massachusetts and in Washington, DC. Her introduction to the maritime life was a program run by the Sea Education Association based in Cape Cod. It was while aboard a SEA schooner that Peg first saw Gloucester harbor. “As a kid from New York, I was in awe. I didn’t know places like this existed!”

While her titles and duties have changed over time, her mission has always been to ensure that science-based strategies are applied to sustain and enhance coastal and marine ecosystems for the communities that depend upon them. Peg’s personal focus is on the Gulf of Maine, the ecosystem that includes both Islands. (Peg has written several articles on this topic for the TSIA newsletter.)

David, originally from Watertown in upstate NY, holds a degree in Environmental Management. His first job out of college was in an office in Connecticut, but it was while sailing on Long Island Sound that he discovered his love of the sea. He joined the US Merchant Marine and earned his Captain’s License. As a professional mariner, David has crewed and captained on a variety of shipping and research vessels all over the world. David also worked in DC in Marine Operations and Protection for the US Department of Transportation’s Maritime Administration, and with the US Coast Guard, where he helped develop pollution control measures for ocean-going ships. Although he is officially “retired” from his maritime and federal jobs, he still consults on maritime safety, security, and environmental protection.

He first saw Cape Ann when he was sailing to Maine. “Boy, when I saw Gloucester, that was it, I just fell in love with the place.” Working for the merchant marine, David’s schedule was “three months at sea, three months ashore”, so he could choose where he wanted to live, and he chose Gloucester.

Then, on a fateful day in 1990, the woman from New Hyde Park and the man from Watertown met at an artist’s reception in Rockport, MA. They married in 1996.

Peg and David serve as Thacher Keepers, helping to open the island at the beginning of each season. When not greeting visitors and maintaining the buildings and landscape, they make time to collect the debris that washes ashore so it can be properly disposed of. Peg’s pet peeve is Mylar balloons. “They last forever, are often trapped in the vegetation, and the strings entangle wildlife.” Last year Peg organized Keepers on both islands to track, record, and - when necessary - bury birds infected by Avian Flu. She then shared the information with infectious disease researchers at Tufts University.

During the week, David enjoys driving the boats to bring visitors and work crews to the islands. “Being out on the water is a huge plus for me.”

Peg and David look forward to many more years of volunteering for TSIA. “The islands are in the Gulf of Maine, which is our backyard, and we love going out there and taking care of them. That’s what we’re there for and we love doing that.”

—Kristy Rudel



David, Peg, Suellen & Syd Wedmore and friends arrive to open up Thacher Island in May 2023.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I remember very well my first trip to Straitsmouth Island. It was in mid-May of 2010 when five other volunteers and I did a recon to determine the state of the island and its structures.

What I saw then was a ruined Oil House, a Keepers House largely destroyed by vandalism and the weather, a lighthouse in dire need of repair, remnants of a long collapsed footbridge and a barn that had totally caved in. It was a depressing scene.

A visitor to Straitsmouth now, 14 years later, sees a very different picture. A well established central path leads to a restored Oil House, a rebuilt Keeper House, a well preserved historic lighthouse, a new 200 foot elevated walkway and a new barn. And that is not all. There is a new compost toilet, winch shed, boat ramp, kayak rack, a series of web cams and a trail system.

The achievements of a dedicated group of Straitsmouth Savages (aka faithful SI volunteers) who committed thousands of work hours, and the expenditure of over \$1 million for materials and professional services needed to bring the island back to life, should not go unrecognized. Accordingly the Board of the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association (TSIA) recently voted to change its name to the Thacher & Straitsmouth Island Association (TSIA). The association also adopted a new logo, designed by graphic designer Meredith Anderson.

As always, there are plenty of people to thank ... our dedicated volunteers, TSIA members, Mass Audubon, Cape Ann Savings Bank, Cell Signaling Technology, the citizens of Rockport, and especially its Community Preservation Committee.

I hope that you are as excited as I am about these changes. The new name and logo are now official and new member cards and window stickers will be mailed out during 2024. I encourage you to visit the newly accessible and usable Straitsmouth Island and investigate what it has to offer.

—Bill Whiting



# THACHER & STRAITSMOUTH Islands Association



The Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association is creating a new position to inform, educate, and engage with TSIA membership and the Cape Ann community of non-profits.

**We are looking for leadership, creativity, and initiative.**

Are you willing to meet with local non-profits? Are you willing to organize a ZOOM call (with technical support) for TSIA membership by engaging with a lighthouse keeper such as Sally Snowman, the last Keeper at Boston Lighthouse, or lighthouse author Eric Jay Dolin, or TSIA work crew volunteers on major island restoration projects? Are you willing to be our liaison to summer camps or educational programs such as Coastal Discovery or Schooner Adventure, groups eager for access to the islands?

Our volunteers determine how much time they will commit. TSIA estimates this position is about 10 hours per month. This volunteer work is rated as fun and rewarding. No one is harmed in the process.

To learn more or to discuss this TSIA role, please contact George Langer at [info@thacherisland.org](mailto:info@thacherisland.org).

## IN MEMORIAM

### Roger E. Perkins

August 18, 1929–February 28, 2024

Roger Perkins spoke machine, and the machinery of Thacher Island spoke to him. Initially recruited to roof an island building, he demonstrated a variety of other skills that attracted notice. He was asked to work beside the island's machine guru, John Bennett, taking over from him when the older master passed away. In turn, Roger passed their combined knowledge on to his protegee, Lee Marr, in the closest thing the islands have to a Jedi training program.

Roger would have been embarrassed by the previous paragraph. Photographs of him reveal a man who was uncomfortable in the spotlight. He was more at ease examining the ramp's newly installed winch motor or listening to other work crew members over a cup of coffee.

Born and raised in Rockport, Roger learned auto repair at Gloucester High School before spending two years at the General Motors Institute in Flint, Michigan. Returning to Cape Ann, he was foreman and assistant service manager for the Pierce



Roger's 90th birthday party, on Thacher Island, orchestrated by Tom and Paula Eldridge.

Photo: Sharron Cohen

Hodgkins' Oldsmobile and Chevrolet dealership on Maplewood Avenue in Gloucester. While serving as a Navy Seabee in the 1950s, he learned heavy-equipment repair in Grondel, Greenland.

Despite Roger's early travels, his heart was forever in his home town. He played the euphonium for the Rockport Legion Band and volunteered for the Rockport Fire Department for 30 years, retiring as captain of Engine 2. He was the owner of Granite Garage, a place where mechanics meticulously cleaned their tools at the end of every workday. On Thacher Island he was the quiet man who could solve any problem. Can't get the new generator through the Stone House door? Ask Roger.

Can't bring a rusted tractor back to life? Go find Roger.

He may have winced at the way keepers and work crew tortured the machines he cared for, but his corrections were never harsh, his smile never less than friendly. For thirty years Roger Perkins was more than liked and trusted. In the words of Sydney Wedmore, "Roger was one of the island's originals. He was indispensable."



Left: Roger beside the tractor he donated to Thacher Island. Photo: Camille Glick



Right: Three of the originals leaving Thacher Island: John Bennett, Connie Rohrbough, Roger Perkins. Photo: Sharron Cohen



### William (Bill) Braunlich

March 6, 1937–October 9, 2023

No one in the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association can recall Bill Braunlich ever setting foot on Thacher or Straitsmouth Islands, but, according to the Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands Town Committee chairman, Sydney Wedmore, "He was the quintessential backstage volunteer." Braunlich served as treasurer for the TSITC for three years, Wedmore said, "until he was poached."

Among other credentials, Braunlich had been the first chief operating officer of NYNEX Yellow Pages before he took over as president of Volt Telecommunications Group, which installed and maintained telephone infrastructure. After retirement, he was a founding member of what would become the Epilepsy Foundation of New England, serving as its president and treasurer. He was president of the Epilepsy Therapy Development Project and started a clothing donation center that has generated over \$10 million for the foundation since 2009.

"In addition to being genial and helpful, he had a valuable knowledge of nonprofits," recalled

Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association board member Peter Bergholtz, who recruited Braunlich for a newly formed finance committee serving the island's fundraising arm. "Bill was a busy man," said Bergholtz, "but for 15 years he helped us make the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association a successful financial endeavor."



Paul St. Germain greets Rachel Holt and the New England Living Film Crew to Thacher Island. Photo: Rich Lorigan

## NEW ENGLAND LIVING TV SHOW VISITS THACHER ISLAND

In early August 2023, CBS Boston WBZ TV's New England Living visited Thacher Island. The resulting feature is scheduled to be broadcast and posted online sometime this coming May.

When the show's Executive Producer/Director Evan Berenson was asked what drew him and his film crew to Thacher Island in the first place, he replied: "I chose Thacher Island to highlight because it really is the quintessential New England experience. It represents a unique opportunity to see this region from a totally different perspective. To be able to ride in a boat from scenic

*"Thacher Island ... represents a unique opportunity to see this region from a totally different perspective.... For our viewers, it's a once-in-a-lifetime New England experience ..."*

Rockport out to an island teeming with wildlife and with two lighthouses on it? For our viewers, it's a once-in-a-lifetime New England experience that really epitomizes what living in New England is all about, and we were so grateful for the access and the hospitality."

Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association President Emeritus Paul St. Germain led the tour of Thacher because of his 25-year volunteer history with the island and his authorship of four books on its history. Paul met the five-member film crew at the boat ramp as they debarked from the 25-minute launch ride from Granite Pier. The tour took the group up the tramway tracks and past the helicopter pad to the Keeper Houses and the museum, which features a Victorian parlor re-creation and antique Keeper artifacts. They ended at the picnic table near the fire pond where the program's host, Rachel Holt, interviewed Paul in the shadow of the South Tower. Rachel then climbed the South Tower's 156 steps all the way to the Lantern Room. Drone cameraman John Lifton flew his drone up the outside of the tower, filming Rachel's progress, which culminated in her waving when she successfully reached the top.



Host Rachel Holt Interviewing Paul St. Germain Near the South Tower. Photo: Rich Lorigan



New England Living is a lifestyle media trifecta that delivers a dynamic website, an informative magazine and an entertaining TV show which runs on Sunday mornings at 11:30am. All come together to celebrate the beauty of living and the art of entertaining in New England.

New England Living's eighth season will begin airing this spring on WBZ-TV Channel 4. Features are also posted online at [www.cbsnews.com/boston/new-england-living/](http://www.cbsnews.com/boston/new-england-living/).

The Thacher Island segment will air in May on a Sunday to be determined.

Later in the day, resident Keepers Julie and Scott Bisgaard were interviewed. The crew then asked if they could film a volunteer working, so Fred McGrath was captured as he painted the base of the Whistle House fog signal building.

Thanks to Rich Lorigan for coordinating this event and to TSIA boat crew Captain Marty Smith and crewmen Roy Johnson and Cal White.

— Paul St. Germain

## AVIAN INFLUENZA DETECTED IN ESSEX COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS IN 2024

Early in 2024 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) was detected in Massachusetts according to the state's Department of Agricultural Resources' Division of Animal Health. Massachusetts agencies disposed of the infected birds, a mixed-species backyard flock, which were located in Essex and Barnstable counties. The birds died suddenly without exhibiting any clinical signs consistent with the virus, yet their samples tested positive for the virus.

During the summer of 2022 Thacher & Straitsmouth Island Association (TSIA) volunteers observed an unusual number of sick and dead shorebirds on both Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands. TSIA representatives collaborated with and provided samples to researchers at the Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Dept. of Infectious Disease and Global Health. HPAI was detected in a portion of these samples. The volunteers carefully collected samples from the dead birds which were analyzed by the Tufts researchers. In fact, the information from the TSIA samples was incorporated into a larger database documenting the distribution of HPAI detections. Shorebirds throughout the Gulf of Maine region were heavily impacted by avian influenza.

HPAI viruses have been spreading around the world and were first detected in the U.S. in 2016 and then again in 2022. Once thought to be associated with high-density poultry production farms, the viruses can infect wild migratory shorebirds. One type, H5N1, which was responsible for the 2022 summer's deadly impact in New England has raised concerns among wildlife experts. During 2022 shorebirds in New England experienced two waves of influenza infections. The first wave peaked in March and was largely represented by raptor deaths. During the second wave (June) gull and eider deaths were most frequently reported. Mortality events affected seabird breeding colonies throughout the New England coastal region during the second wave.

### Virus detected in dead seals

During the second wave of avian infections in the Gulf of Maine, there was an increase in harbor and gray seal strandings along the Maine coast. Samples collected from those seals tested HPAI-positive and were located within regions of known and suspected HPAI outbreaks among shorebirds. Transmission was



Double-breasted Cormorant. Photo: Eric Belseth

likely due to shed virus since shorebirds are not a typical food source for harbor or gray seals.

As the TSIA Keepers and volunteers have done since 2022, they will carefully monitor and record sick and dead birds on both islands in the coming season. When necessary, the volunteers will collect samples and bury the dead birds to reduce the transmission of the virus.

### What to look for?

Infected animals exhibit symptoms including lethargy, coughing, discharge from the eyes and nose, seizures, and death. Humans are rarely infected with avian flu viruses, but those who have prolonged, close contact with sick or dead birds are at the most risk of becoming ill. Officials are urging the public to take precautions and not to handle or feed any birds suspected of being infected. The public is advised to keep pets away; and to notify local animal control officials of any sightings.

In Massachusetts the public is encouraged to report their observations if they observe sick or dead seabirds (e.g., gulls, terns, cormorants, sea ducks), and/or observe five or more wild birds of other species at a single location. The public can report their observations using this simple webform at <https://mass.gov/reportbirds>.

— Margaret (Peg) Brady



Common Eider Duck. With permission of Cornell Ornithology Lab



Common Tern. With permission of Cornell Ornithology Lab



### 36 Bird Species Spotted During One Count in June 2023

- American Crow
- American Goldfinch
- American Oystercatcher
- American Redstart
- American Robin
- American Woodcock
- Barn Swallow
- Black-billed Cuckoo
- Canada Goose
- Cedar Waxwing
- Common Eider
- Common Grackle
- Common Loon
- Common Yellowthroat
- Double-crested Cormorant
- Eastern Towhee
- Eastern Wood Pewee
- European Starling
- Fish Crow
- Gray Catbird
- Great Black-backed Gull
- Green Heron
- Herring Gull
- House Finch
- Magnolia Warbler
- Mallard
- Mourning Dove
- Northern Cardinal
- Northern Mockingbird
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Song Sparrow
- Spotted Sandpiper
- White-throated Sparrow
- Wild Turkey
- Willet



### WILDLIFE SURPRISES (cont. from page 1)

ocean swimmers. Googling “swimming raccoons” returns many videos of raccoons in backyard pools but adding “ocean” to the search returns videos of rescues!

Also in June 2023, Keeper Christa Clark spotted an Eastern Cottontail grazing above the old derrick site. Rabbits can swim to escape predators, but only a southern species, swamp rabbit, swims routinely in fresh water to travel through its environment (like the “killer rabbit” that in April 1979 famously startled vacationing President Jimmy Carter in his canoe).

Tracks in the mud on Straitsmouth trails, identified by a Mass Audubon observer, indicated the surprising presence of mink. Though they hunt along ocean shores, mink are not normally considered island dwellers. A recently extinct species, sea mink (which could be twice the size of their inland relatives), was once common on rocky islands off shores from Maine to Nova Scotia. The last observation of an individual sea mink was in 1880. If our resident semi-aquatic mink evolved with their much larger cousins, perhaps they've been evolving ashore before making their return. What led the one who left tracks on Straitsmouth to cross the gap is unknown.

Straitsmouth nature lovers wonder what's coming this season!

—Harry Newell

### THE GIRLS IN THE BOAT (cont. from page 1)

that “girls can do anything” than to witness the many concrete examples offered by the Thacher Island female volunteers who were specifically gathered for the day. The girls were able to observe the staff working in their roles as launch captain, boat crew, Keeper and docents who provided educational guided tours of the island.

The girls explored the island in two groups: climbing the North Tower, traversing the paths, and delighting in the boardwalks and tramway with its turntable system linking the crossing rails between outbuildings. All the while, they bobbed and weaved to avoid the bothersome seagulls and the Canada geese who were claiming the green spaces as their very own salad bowl. In the museum building they viewed the video highlights of the island with its twin lights, and were captivated by the stories of heroic figures associated with its history.

After sharing a picnic lunch in the campground, Suellen Wedmore, Poet Emeritus of Rockport, gave a reading from her book *A Fixed White Light: Poems of Women Lighthouse Keepers*. Fittingly, she regaled the girls with poems dedicated to the heroism of Maria Bray, a Keeper's wife on Thacher Island, who kept the oil lamps burning during a fierce three-day snowstorm while her husband and crew remained stranded on the mainland. The girls completed their own heroic feat, overcoming their apprehension as they worked together to pull up a few lobster traps onto the island boat launches.

The adventure continued the next day

at the Cape Ann Museum where the group was able to admire the First Order Fresnel Lens that was originally part of the beacon system in the South Tower. They marveled at the size and design of 290 glass prisms set in a bronze frame with an aesthetic beauty that belies its overall function of guiding ships at sea. The girls were then given a hands-on opportunity in the museum's studio where they created colorful block prints based on their Thacher Island experience ensuring the day lived on in perpetuity.



Photo: Suellen Wedmore, with permission of CAM.

“The future of Thacher Island is in getting younger people enthused and appreciative of our island's magic,” noted Sydney Wedmore, Chairman of the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Town Committee, in a recent observation. The Cape Ann institutions involved in this successful collaborative program echo this same sentiment in their individual mission statements dedicated to preserving the history, culture, and art of our unique seaside locale for generations to come. The Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association hope to be a part of educational opportunities of this nature in the coming summer season.

—Denise Farnsworth

# AGGRESSIVE PROJECT PLANS FOR 2024



Historic photo of the original lighthouse, entry cabin, and walkway. Photo: TSIA archive

Each winter, members of the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association volunteer work crew get together to scope out the next summer's work projects for both islands. This planning effort helps to establish budgets and priorities. However, those plans are often upended after our first visits to the islands in early April, when winter storm damage repairs take precedence. For example, last year we discovered that a portion of the Thacher South Tower entry cabin roof had blown off. As the old proverb says: "Man plans and God laughs."

In addition to any essential repairs, there are two major projects we hope to complete this summer. Plus, we have a list of smaller but important maintenance and improvement tasks.

On Thacher, this will be the third and final year of installing the new solar electrical system. Last year, we completed most of the work on the solar array and went partially operational. This summer, we will install the final row of solar panels and complete work on the energy storage system. The new system will replace components that have exceeded their life expectancy, provide cleaner power capable of running modern appliances and devices, and reduce the usage of the diesel generator backup system.

On Straitsmouth, we plan to construct an entry cabin for the lighthouse to replace the one that was destroyed in the October 1991 "Perfect Storm." As detailed by Paul Sena in the April 2023 issue of this newsletter, the cabin will have a brick face with inner walls of concrete block for structural support. Windows, a door, and a wooden roof will restore the entry cabin to its historical design.

Here's the list of additional planned projects:

- Install new backup water pressure pumps on each island.
- Install a triple-clear water filter on Thacher (Straitsmouth already has one).
- Repair and repaint the exterior of the historic Oil House on Thacher.
- Install ceiling fans, and plaster and repaint the two larger 3rd-floor bedrooms in the Thacher Assistant Keeper House.

(continued on page 9)



Photo: Norm Delisle



Photo: Sharon Cohen

Top: New solar array with South Tower in the background. Bottom: Nate Cohen adding critical signage on Thacher Island.

## LONGTIME CAPTAINS TOM ELDRIDGE AND LARRY LIBERT RETIRE

Two volunteers with long service in the Thacher-Straitsmouth launch captaincy won't be at the helm of the tourist or volunteer boats this season. Captains Tom Eldridge and Larry Libert will be missed!

Taking their places in the captain ranks this season are volunteers Alice Twombly, who started in the 2023 season, and Bob Foudriat, for whom the 2024 season will be his first.

In recent years US Navy vet Tom Eldridge was, for new boat crew members, the face of the islands' launch services. He obtained his captain's license in 1995, and spent his free time each following summer, with his wife Paula, sailing their 34-foot Hunter. In 2007, he began as a captain for Thacher Island volunteer trips, and gradually took on a crucial onshore role: upgrading and maintaining the management process for staffing, training, and scheduling crews for all launch trips each season. Tom, sometimes playfully referred to as "Admiral of the Thacher Navy", kept a close eye on the condition of the launches while captaining his sometimes twice-weekly trips.

As a young man Larry Libert hand-built a small hydro-plane, with hopes of getting into boat racing. His boat building skill unfortunately caught the eye of a thief, who stole the boat from its mooring. Larry moved on to create a local legacy in Rockport town government service as a police officer and firefighter. Captain Larry took special pleasure in departures from Thacher: checking the readiness of craft and crew, making passengers feel welcome and safe, and, with everyone in place, giving the command to release the bow line for the stern-first launch—"the Thacher sleigh ride."

I can report as a member of the "Straitsmouth Savages" (volunteers who debarked onto the Straitsmouth rocks before that ramp was built), that we greatly appreciated both captains' tide and sea condition savvy, and their skills at maneuvering the launches, which enabled our assaults on the island!

— Harry Newell



Tom Eldridge



Larry Libert / Photos: Gail Zeman



## THACHER & STRAITSMOUTH ISLANDS ASSOCIATION HOLDS FIRST HYBRID ANNUAL MEETING

The first hybrid Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association annual meeting was in person at Rockport Library and broadcast over ZOOM on Wednesday evening, November 8th, 2023. Hybrid access allowed volunteers and members not living locally to participate, resulting in over 110 attendees, the largest audience ever at an annual meeting.

Our 2023 results were filled with great news about finances, progress of major projects on the islands and lots of photographs of work crew volunteers. Our organization is proud to be all-volunteer and accomplish so much to preserve the rich history of these islands off the coast of Rockport.

If you wish to review the slide set, scan the QR code in this article with your smartphone camera for instant access. It is safe to download this large MS-Powerpoint file to your device for viewing. Be patient, your download may take a couple of minutes.

And of course, thank you to all TSIA members for your support.

—Norm Delisle and George Langer

### AGGRESSIVE PROJECT PLANS (cont. from page 8)

- Remove & dispose of old lead acid batteries in the base of the Thacher South Tower and the Straitsmouth Lighthouse.
- Install float grab bars at Granite Pier.
- Repair the fog horn in the historic Thacher Whistle House.
- Construct a delivery ramp system on the North Side of Straitsmouth Island.
- Add signage on each island.
- Remove the equipment (cameras, dish antennas) from the railing on the Thacher South Tower to allow the scheduled parapet repairs. Reinstall when work is finished.
- Add cabling to reinforce the granite posts supporting the Straitsmouth Lighthouse walkway.
- Repair the camera service on the Straitsmouth lighthouse.

Admittedly, it's an ambitious list. But it is incredible how much work our dedicated volunteer work crew members and Keepers can accomplish. The fall issue of this newsletter will provide a photo spread of the work we complete. Don't be surprised if a few of the projects listed above don't make the cut—edged out by other more critical, unanticipated tasks. And as you read this, if you listen carefully, you will hear God laughing. But I've got a feeling that she's smiling at us.

— Norm Delisle



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# SUMMER 2024 VISITOR EVENTS



## 2024 Launch Access to Straitsmouth & Thacher Islands

Our boats, *Thacher Island I* and *Thacher Island II* will be back in the water with our able captains and crew beginning Tuesday, June 4, 2024. We expect to transport more than 900 visitors to the islands during the summer season.

Launch trips to Straitsmouth Island are only on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday in June, July and August.

Launch trips to Thacher Island are on Wednesday and Saturday.

For 2024, we have added trips to Thacher Island on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday in June, July and August with an extra trip on July 30th.

Tickets, which become available in early May 2024, can be purchased using Eventbrite ([www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com)). Scan the QR Code in this article with your smartphone camera for instant access. For those experiencing problems with Eventbrite you may call 617-599-2590 for assistance.

The Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association boat launches make the islands accessible to everyone. We hope you will join us.



Tickets TUES Thacher



Tickets SAT Thacher



Tickets WED Thacher



Tickets TUES Straitsmouth



## Sunset Lighthouse Cruise 2024

The very popular sunset lighthouse cruise returns in 2024. This is the most important fundraising event on the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association annual calendar.

With your support TSIA preserves and provides accessibility to Straitsmouth and Thacher Islands including their 15-plus buildings, ramps and walkways.

The cruise route departs from Gloucester Harbor, circumnavigating Cape Ann counter-clockwise to the Annisquam River as it meets Ipswich Bay, where we come about for our return to Gloucester Harbor. The boat will approach all six Cape Ann lighthouses from Ten Pound Island to Annisquam. Other sites include the Londoner Reef, the Dry Salvages, Avery Ledge, and the old breakwater of Sandy Bay.



August 1, 2023, Sunset Lighthouse Cruise "Sturgeon" Super Moon  
Appears 7% larger & 30% brighter  
Moonrise: 8:54pm

Additionally, unexpected sights make for special memories. The August 2023 cruise witnessed the rising of a Sturgeon Moon. Viewed across the water, while low in the sky, the size, the color

and the moon's detail was extraordinary. A truly spectacular experience.

There are two cruises in 2024 scheduled for Wednesday, July 10th and Wednesday July 17th. Look for details on our website ([www.thacher-island.org](http://www.thacher-island.org)), in email communications to members, socially on Good Morning Gloucester, and via flyers posted in shops around Cape Ann.

Tickets go on sale Monday, April 8, 2024, using Eventbrite ([www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com)). Scan the QR code in this article with your smartphone camera for instant access.

Once again this trip will be underwritten by corporate sponsors: companies committed to our communities on Cape Ann. A list will be out by early June. Please show your appreciation by supporting these businesses.

Bring your own food and make a picnic on board or buy light food and drinks at the galley on board the boat. Oh, and please no pets.

This cruise is very popular and tickets go quickly. Don't wait to get yours! We look forward to seeing you on the boat.



JULY 10th



JULY 17th

# Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands Merchandise

As always ... FREE shipping



Perfect for the Summer!

## Mesh Hats

Unstructured hats feature Thacher Island Twin Lights logo in Royal Blue, Charcoal and Nantucket Red. Adjustable, washed cotton twill and soft khaki mesh. \$25.00

NEW

## Keeper's Hat

New Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands logo is proudly embroidered on the front of this blue Keeper's Hat, with the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association name embroidered on the back. Adjustable, 100% cotton, washable. \$25.00



## Denim Keeper's Shirt

This 100% cotton, soft denim shirt is a key item to own. It proudly shows off the Thacher Island Twin Lights embroidery. Comes in S, M, L, XL, 2XL. \$44.50



## Note Cards — The Lights of Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands

This limited edition set of note cards, showcasing the lighthouses of Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands, has been designed by renowned Rockport artist David Arsenault. Each of the seven different designs captures the light, the historic landmarks and the natural beauty that make these islands so special. \$20.00

For more available items, please go to our web site [www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org) and click on Shop.



THACHER &  
STRAITSMOUTH  
Islands Association

P.O. Box 73  
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[www.thacherisland.org](http://www.thacherisland.org)  
[info@thacherisland.org](mailto:info@thacherisland.org)

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

### YOUR MEMBERSHIP MATTERS!

Your membership powers every aspect of the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association's vital mission. Thanks to your support, the historic structures and scenic trails on both islands are kept in good repair and protected from the ongoing ravages of salt water and harsh Atlantic winters, and access to both islands is maintained. Please check the address label above 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, it is very much appreciated.



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