

SOUTH TOWER UPDATE: **PHASE 1 COMPLETE**

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Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association

COVER PHOTO BY DAVID CARLSON



SOUTH TOWER UPDATE: PHASE 1 COMPLETE

As this *Island News* goes to print, a crew of tower engineers from ICC Commonwealth is performing critical and desperately needed repairs to the Thacher Island South Tower. This vital renovation work is made possible by the generosity of those who contributed to the successful three-year \$500,000 Save Our Lights capital campaign. The ICC construction team is completing Phase 1 of the project: repairing the gallery and lantern parapets and replacing the railings and stanchions on both. Once this multi-week phase is done, visitors will again be able to safely walk around the parapets to enjoy the spectacular views.

Please stay tuned for more information about Phase 2, which will include substantial repairs to the lantern room and the supporting stonework beneath it. Thanks again to all of you for making this critical work possible.

— Bill Whiting

South Tower Repair Work in Progress: note the temporary scaffolding below the Gallery Parapet and the Gin Pole, which is used to haul materials. A similar rig was used to build the tower and lift the individual blocks into place in 1861.
Photo: ICC Commonwealth

LIGHTHOUSE MOVIE NIGHT

Sometimes after long island days of completing chores and greeting visitors, our Keepers just need an evening diversion. Fourth-season Keepers and cousins Francesca, Fiona, and Phoebe Twombly planned just such a diversion for a rainy Straitsmouth night in July, a viewing of the 2019 film “The Lighthouse.”

The film, starring Willem Dafoe and Robert Pattinson, was well received by critics and was nominated for an Oscar for its moody black and white cinematography. But it is no confection! One critic described it thus: “A film of disturbing horror, absurdist comedy, and probing psychodrama.”

Set in the 19th century, it tells the tale of a grizzled, stern, and decidedly odd, veteran “wickie”, (played by Dafoe), who has been assigned a young assistant (portrayed by Pattinson) with a checkered work history that includes a shocking and deadly incident for which he may bear some responsibility. In the film, the tour of duty of the keepers is greatly extended by the intervention of a powerful Nor’easter, and the tensions only grow. As you might imagine (spoiler alert), things end well only for the population of hungry gulls.

There is a reason that there will be no link to the movie trailer in this article -- our goal is to encourage visitors to our lighthouse islands! Anyway, the Twombly cousins created something of an antidote to the darkness, by accompanying their viewing with ice cream sundaes.

Later, Francesca had an even better idea for exorcising the movie’s dark implications: meme-ify it! So the cousins downloaded still photos from the film and artfully recreated portraits with themselves as stand-ins for the actors, with Straitsmouth replacing the film’s far offshore Nova Scotia setting. *Continued on page 3.*



If you are thinking this was “just a movie,” do take note of this piece of history from our very own islands, as recounted in historian Paul St. Germain’s *Saving Straitsmouth Island* (2020). In a December 4, 1913 journal entry [Thacher] Keeper Creed wrote “1st Asst Cook attempt assault with danger weapon, 2nd Asst Carter with oar.” Soon thereafter, Keeper Creed was dispatched to Straitsmouth Island, and Cook took over duties on Thacher.



VOLUNTEER WORK CREW PROFILE: MARY ELLEN & STEVE KOTHER

Steve & Mary Ellen Kother Steve fixes a motor on a mower



Dottie Carroll with Mary Ellen Kother Steve Kother follows behind George Carroll

Steve and Mary Ellen Kother discovered Thacher Island in 1989 while vacationing on Rockport’s Long Beach and returned each year to admire the island from afar. In 1992, wondering how to get to the island, they asked shop owners on Rockport’s Bearskin Neck and learned of long-time Keepers George & Dottie Carroll. The two couples became good friends but that summer the island was inaccessible because the ramp had been destroyed by the “Perfect Storm” the previous October. Once access was restored, the Carrolls invited the Kothers out to clear trails on Thacher Island. Every vacation after, the Kothers joined the Wednesday work crews until they were invited to spend time as intern Keepers with Jeannette Haynes and Sharron Cohen in 2016.

The Kothers are now early season Keepers each year with Jeannette and Larry Haynes. Jeannette describes Steve’s skill set this way: “Steve is like the best of John Bennett, George Carroll, and Roger Perkins rolled into one! I believe all three of them would be proud.” That is high praise from Jeannette!

Mary Ellen describes her attachment to the islands differently: “Experiencing the islands is unlike anything else. The tranquility, fresh air, night sky, sunrise/sunset and being off the grid make it unique.” She enjoys the sense of accomplishment when assigned tasks are completed. While Steve shares her view, he adds, “for every task, you work with the tools available, and you sometimes have to improvise. (Consider) the brown skiff which sits at the guest mooring on Thacher. It had a hole and would take on water.” With no boat yard nearby, he had to be resourceful and as a result, the skiff that Steve repaired is in use today.

And the birds ... Mary Ellen enjoys observing the life cycle of the gulls, from mating, to eggs, to chicks, to fledglings and adulthood as well as the behavior of the parents as they attend to their hatchlings. She easily spots the pairs of Oystercatchers by their sharp whistle and bright orange red bill, and admires the devotion between the mated pairs.

The Kothers continue to be committed to the islands, “to preserve them for future generations.” We are lucky to have them as volunteer Keepers.

— George Langer



SEARCHING FOR VOLUNTEERS

Are you searching for a rewarding volunteer opportunity? Do you enjoy writing? Look no further. Volunteers are needed to serve on the TSIA Communications Committee!

The TSIA Communications Committee is responsible for print and digital communications from the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association to members, donors, and friends. *Island News* is published twice a year in April and November, and *Island Musings* is emailed during the season.

As a volunteer member of the Committee, you will work collaboratively with other volunteers to explore topics. Once the Committee determines the topics, each volunteer will research and prepare their assigned articles.

This activity can be accomplished remotely. Articles for *Island News* are generally 300-500 words and may include photos and/or graphics. Volunteers work about 10 hours twice a year in February and September. The Committee meets virtually via Zoom, about 2-3 times for each issue. The Committee includes 8-10 volunteers who work collaboratively by reviewing each other's articles. Your article(s) will include your byline. This volunteer work is rated as fun and rewarding. No one is harmed in the process.

Interested in volunteering with us? Contact info@thacherisland.org to learn more about trail maintenance, carpentry, electronics, mechanics, docent, publicity, boat crew and keeper opportunities.

In Memoriam

JOHN GREGORY "GREG" PORTER II

December 2, 1943- February 7, 2024

Greg Porter liked people, working with his hands, traveling, being near the ocean, and caring for the earth. By those standards, his life was fully lived. After college, as a Peace Corps volunteer, he taught English on the Micronesian island of Rota. Between 1975 and 1977, while living on the island of Saipan, he worked as curriculum coordinator for Micronesian vocational education.

In the early 1980s, while employed as steward at Sandy Bay Yacht Club in Rockport, Porter joined the Thacher Island Town Committee and worked with other early volunteers to make Thacher accessible to visitors. His daughter, Lisa, who had been along for his adventures in Micronesia, remembered those summer trips to Thacher as especially wonderful times with her father. *Continued on page 5.*

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

We recently received the following letter from a visitor to Thacher Island.

"On August 1st our family was treated to a memorable morning at Thacher island. We were simply blown away by the natural beauty, rich history, and abundant hospitality of the people from Rockport. Thanks for taking time to show us a part of the country we have not visited but will be sure to return to."

This kind of letter is not all that unusual; it represents a lot of the correspondence that we receive from visitors to Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands. The breathtaking beauty of both islands, together with their historical significance and the welcoming presence of over 100 volunteers who give generously of their time almost always results in a memorable experience.

We very much appreciate these notes but we also want to express our own appreciation to everyone who makes all of this possible. The generous 1,100+ Thacher & Straitsmouth islands Association members, donors, and volunteers, the Rockport Community Preservation Committee, the Corporate Sponsors of our Lighthouse Cruises, and many others too numerous to mention. To all of you...THANKS!

Finally, I am happy to report that our Endowment Fund, which we wrote about in last Fall's *TSI News*, has now reached \$233,000. This fund will be important as we continue to plan for improvements needed on both Islands in the coming years. My sincerest thanks to everyone who has contributed to this fund.

With warm regards,

— *Bill Whiting*

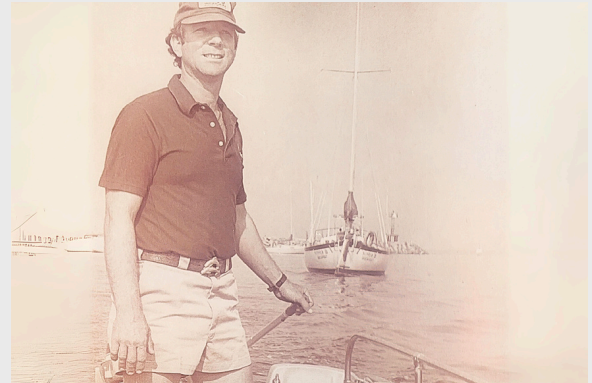


Lisa Porter and J. P. Williamson, a close friend, during farewell ceremony for Thacher Island volunteer Greg Porter

In 1985, Porter took a job at Brown's Yacht Yard in Gloucester. Initially just for the summer, the job lasted 30 years. During the off-season he drove around the country visiting friends and, in a move that surprised many, began acquiring what would become a 400-acre parcel of land in northern Vermont.

"No one expected Greg to live anywhere he couldn't see the ocean," said his sister-in-law, Karen Jarmon, but the purchase echoed his earlier efforts to preserve Thacher Island. Porter's daughter said, "He worked with a forester. He put much of the land in trust. My father had a strong sense of stewardship."

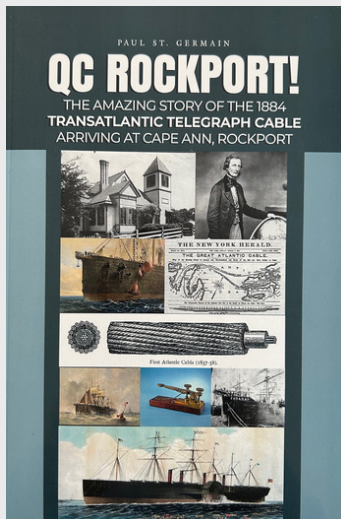
Greg Porter died in San Diego, California, fittingly within sight of the sea. On June 17, 2024, in accordance with his wishes, family and friends boarded a Thacher Island launch to bid him a final farewell in sight of Thacher Island's twin towers.



Greg Porter in a Sandy Bay Yacht Club launch, circa 1987

NEW BOOK ABOUT ROCKPORT'S CONNECTION TO THE TRANSATLANTIC TELEGRAPH CABLE

Most people have heard of the Transatlantic Telegraph Cables. They were strung along the floor of the Atlantic Ocean in the second half of the nineteenth century to enable the transmission of short textual messages between North America and Europe. However, few know that Rockport, Massachusetts played a role in making this complex international project successful. A new book by Paul St. Germain brings this amazing story to light.



St. Germain's interest in transatlantic telegraphy began in 1984 when he participated in Rockport's celebration of the 100th anniversary of a cable landing at the town's Pebble Beach. During his many hours of research and authoring numerous books on the history of diverse topics around Rockport, he collected information about the telegraph cable, now culminating in this new book.

The laying of the transatlantic cables was one of the great international undertakings of the mid-19th century. Telegraphy helped to spur the Industrial Revolution by enabling rapid communications across land. It was not long before people began to consider the problem of extending telegraphy across the Atlantic Ocean. North America was two months away from Europe by ship, and a regular postal system did not exist. Therefore, letters had to be entrusted to anyone willing to carry them across the long sea voyage. A cable could transmit a message and its response between the two continents on the same day.

The quest to establish a reliable transatlantic telegraphic link took 12 years and five attempts at the cost of tens of millions of dollars before finally succeeding in 1866. One nautical mile of cable weighed over 20,000 pounds - so heavy that two cable-laying ships were required to carry the length of cable needed to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

Just about every prominent scientist and inventor of the time was involved, including Alexander Graham Bell, Guglielmo Marconi, Michael Faraday, Thomas Edison, James Maxwell, and others. This book includes the fascinating stories of their contributions.

St. Germain's book focuses on the Rockport Cable, which landed in 1884 and connected America to Ireland. Two cable houses were constructed in Rockport. The "Cable Hut," located at Pebble Beach in South Rockport, was the "testing" signal house at the ocean entry point of the cable. Messages were sent worldwide from the "Cable House" located closer to the town center on Norwood Avenue.

This new book is titled: *CQ Rockport! The Amazing Story of the 1884 Transatlantic Telegraph Cable arriving at Cape Ann, Rockport*. CQ Rockport! in the title refers to the official telegraphic call letters used to communicate with the Rockport Cable Station. It has 280 pages and 185 historical photographs and is available for sale on the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association website. Proceeds will benefit the TSIA.

— Paul St. Germain with Norm Delisle and Kristy Rudel



Rockport's Cable House

2024 SUNSET LIGHTHOUSE CRUISE

There were full boats and happy passengers on our two fundraising cruises in July supporting the Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association. The TSIA is grateful to the eight corporate sponsors who provided foundational funding, and we encourage our members to patronize these local businesses. TSIA introduced a new category of individual sponsorship called Cruise Patron Donors. Fifteen individuals and/or families joined to support this TSIA fundraising effort.

The Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Association appreciates the support of our corporate sponsors:



*Captain David Anthony Condino
Marine Survey Services
Marine Environment Consultant*

CRUISE PATRON DONORS

Peter Bergholtz, Thomas Bower, Peg Brady & David Condino, Monica Lawton & Ray Crane, Ann Hochberg, Stephen King, George Langer & Karen Wise, William Murphy, George Record, Randy Saville, Don Southard, Bill & Debbie Whiting, Christine Lovgren, Christine Millhouse, Clay Kern



LEE LAMKIN RECALLS FAMILY TIME ON THACHER ISLAND

In 1968 Jim Reed, a 1st Class Boatswain's Mate with the US Coast Guard, was assigned as the 1st officer on Thacher Island, along with two other Coast Guardsmen. Lee, the oldest daughter of the six Reed children, remembers making the first of many family visits to Thacher Island in the spring of 1969.

Loblolly Cove in Rockport was the rendezvous spot where her dad would appear in a small Boston Whaler to pick up the family. The boat, also laden with provisions for the servicemen, would often encounter such rough seas that Lee would fear they would never make it to the island. After some of the scariest boat rides of their lives, her dad would finally hook up to the winch and hoist the boat up the ramp. The kids helped transfer boxes of groceries to the waiting cart at the western end of the rail system, and it was their job to push it up to the turntable for delivery to the houses. The servicemen lived in the Assistant Keeper House and Lee's mom and siblings stayed next door in the Principal Keeper House.

Her father's post on the island over the course of five years afforded the family ample time to make cherished memories during their extended summer visits. After island chores such as painting and mowing were finished there was time for fun and games. The day ended with a reward for the child who picked the most dandelions, a fun way to get the weeding done. The children and family dogs always had free reign of the island, but Lee reminds us it was a wild place full of poison ivy and brambles. Low tide was a favorite time because they could explore the tidal pools searching for periwinkles and crabs. Her dad made lead sinkers for fishing; the catch of the day, which also might include lobsters, was made into a delicious seafood stew.

The tidal pools around the island were favorite places for the Reed children to explore at low tide. Can you picture them here searching for periwinkles and crabs? Photo Credit: Rick Frost

Of course, shenanigans occurred on the island: the North Tower, not in use at the time, was off limits but with the door propped open it was an enticing place to sneak in to play. The kids never went out on the unsafe parapet for fear of getting caught. Instead, they were allowed to climb the South Tower with their dad to see the views. Once a terrible barking alerted the family that their German Shepard, Duchess, had fallen into the cistern. In her panic she severely injured her pads and had to be fished out and bandaged. When Boy Scout Troop 1, from their hometown of Beverly, pitched their tents on the lawn, Lee's father would tell stories about ghosts and sea serpents. One scout got so scared he ran into the house and slept with the family for the night.

Lee remembers terrible storms requiring her father to set the foghorn. The heavy fog rolled in off the ocean at the back of the house, sometimes so thick it seemed a sea serpent could really be lurking there. Rex Trailer, WBZ-TV's singing cowboy, discovered the island, landing often on the helipad on clear days. He would convince Jim to come flying, tipping the helicopter with Jim on the low side amidst shouts to level off.

Their dad told of Edwin Rowe Snow, the "Flying Santa," who flew over the island dropping holiday gifts from a small plane. In a Coast Guard tradition that continues to this day, the packages contained books and treats for the servicemen to let them know they were remembered by the outside world. Lee's parents used a CB (Citizen's Band) radio to stay in touch with the mainland aptly choosing "The Old Lamplighter" and "The Little Mermaid" as their "handles" which were easy to identify among the radio chatter.

In 1973 Jim was reassigned to Hull, the light station from which he retired, and the family moved on but their ties to Thacher Island remained strong. Later, the entire family returned to the island for a special visit honoring Jim's 22 years of service as a guardsman, showing the newest generation of Reeds where their grandfather served, and their parents roamed as children. Entering the Principal Keeper House, Lee and her sister Sherry climbed the stairs to the 3rd floor marveling at the fact that not much had changed in 20 years. As they gazed at the twin beds where they had slept, they were flooded with childhood memories of their time on the island and agreed it was a magical place to have spent their formative years.

— Denise Farnsworth

USFW Survey Shows a Decline in Thacher Island Gull Colony

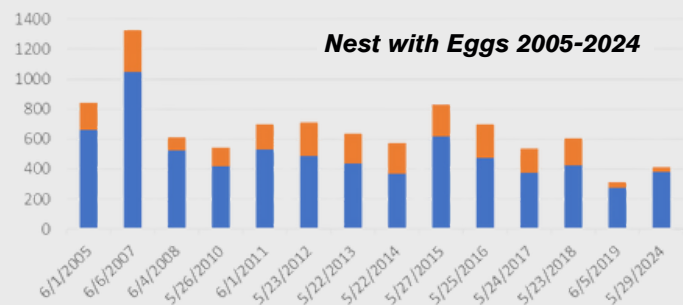


Gull eggs in nest, Photographer: Sue Thomas/USFW

In August a US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFW) team led by Wildlife Biologist Nancy Pau conducted a colonial (breeding in colonies) waterbird survey on Thacher Island. Following a counting hiatus of five years, the 2024 survey data indicates a decline in nests with eggs for the Greater Black-backed and Herring Gulls compared to the results from previous years. One factor that may be contributing to the decline is the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in the gull colonies. It is unknown exactly when HPAI began to affect the gull colonies but we do know it was present in 2022. The Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University identified HPAI in samples collected by TSIA volunteers on Thacher Island.

The 2024 survey data gathered from Thacher Island is incorporated annually into the Maritime Canada and Northeastern US portion of the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative (Learn more at <https://atlanticflywayshorebirds.org/about/>). The USFW shares the data from each survey into an extensive database that is designed to keep track of the numbers of breeding and nesting colonial waterbirds nationally and regionally. Many states, organizations, and agencies have conducted colonial waterbird surveys independently for many years. For example, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) has conducted surveys of colonial waterbirds in Massachusetts since 1984.

— Margaret (Peg) Brady



USFW 2024 - HERG (Herring Gulls), GBBG (Great Black Back Gulls)

In the Words of the Children – Leola & Roland



It was a pivotal year, 1918; many events changed the course of history for the world and the country. In September, the Boston Red Sox won the World Series, their last for many years. That same month, an influenza pandemic was traveling across the globe. More than 250 Cape Ann residents would die in the next few months; 4000 or more were infected. On Thacher, Keeper George Gustavus took ill and was treated by local military medical personnel, who weathered stormy seas to get medicine to him.¹ In November, the Armistice was signed, ending the Great War. Six men from Rockport, with family names like Carlson, Grover and Peterson, were memorialized as war heroes.

Also in 1918, marine engineer William C. “Willie” Daggett was launching a new career. He had been appointed First Assistant Lighthouse Keeper at Thacher Island by the Bureau of Lighthouses within the Department of Commerce. After first being a mason and then a mate aboard tug and tow boats, Willie was thrilled with this opportunity to be close to the sea, in his hometown of Rockport, and with his family. His wife Ida and the two youngest of his five children, daughter Leola, aged 14 and son Roland, aged 11, joined him on Thacher. *Continued on page 9.*



Leola and Roland found their childhood years on Thacher exciting with their father, who had been away so much, now living on the island with them in the Assistant Keeper House, nestled near the North Tower.² There were five families total on the island; the six children of Principal Keeper Gustavus added to the estimated total of 15 children.³

Children on the Island in 1918 did many of the same things that children today do. They attended the Rockport Schools, did daily chores involving food preparation and housekeeping, and spent time roaming and exploring the tidepools, meadows, and rocks of the island. There were apple trees to climb as well as harvest. There was a garden to supplement the provisions from the mainland; vegetables were grown, eaten and put up for the long winter months. The family had a cow to be milked and Leola, being the elder, had responsibility for her younger brother, Roland.

Leola hosted her dearest friend Laura Martin, frequently, on the island. In letters, Laura shared her activities:

fishing off the rocks, crabbing, and going out in the punt. On rainy days, they cooked, sewed and repaired clothing. The weather was often a challenge. "I'll die of lonesomeness if this weather keeps up," moaned Laura.⁴ The fog horn, which blew continuously during her September 1919 visit, was their most steady companion.

Laura recounted what she did: "I have had lots of time for sewing. I have finished my bloomers, all but the elastic and hooks and eyes." She told of going off the island to mail letters but more importantly to get sweets. Candy was a treat. "We are going ashore today but will have to walk up and back from Loblolly. It is so rough." "Tomorrow Leola, Roland and I are going fishing off the rocks, that is if it isn't to [sic] windy and rough."⁵

Leola left the Island in 1921 to marry and start her family. Roland stayed until he finished high school. Their memories conveyed the magic of the island, finding it both a place of wonder and a place of security. Something about a finite space set against an infinite horizon created memories that were lifelong and generations deep.

— Karen Pell, granddaughter of Leola Daggett

Footnotes:

1 For an account of Gustavus and the 1918 pandemic, see *Thacher and Straitsmouth Island News*, April 2021, <https://thacherisland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TSNewsApril21.3.pdf>. **2** Today only the foundation can be seen on Thacher Island. **3** Inferred from conversations with Leola Daggett Thibeault. **4** Private correspondence from Laura Martin to Leola Daggett. **5** Private correspondence from Laura Martin to her sister Hazel.

From Both Sides Now

Bill Indresano saw Cape Ann's twin towers from the Coast Guard buoy tender Cactus back in 1959, but he never set foot on Thacher Island. After two years of reserve duty and two years of active duty on the USCG Cutter Humboldt, he had rejoined the reserves and was assigned to the buoy tender that supplied water and other necessities to those who manned the Thacher Island Light Station.

This past July, Bill, accompanied by his wife, Susan, finally made it ashore via the Thacher Island launch.

Bill and Susan Indresano, of Marblehead, in the parlor of the Principal Keeper House.





Pete Morgan and Dave Bennett paint Oil House soffit.



Sarah Glick, Dorothy Maglione, Dan Kosinski, and Tony Maglione replace rotten planks on the Thatcher Boat Ramp.



Donna Cusick removes an unused antenna from the Thatcher South Tower parapet to allow replacement of the railing.



Mike Hammerl, Dave Anderson, Randy Saville, Ray Moss, Bill Whiting, Roy Johnson, and Marty Smith (boat captain) unload bricks onto temporary ramp.



Alejandro Jimenez weed whacks a trail on Thatcher.



Patrick Kelly mows the grass at Straitsmouth Boat Ramp.



Bill Helmuth realigns the doors on the Thatcher Oil House.



Peter Bergholtz, John Doue, and Bill Sclafani pose in front of new storage shelves in Straitsmouth Barn.



Bill Whiting and Bill Sclafani build housing for the generator on Straitsmouth.



Tom Mikus, Ray Moss and Dave Anderson (hidden), Bill Helmuth, and Dick MacPherson install the last row of new solar panels on Thatcher.



Julianna Hul, Andy Hul, Gaelen Cohen, and Annie Cohen stain the Oil House walls.



On Whistle House: Jon Conant and Joe Napolitano repair the roof; Bill Sclafani, Bill Whiting, and Mike Hammerl erect scaffolding to repair the east wall.



Nathan Cohen and Julianna Hul clean the sewage aerator on Thacher.



Donna Cusick and Fred Stoddard repair winter damage to Thacher Assistant Keeper House roof.



Peter Bergholtz, Dave Anderson, and Nathan Ives construct temporary ramp for delivering materials.



Camille Glick and Leslie Milne paint new signs for Boat House.



Dave Anderson repairs a screen from the Thacher Assistant Keeper House.



Ryan Hul repairs the Thacher Assistant Keeper House plumbing.



Heidi Delisle poses next to new sign for the Thacher Privy and Art Gallery.



Leslie Milne and Dewey Glick hang new sign on Boat House.



Peter Chick, Randy Saville, and Bill Sclafani scrape, repoint, and paint Lighthouse base.



R/V South Cove Survey Ship Photo Credit: M Brady

MAPPING THE SEAFLOOR AROUND THACHER ISLAND AND ROCKPORT HARBOR

While volunteering as Keeper this summer, I noticed a small vessel, *R/V South Cove*, frequently sailing around Thacher Island. I discovered the vessel, operated by Ocean Survey, Inc., had been contracted by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Office of Coast Survey (Coast Survey) to conduct hydrographic surveys of the seafloor covering an area from Boston to Cape Ann.

The federal government has been responsible for surveying the nation's coast since 1807, when President Thomas Jefferson signed a mandate creating the US Coast Survey to conduct surveys and produce nautical charts for the maritime community to ensure safe passage to and from American ports. Nautical charts show the configuration of the shoreline and seafloor.

The existing survey data of the seafloor between Boston to Cape Ann is over 20 years old; data for several areas dates from the 1940s. The survey area comprises an extensive coastline with numerous wrecks and poorly documented hazards. Human activity and storm events have produced extensive changes to the seafloor.

Today NOAA's Coast Survey hires vessels such as *R/V South Cove* to conduct the hydrographic surveys that are the fundamental element of nautical charts. Hydrography is the science of measuring and describing the physical features of bodies of water.

Hydrographic vessels are equipped with multi-beam sonar, which uses sound waves to find and identify objects in the water to determine seafloor depth. Surveyors acquire precise locations of shallow areas, obstructions, and aids to navigation that warn mariners. They also record tide or water level measurements to provide a reference for water depths. Surveys also determine seafloor material (e.g., sand, mud, rock), which is important for anchoring, dredging, and fish habitat. The information collected by vessels such as *R/V South Cove* will be used to update the local NOAA nautical charting products thus improving the safety of maritime traffic. After January 2025 Coast Survey will no longer be making paper chart products. Therefore, only digital chart products will be updated and available at <https://devgis.charttools.noaa.gov/pod/>.

More information on the current NOAA Coast Survey Boston to Gloucester Survey can be found by entering "NOAA Hydrographic Survey Projects 2024" into your online search engine and then clicking on "Atlantic Coast Projects" and "Boston to Gloucester".

To view the wealth of information for navigators produced by the NOAA OCS surveys, go to <https://www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/enonline/enonline.html>

— Margaret (Peg) Brady



**The U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey
(a predecessor of NOAA Coast Survey)
published the earliest known nautical chart of
Rockport Harbor and Thacher Island in 1859.**

NOAA Office of Coast Survey

PREPARED AND RESPONSIVE

The US Coast Guard motto is *Semper Paratus*, which translates to “Always Ready”. Preparedness describes the boat captains and crews of the vessels serving Thacher and Straitsmouth Islands. They train, they practice, and sometimes they are called to perform both first aid and sea rescues.

As each active season begins, first aid and CPR training are provided by professional firefighters and EMTs by McNelly Associates. Bob Krause, Coordinator of Marine Operations, sets up this classroom training and attendance is mandatory.

According to Syd Wedmore, Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands Town Committee Chairman, “over the years most injuries have been land-based: three episodes of broken ribs, two fractured ankles, and two broken wrists.” There was one serious head injury which required the USCG to evacuate the person to a Boston hospital. As he explains, the first aid training complements common sense and ready contact with the Rockport Harbormasters.

First aid assistance in 2024 was no different. A new intern Keeper, Wendi Combes, was walking Straitsmouth with her husband Tom on her second day on the island. She misstepped and injured her ankle. When her initial efforts to treat it with ice and elevation did not reduce the pain, it was decided she needed medical attention. Low tide prevented *Thacher Island II* from landing on the Straitsmouth ramp, so Captain David Condino coordinated and piloted a zodiac to the ramp, where volunteers Nate Ives and Meredith Glaser assisted in getting her aboard.



Keeper Wendi Combes is assisted up the ramp of Thacher Island II by her husband Tom Combes and Captain David Condino, while Syd Wedmore steadies the chair. Lee Marr and Bill Hellmuth are available to help as needed. Photo credit: Bob Krause

On shore, with the help of the Harbormasters, wheelchair and transport awaited to get her to the nearest medical facility. She had a fractured tibia and was fitted with a walking boot. She returned to the island and her Keeper duties after two hours, in keeping with the best traditions of lighthouse keepers historically.

Rescues at sea are less common, fortunately. Man-overboard Training (MOB) is coordinated internally by Krause and TSIA captains, many of whom have trained in the military or Merchant Marines. The seas on the training day in May 2024 were three to four feet high in Sandy Bay. Captains and crew practiced in rough conditions, so when a rescue is needed, everyone knows their roles and safety practices.

Those skills were tested later this summer, when docent Cate Cahill was paddling a kayak with a friend near Granite Pier and came across an Everett man in a kayak that was taking on water. As he realized he had no pump or life jacket, the kayak tipped, throwing him into the water. While Cate’s friend stayed with the fisherman, Cate paddled back to Granite Pier and alerted Captain Seth Cutter, who immediately took *Thacher Island II* out to rescue him, then in chest deep water on the rocks, cold and in danger. With MOB training fresh in all minds, the crew worked quickly to get the man on board. Thanks to crewman Sebastian Lovasco’s ingenuity in repurposing a siphon hose to partly drain the kayak, it too was retrieved. Slowly, Seth navigated *Thacher Island II* back to the pier, watching to see that both person and boat stayed safe. At the ramp, the man’s damaged kayak was secured, while the owner was able to get his truck and collect both kayak and gear, thankful that docents, trained captains and crews were ready and prepared that day.



After a simulated rescue of “Oscar,” the Man Overboard in stormy seas, the crew of Thacher Island II, Sebastian Lovasco, Bill Cardini and Christine Milhouse, navigate safely back to the pier. Photo Credit: Margaret (Peg) Brady



Peg and Dave make it clear.

THACHER HACKS: HELP VIDEOS FOR KEEPERS

It seems we are all now conditioned to the idea that, if faced with a task we haven't attempted before, whether it is how to: set up a router, sharpen lawn mower blades, replace windshield wipers, or you name it -- there is a probably at least one YouTube video where an expert patiently guides the viewer through the process.

As an apprentice keeper on Thacher, Leslie Milne says she "learned so many new things!" Realizing that she would need to recall details a full year later, she concluded that she was "bound to forget a lot." So, in 2022, while reviewing some tasks under the tutelage of keepers Peg Brady and David Condino, she made videos for herself to bring to the island the following year.

Then, Leslie says, "I got the idea that maybe they would be helpful to others." She made a list of topics, recruited veteran keepers as her actors, and started filming summer of 2023. Among the starring instructors are Peg and David, as well as keepers John and Darlene Fulton, and Dewey and Camille Glick. With representative titles like "checking the aerator", "filling keeper and assistant keeper houses' cisterns", and "checking fuel level for winch engine," these videos are no threat to go viral -- but have already been valuable for keeper training!

Leslie, as producer (nicknamed by John Fulton "Leslie B. deMilne"), at times adds some explanatory narration. In one video she tells actor/keeper Camille Glick, who is heading up a set of stairs for the outdoor portion of aerator inspection, "I'll follow you, because I don't know how to edit." Leslie is ok with not revising, feeling that the unedited quality of the videos "gives them some charm, as you watch folks struggle with some of the tasks." Indeed it does, and it also lets viewers know things may not always go just like on YouTube.

And though the infrastructure on Straitsmouth is less complex than on Thacher, there is a clear case for a series sequel!

Videographer: Leslie Milne



Dave and John discussion.



Dewey shows how it's done!



Camille checks aerator.

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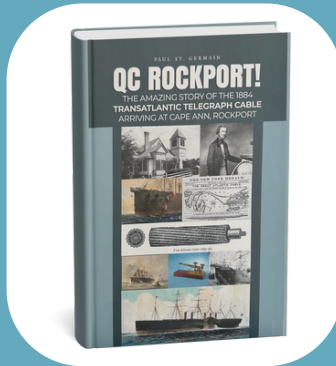


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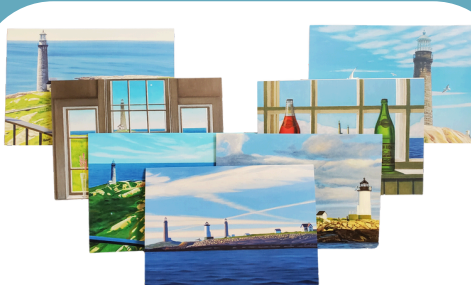
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