

Thacher Island Association

P.O. BOX 73

ROCKPORT, MASS. 01966

Thacher Island Newsletter

November 1995

WHISTLEHOUSE REPAIRS PROGRESS

How many remember the pristine interior of the Thacher Island Whistle House, after Armand had cleaned it and freshly painted it? Ned enjoyed showing off the interior and demonstrating the powerful loud force of that older horn. The generator, compressor, air tank and controls were all operational. The hot air furnace was working and the white walls and ceiling were glossy, along with the red floors of clean Bristol-fashion Coast Guard style. It was obvious what the keepers do during the long winters. Armand can tell us.

Then came the "No-name" storm! Those 12 inch brick walls were bombarded by the wind, rain and spray. On the seaward side more than half the brick wall was broached and opened up to the elements. The compressor, generator, and furnace were moved and tipped. The three sash were blown out by the wind pressure and green water. The horns were also flattened. It was a disaster inside, and Betty and Armand did what they could to pick up and patch, even replacing the outside wall with a temporary wooden structure to keep it closed in. However, a couple of years later, after a series of storms, the repairs ended up for nought.

By the Spring of 1995, the winged residents had some pretty good piles of excrement going. The eaves, attic, and enclosed rafters were great locations for bird nurseries, and the pipes and conduits offered great perches for dumping feces. Wind, rain, snow, and pigeons flew in and flew out at will. Not really a very pleasant place; though the birds usually took a hasty exit on our arrival. The situation was not good. None of the island agencies indi-



The Whistlehouse in sunnier days.

cated any tendency toward supplying monies for rebuilding. It was left for our own Thacher Island Association, ta-daa (fanfare), to fill the breach and commence the arduous undertaking.

Those beautiful spring days in May and June on Thachers are very attractive for visits and work parties. Phone calls did the job, and willing parties came forward. How could one refuse a chance to get a ride DOWN the ramp on those new launch rollers!

Soon there was a group of young at heart workers establishing temporary supports under the seaward side of the roof, which had survived in pretty good shape. A large hunk of old brick wall was removed, but not without difficulty. A lot of sh-t was shoveled out, a new concrete foundation was poured, and anchor bolts imbedded. By the Fourth of July, a 2x6 sill, 2x6 studs,

and 2x6 plate were in place.

The effort slowed during the hot days of summer, even though air conditioned Thachers (in the shade) was not too tough to take. By Labor Day there was a lot of 3/4 inch tongue and groove plywood nailed and screwed with galvanized deck screws. The stubborn pigeons were still going in and out at will, and doing that other stuff also. Finally and recently the small chinks and openings all were closed up, the door closed and the pigeon welcome sign was removed. On the 14th of September there was one pigeon inside, looking forlornly out one of the windows. His world had suddenly narrowed considerably and his ability to produce calcium deposits reduced. Perhaps in a few weeks when he looks down from pigeon heaven, he will contemplate what a pleasant place that Thacher Island Whistle House WAS to live in; but the land-

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lords were not very sociable.

The volunteer help that constituted the work parties were very sociable however, and we had some great times in the kitchen around the keeper's lunch table, with Vi and John, Nancy and Merrill, Kathy and Andy. There was always someone to operate and crew the launch, with: John Bennett, Robert Smith, George Carroll, Seth Cutter, Dan Karr, Jim Runkle, Don Seiffert, Mallory Lash, Myron Brown, Lee Marr, and Geof Dangerfield. There were a few times when this project should have been a "hard hat job" but not necessarily because of the gull threat, but Seth healed fast. The gulls did their bombing runs but made few contacts.

Members loaned personal tools to expedite the work. We all salivated at Mallory's cut-off saw when it came to producing square blocking. And John's sheet-rock square was very helpful along with the sheet-rock screw.

There are still more little jobs to do around the whistle house that will be continuing this fall; and Dotty would like to see the Thacher Island Museum Room spruced up and refurbished in the future. She has stuff there that one does not see in the Sandy bay Historical Society. Join us if you want a fun day. A lot of days we start late and finish early. That's the benefit of a non-profit organization. Δ

Jim Runkle

Ode To Anthony

*When Anthony went out
in his boat,
He lost all but his wife and
a goat.
I'm glad he could swim,
For a wave washed him in -
Or I wouldn't be here with
this note.*

-Olive Thacher Wiper

Thacher island Committee News

Since the last Newsletter (in June), the Committee, for the most part, has been busy with very routine business.

According to a news article in the Gloucester Daily Times, July 25, 1995, the Thacher Island Deeding portion of the USCG Appropriation Bill has been approved by the Senate Commerce Committee.....but the larger bill was scheduled to go before the entire Senate after Labor Day. If there are too many amendments to the larger Appropriation Bill, it could be vetoed again!

Everyone will be pleased to know that the Cameron Memorial Plaque and the Historic Register Plaque have been permanently mounted on the stone utility building just beyond the boathouse. The Fish & Wildlife/International Chimney framed sign, regarding work on the North Tower, has been moved to the North Tower, where it more appropriately belongs. The work of preparing the original site for the Memorial Plaque proved to involve too many problems. Moving the site to a spot where everyone will see it as they enter the Island seemed a reasonable compromise. (It also clearly designates the entire Island project as a memorial to Ned!)

We're happy to report that the Whistlehouse finally has a substantial repair....which we hope has made it weatherproof to withstand the elements until we have the funds to do a proper restoration. Credit for this accomplishment goes to committee member Jim Runkle and his group of volunteers. If any Association members have any fund raising ideas.....or expertise in grant writing, we could sure use them.....especially on this project.

At the August Committee meeting it was voted to discontinue the regular weekend tourist trips to the Island, starting with the 1996 season. The trips were attracting more and more non-members....who neither joined the Association nor left a donation. More time can now be spent on special events for Association members and fulfilling our obligation to make the Island available for educational activities. Δ

Meetings

The Thacher Island Town Committee is chaired by John and Mary Bennett, 1-508-546-2849, with meetings scheduled for the fourth Tuesday of every month. There are twelve other members of the Committee, with meetings being held in the Fire Station.

The Thacher Island Association Board of Directors meets on the third Monday of every other month, beginning with January, at the Sandy bay Yacht Club. Officers of the Association at the present time are: George Fisher, President, 1-508-546-9982; Richard Vassallo, Vice President, 1-508-546-3310; Robert Eirich, Treasurer, 1-508-546-6056; and Dorothy Carroll, Secretary, 1-508-546-7697. There are thirteen other members of the Board of Directors.

Some Recent Comments:

"Thank you for the opportunity to donate to such a worthy endeavor. I try to visit Rockport every summer and I always enjoy the view of Thacher Island and the Twin Lights. Keep up the good work."

"I have not visited this island for at least ten years. It is well kept and a worthy investment in preserving this historic landmark."

"Bring back the clambakes on the island!"