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Island Musings

Volume 2026, Issue 1

Ramping Up for the 2026 Season

From new findings about the shipwrecked pinnace *Watch and Wait* to the use of ten-inch spikes, here's news from Thacher & Straitsmouth Islands as our 2026 season begins.

It was a tough “old fashioned” winter on Cape Ann, with winds reaching 48 mph, more than three feet of snow, and sub-zero temperatures over several days, and once again the Thacher Island boat ramp sustained major damage. Far worse for the Cape Ann community was the loss of F/V *Lily Jean*, with no survivors.



Waves Tear Away the Heart of the Thacher Ramp

The boat ramp on Thacher was rendered unusable when brutal seas ripped 30 feet from its center in February. Along with the surface decking, the hungry waves pulled the 26-year-old spikes out of 10x10" stringers that formed the foundation of the ramp.

Thacher I made a precarious landing in mid-April to deliver support and decking lumber along with 10" spikes to use in repairing the damage. A cold, windy spring has delayed further reconstruction efforts, but volunteers will see that the foundation and decking are nailed down in time for visitors' arrival.

Photo Courtesy of Gail Zeman

On Saturday, May 16th at 9:00am the link to make launch reservations for the coming season will open on the TSIA website.

[ORDER YOUR TICKETS](#) !

Keeper Descendants Lost with F/V Lily Jean

We at TSIA join the Cape Ann community as it continues to mourn the tragic January 2026 loss of the F/V *Lily Jean* with all aboard. Among them were Paul Beal Sr. and his son Paul Jr., who had ties to Thacher Island. They were grandson and great grandson of Austin “Bertie” Beal, a lighthouse keeper from Maine who came to serve on Thacher Island in 1931. He maintained the twin lights and fog whistle, residing there with his wife and their children until his retirement in 1945.



Austin B. Beal worked his way up the ranks from third assistant to primary keeper during 14 years of service on Thacher Island.
Photo courtesy of US Lighthouse Society Archives.

The Founding of Thacher Island

Caught up in the Great Continental Hurricane of 1635, the *Watch and Wait*, a small pinnace carrying 23 souls, struggled against 135 mph winds and 20-foot waves for several days. The helpless ship eventually broke apart on the Dry Salvages leaving all aboard to perish except Antony and Elizabeth Thacher. Grabbing hold of loose timber from the wreck, they were swept away separately, 2.4 miles southward by the rapid current. Entering an eddy off the southwestern tip of the island now known as Thacher, they washed ashore.



Image courtesy of Dana Gaines

Leftovers

At the end of the season before boat storage, Captain Bob Krause and a few crew members clean the launches of “leftovers.” According to Bob, the collection is a bit surprising. It’s expected that someone would forget a jacket, a hat that flew off in the wind, or a water bottle that rolled under a seat. But picture a half-eaten tuna sandwich or the remains of a withered salad.

We have no formal lost and found, so during the coming season please finish your lunch and pick up your clothes.



Photo courtesy from Judith Leach



Gardens for Food and Beauty

Tomatoes, cukes, zukes, lettuce, chives, oregano, beans, rhubarb, peppers and more will feed keepers this summer from gardens planted by volunteers Chris



Photo Courtesy of Chris Lovgren

Lovgren and Meredith Glaser. On Straitsmouth they'll plant around the flagpole and on Thacher in the former chicken coop.

They'll also plant sunflowers, nasturtium, bee balm and other flowers to beautify landings and keepers' yards, plus butterfly-attracting natives on Straitsmouth. Cisterns and rain barrels provide water, seaweed adds fertilizer, and many helping hands contribute.

Helping Native Plants Thrive

Invasive plants grow wild on both Thacher and Straitsmouth, often covering and choking native vegetation that once flourished. This spring, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which maintains the island as a wildlife sanctuary, plans to locate and begin removal of invasives including oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose, amur honeysuckle, privet, and hops.



A native juniper on Thacher now gets plenty of light and looks healthy after volunteers freed it from invasive bittersweet.

Photo Courtesy of Gail Zeman.

Island Fun Fact:

The Automatic Identification System (AIS) is a marine navigation safety device that transmits and monitors vessel location in real time. When right whales are passing north by Thacher Island, the AIS can send a message warning oncoming ships to slow down. Thacher Island was chosen as a site to investigate the use of this system to avoid vessel strikes with the migrating whales. TSIA members Dick MacPherson and Donna Cusick played an important role in its installation.



See you soon!

***Thacher &
Straitsmouth Islands
Association***

Your Membership Matters!

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