



Coast Guard Heritage Museum

at the U.S. Custom House in Barnstable Village, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

Spring 2021 Newsletter

The oldest continuously used and last staffed lighthouse in the country is in Boston Harbor ...

by Nancy S. Seasholes

The historic Boston Light overlooks the sea from Little Brewster Island, casting a light beam 27 miles into the Atlantic. Built in 1716 by Massachusetts, before the nation was founded, the circular structure was slightly tapered, constructed from rubblestone and about 60 feet high with light provided by candles. Also built were a keeper's house, barn and a wharf. A fog cannon was installed in 1719. (After being discontinued in 1851, it was removed from the island to the Coast Guard Academy in 1962, and returned in 1993.)



Early damage by both fire and storm resulted in multiple repairs but the most significant damage occurred during the Revolutionary War on July 20, 1775. While British troops occupied Boston and held Boston Light, patriot troops burned the wooden parts of the tower. Americans burned it again on July 31 and again in September. Finally, as the last of the British were leaving Boston, they blew up the lighthouse (Snowman, Sally R. and James G. Thomson, 1999 *Boston Light: A Historical Perspective*. Flagship Press)

Boston Light was not rebuilt by Massachusetts until 1783. Again, it was circular, constructed of mortared rubblestone and 75 feet high, with illumination provided by four fish oil lamps. By 1809, while under the purview of the secretary of the treasury, large cracks developed in the east wall and six iron hoops were installed around the tower for support. Today, there are five, the sixth having been removed sometime between 1917 and 1935. The present aluminum bands replaced corroded steel ones in 1973-74. In 1811, a revolving mechanism was installed to create a flashing light. Other improvements over the years included the addition of a chandelier with 14 lamps and reflectors, and

the present cast iron stairs, iron window frames, balcony and large iron door were added in 1844. In 1851, the fog cannon was replaced by a wind-up bell. (Snowman and Thomson, 1999)

Under the U.S. Lighthouse Board, many more improvements were made to Boston Light. A second-order revolving Fresnel lens was installed

in 1859, and to accommodate it, the tower was raised to 89 feet. The fog signals were upgraded a number of times: in 1869 a striking apparatus was introduced; in 1871 a whistle; 1872 a fog-trumpet and in 1888 a steam siren. In 1876, a brick building that still stands was constructed to house the fog signal. (It now also houses the generator.). Other buildings constructed in this period and also still standing are the frame keeper's house and a brick cistern (1884) brick oil house (1889; mineral oil had replaced lard oil as fuel in 1883), and replacement boathouse (1899) (Snowman and Thomson, 1999). Under the U.S. Lighthouse Service, the former wick lamps at Boston Light were replaced in 1913 with an incandescent oil vapor (IOV) lamp. (Snowman and Thomson, 1999)

More significant changes were made under the U.S. Coast Guard. In 1948 Boston Light was electrified. Power was originally supplied by a generator and batteries were replaced in 1957 by an underwater cable from Windmill Point in Hull with generator backup. The motor driving the rotating machinery of the Fresnel lens was also electrified, ending the keeper's having to wind it by hand every four hours. (The keeper still had to climb the stairs to the light at sundown and sunrise every day to turn on and off the switches for the light and the rotating gear.) In 1959

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Boston Light (cont'd from pg. 1)

Boston Light was changed from family-operated to a male-billeted station, and in 1960 the Coast Guard removed the badly deteriorated duplex assistant keepers' house by burning it.



In 1964 Boston Light became a National Historic Landmark, in 1987 it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and in November 1989, just as the Coast Guard was preparing to automate the light and remove personnel from Little Brewster, the U. S. Senate passed a law sponsored by Senator Edward Kennedy requiring that Boston Light be permanently manned. Boston Light thus became the only manned lighthouse in the United States. The law also required that public access to Little Brewster be facilitated, and this occurred during the 1990s, culminating with the official opening of the island to the public in 1999.

The light was finally automated in 1998, again the last one in the country, and now remains always "on," ending the

keeper's having to climb the stairs twice a day. The latest installment in the transformation of Boston Light occurred in 2003, when Sally Snowman was appointed the first civilian keeper since 1941. She is also the first woman keeper in Boston's Light's long and illustrious history (*Snowman and Thomson 1999*).

Prepared by Nancy S. Seascholes, 2009

Nancy S. Seascholes and Timothy L. Binzen, 2008 Archeological Overview and Assessment of the Boston Harbor Islands National Park Area: Volume 1. Archeological Services at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Editor's Note: Today, Little Brewster Island is an active U.S. Coast Guard navigational aid facility. To view this historic lighthouse or simply take in the beautiful views of the harbor, take a two-hour Boston Harbor Lighthouse Cruise narrated by National Park Service and U.S. Coast Guard staff. Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park is in Recovery Phase 3 Status. Visit Boston Harbor Islands Partnership Site for current information to determine operating status.



Above: a 1938 photo of the fog signal cannon at Boston Light. In 1719, Boston Light Keeper John Hayes requested "That a great Gun may be placed on Said Island to answer Ships in a Fogg." One was supplied that year on which the date 1700 was engraved. This cannon is the oldest known Coast Guard artifact and is currently displayed on Little Brewster Island in Boston Harbor. - Greg Ketchen, Pres., CGHM

President's Report

We opened the museum to the public this year on May 1st. This had been our practice for the past 15 years until 2020 when COVID-19 required us to delay for nearly three months. As is Coast Guard tradition, we enthusiastically met this new challenge, came up with solutions and came out stronger in the end. We're very excited about our future.

Several talented and experienced people have joined our staff and Board of Directors. They nicely complement our already extraordinary cadre of volunteers. New exhibits have been added, existing ones improved. If you haven't stopped by in a while, we think that you'll be pleasantly surprised. We're also supporting more events including CCTIs (Chiefs' call to initiation) and promotion ceremonies. Support from active-duty Coasties has been exceptional and invaluable.

CGHM President Greg Ketchen

November 2020:
Recognizing Joannie Dubis
for three years of
dedication and hard work



March 2021:
CPO Initiation
more photos on page 6



April 2021:
Promotion Ceremony
for ETC Steve Daem



In celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the U.S. Life-Saving Service:

U. S. COAST GUARD NOTABLE BIOGRAPHIES

Sumner Increase Kimball



A young lawyer from Maine, Sumner I. Kimball was appointed as the chief of the Treasury Department's Revenue Marine Division in 1871. He had joined the Treasury Department as a clerk 10 years earlier and had proven his abilities as a manager.

Using his hard-earned political know-how, and a good dose of Yankee common sense, Kimball proceeded to completely overhaul the Revenue Marine and the hodge-podge system of lifesaving stations along the nation's coast that were also under the control of the Revenue Marine Division. His impact on both organizations would prove to be immeasurable.

After the Civil War, the Revenue Marine, and the executive branch agencies generally, came under intense Congressional scrutiny. Economy was the name of the game during this time and expenditures were scrutinized across the board. Hence, Kimball decided to order the construction of new cutters not with iron hulls, which entailed considerable expense, but with proven wood hulls. The total number of petty officers and enlisted men was substantially cut and their pay reduced. Kimball also carried out a vigorous "housecleaning" of incompetent Revenue Marine officers and saw to it that discipline was tightened. A special object of his censure was the use of cutters as personal yachts by local Custom officials, a widespread abuse during that time. Kimball also put into effect a merit system to determine promotions. He also made one other great contribution to the quality of the Revenue Marine by establishing, in 1877, a School of Instruction, to train young officers. From this move developed today's Coast Guard Academy, which still trains the majority of the Coast Guard's career officers. But his greatest impact came with his work with what would become the U.S. Life-Saving Service.

Since 1848 Congress had been funding strictly volunteer stations, paying for the station and its equipment but relying on the local community to provide unpaid crews when needed. Kimball drew up regulations that set standards for personnel performance, physical standards and station routines. He convinced a parsimonious Congress to increase the funding of the Service to provide for full-time,

paid crews, led under the direction of an appointed keeper. New stations were constructed around the coast and were equipped with the finest lifesaving equipment available. In 1878, this growing network of stations was organized as a separate agency of the Treasury Department and was named the U.S. Life-Saving Service. Kimball was chosen as the General Superintendent of the new service. He served in that capacity during the entire existence of the Life-Saving Service until it was merged with the Revenue Cutter Service in 1915 to form the new U.S. Coast Guard.

Dr. Dennis Noble, a historian of the U.S. Life-Saving Service, wrote of Kimball: "Kimball was unquestionably the driving force behind the United States' possessing a first-class lifesaving organization. Much of the present-day Coast Guard's highly regarded reputation as a humanitarian organization is the result of his organizational skills and management abilities. Many of the routines that he established, such as constant drills with rescue equipment, are just as important today as they were more than a century ago. In the final analysis Kimball was the ultimate bureaucrat: he knew how to work within the federal government.

"Kimball himself never actively sought the limelight, but he realized that the exploits of his lifesavers were dramatic and could help sway politicians who controlled the purse strings. Hiring William D. O'Connor, a professional author, to write the [Life-Saving Service's] annual reports show Kimball's genius at what we would now call public relations. The regulations he passed over the years were designed not only to improve the service, but to remove the crew members from reproach. Kimball realized that to create a professional service, and one that was in large part located in small communities, his crews would have to be above petty politics and be seen as a service to the community and the nation. Apparently, Kimball lived his life along the same lines. No taint of scandal ever touched him, and his life-style made him as anonymous as the faceless clerks that served in Washington, D.C. Kimball died in that city in 1923, with very little notice." *

* Dennis Noble, *That Others Might Live: The U.S. Life-Saving Service, 1878-1915* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994, p. 155)

The Long Blue Line: Edward “Iceberg” Smith: Coast Guard’s Admiral of the Ice!

William H. Thiesen, Historian, Coast Guard Atlantic Area

To the officers of the Greenland Patrol vessels:
This is your command. Your first command. Your first
great chance. It is hard, responsible, vital duty. War duty.
Don’t fail your country or your ship or me.

Rear Admiral Edward “Iceberg” Smith, 1944

In 1944, Coast Guard Rear Admiral Edward Smith commanded U.S. Navy Task Force 24 and the Coast Guard’s Greenland Patrol. As the quote above indicates, he demanded a lot of his men, but his career shows he demanded even more of himself.



Descended from Martha’s Vineyard whalemens, Edward Hanson Smith was born in 1889 at Vineyard Haven. His parents were Edward J. and Sarah Elizabeth (Pease) Smith. After attending Vineyard Haven’s public schools and then New Bedford High School, he spent a year studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Appointed a U.S. Revenue Cutter Service cadet in 1910, Smith entered the service’s School of Instruction when classes were held on board the Revenue Cutter *Itasca* at Arundel Cove, Maryland. Smith graduated and was commissioned an ensign in May 1913. Like many of his classmates, such as famed aviator Elmer Stone and World War I hero Fletcher Brown, Smith experienced an interesting career.

From graduation to the start of World War I, Smith served on a number of East Coast cutters. After U.S. entry into the war and mobilization of the Service, he served as navigator of Cutter *Manning* in the U.S. Navy’s Atlantic Patrol Force, which escorted convoys between England and Gibraltar. After the war, he was assigned to Cutter *Seneca* as the International Ice Patrol’s first scientific observer. After that experience, he dedicated his career to operations in the Arctic and research in oceanography. Because of his focus on ice research and early work with the International



Ice Patrol, his peers nicknamed him “Iceberg” Smith.

Coast Guard cutter *Seneca* deployed on the International Ice Patrol. (U.S. Coast Guard)

He continued carrying on the duties of observer with the International Ice Patrol until August 1924. When not on Ice Patrol duty, he studied at Harvard University and prepared Coast Guard bulletins on the work of the Ice Patrol. In recognition of this work, Harvard awarded him a master’s degree in 1924. He was also awarded a fellowship in oceanography by the American Scandinavian Foundation, which he used to study a year at the Geo-Physical Institute at Bergen, Norway. After returning to the U.S., he resumed his work with the Ice Patrol reorganizing its scientific programs and introducing dynamic oceanography to predict the movement of icebergs. During this time, Smith developed a system that could forecast the annual number of icebergs drifting south from Newfoundland.

One of his most notable assignments occurred in the summer of 1928, when he commanded Cutter *Marion* in oceanographic surveys of the Labrador Sea, Davis Strait, and Baffin Bay, home of some of the most productive iceberg glaciers in West Greenland. This oceanographic work proved the most extensive of its kind ever made by the U.S. In June 1930, Harvard University awarded him a Ph.D. in Oceanographic Physics in recognition of his research in ice formation. It was the first Ph.D. awarded to an active-duty Coast Guardsman.

Coast Guard cutter *Marion* commanded by Smith in his famous cruise to study iceberg formation for the International Ice Patrol. (U.S.C.G)



Between January 1928 and June 1936, he served as commanding officer of various vessels in the Coast Guard’s Destroyer Force, which patrolled the East Coast to interdict rum runners during Prohibition. His commands during this period included five Coast Guard destroyers and Coast Guard Base 18 at Woods Hole. However, he was absent from those commands much of the time to perform work in connection with the Ice Patrol, and specialized research.

One of Smith’s assignments during this time was a flight on the dirigible *Graf Zeppelin* made in mid-summer 1931. In July 1929, Harvard University, the American Geographic Society, and the National Academy of Science had recommended him as a scientific member of an Arctic



Graf Zeppelin hovering over the water during Smith's expedition to the Russian Arctic. (USCG)



Capt. Smith on the *Graf Zeppelin*

By 1936, Smith was assigned command of Cutter *Taboe* and, in 1937, he took command of the new 327-foot cutter *Spencer*, both of which were assigned to Alaska. While commanding the latter, he was cited by the Navy Department for rescuing the crew of Navy minesweeper, USS *Swallow*, from Kanaga Island in February 1938. That same year, he was assigned command of the International Ice Patrol for the 1939 and 1940 ice seasons.

In June 1940, Smith was assigned command of famed Arctic cutter *Northland* and, in October 1941, he assumed overall command of the Coast Guard's Greenland Patrol. Composed primarily of Coast Guard cutters and aircraft, the Greenland Patrol defended against foreign incursions and supported U.S. Army airbases for aircraft transiting over the North Atlantic to the European Theater of Operations. Under Smith, Nazi forces were repeatedly prevented from establishing weather stations in Greenland.



Rare color photograph of famed Greenland Patrol flagship *Northland* breaking ice. (USCG)

Smith remained in charge of the Greenland Patrol until late 1943. During his years in command, he advanced from the rank of commander to captain then to rear admiral. Late in the war, he served as Commander, Task Force 24, U.S. Atlantic Fleet. Rear Admiral Smith was World War II's first Coast Guardsman to receive the Distinguished Service Medal – Commandant Russell Woesche received the only other DSM awarded to a Coast Guardsman for wartime service. Smith was also honored by the King of Denmark as a Commander of the First Degree of the Order of the Dannebrog.

zeppelin flight proposed by Germany. A flight of six days covering of 8,000 miles in the Russian Arctic, it was the longest non-stop flight ever made by the *Graf Zeppelin*. Serving as observer and navigator, Smith gathered from this flight more information for the International Ice Patrol.

In 1945, Rear Admiral Smith was appointed commander of the old Third Coast Guard District, headquartered in New York. In 1946, he became captain-of-the-port of New York and the first commander of the Coast Guard's Eastern Area, known today as Coast Guard Atlantic Area. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, he also served on the staff of the Applied Physics Laboratory of John Hopkins University, the Weapons System Evaluation Group under the Secretary of Defense, and the Navy's Naval Research Advisory Committee. Smith was a member of the American Geophysical Union, Arctic Institute of North America, Aero-Arctic Society, and Propeller Club of New York. He also held an unlimited master's license, the highest certification granted a master mariner.



Captain "Iceberg" Smith in his winter jacket on the Greenland Patrol during World War II. (USCG)

In 1950, Rear Admiral Edward "Iceberg" Smith retired from the Coast Guard with more than 40 years of service. That same year, he accepted the position of director of the Oceanographic Institution at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, and remained its head until 1956. Smith died on his 72nd birthday in 1961 and was laid to rest at his ancestral home of Martha's Vineyard. He contributed greatly to our knowledge of the Arctic and oceanography and was one of the countless men and women of the Coast Guard's long blue line.



Rear Admiral "Iceberg" Smith change-of-command in Argentina, Newfoundland. Smith turned over command of Navy Task Force 24 to Coast Guard Rear Admiral Earl Rose (fourth from left) in August 1945. Photo: U.S. Navy



Coast Guard Heritage Museum

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Additional Photos of the CPO Initiation



Two Rhode Island Lighthouses for sale

Free to a good home!

The *Boston Globe* ran an article (*Boston Globe* staff reporter Amanda Milkovits, updated May 13, 2021) regarding the Beavertail Lighthouse in Jamestown, R.I. and the Watch Hill Lighthouse Tower in Westerly, R.I. (below). Both lighthouses are being offered for free to a qualifying public entity, the General Services Administration announced. Any organization interested in owning the lighthouses is asked to submit a letter of interest to the GSA within 60 days.

Good luck to those interested!



Did you know . . .

1969 HC-130H CGNR 1453, stationed at Air Station Kodiak, flew over the geographic North Pole, becoming the first Coast Guard aircraft to do so. The aircraft commander was LCDR Melvin J. Hartman and the copilot was LT Larry Minor. The purpose of the flight was ice reconnaissance of a potential route for super tankers from the North Slope of Alaska to the east coast of the U.S. According to a summary of the flight published in the Commandant's Bulletin: "COAST GUARD AIRCRAFT FLIES AROUND THE WORLD NONSTOP ... During the course of this flight, the aircraft circled the North Pole, crossing all meridians in eighty seconds."

Source - USCG Historian's Office



Lockheed HC-130 Hercules

May 6, 1994 The last HH-3F *Pelican* helicopter in U.S. Coast Guard service was retired. This ended the Coast Guard's 'amphibious era' as no remaining asset left in service was capable of making water landings.

Photo: USCG Aviation History



Sikorsky - HH-3F Pelican