



# Coast Guard Heritage Museum

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

## Summer 2018 Newsletter

### President's Report

Great weather has again returned to Cape Cod, attracting families back to the area for their summer vacations. A large number of these visitors choose to tour the Cape along the Old King's Highway, voted as one of America's Most Scenic Drives and which runs right past our front door. Fortunately for us, many are choosing to stop at our "campus" which includes not only the historic U.S. Customs House containing our growing collection of Coast Guard artifacts and displays but also America's oldest wooden jail and an operating blacksmith shop. This summer we are adding a small theater, a recording station to collect oral histories, and a selfie studio. These additions will help us better tell the many stories of the Coast Guard's extraordinary history.

Our 2018 season is off to a fast and exciting start. The work done on the building and exhibits this past winter by our volunteers was amazing. When we opened on May 1st, the Museum never looked better.



L to R: Greg Ketchen, Bruce Melnick, Buck Bailey, and Dan Burbank

The astronaut presentation and reception at the museum in mid-May was a great success, an historic event. This was the first time the only two Coast Guard astronauts, Bruce Melnick and Dan



Burbank, had formally appeared together in a public forum. Their two-hour talk kept 125+ people engaged and thrilled.



Sea Scouts with Bruce Melnick following the presentation, Bruce and Dan continued interacting with our visitors, signing photos. The event officially marked the opening of our newest exhibit - "Coast Guard in Space".

On July 4th, the museum participated in the Barnstable Village parade with three entries including vehicles and a trailered boat from Coast Guard MSD and ANT Cape Cod.



Active duty Coasties and local Coast Guard units continue to enthusiastically support the museum as volunteers. Their contributions have proven invaluable and are much appreciated.



Throwing lifesavers to parade viewers are Madyson and Victoria, daughters of CWO4 Aaron & Casey Van Huysen.

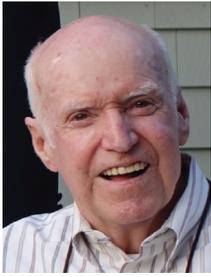
As always, we'd welcome your support whether as an on-site volunteer, donor, or contributor of Coast Guard artifacts and/or written or oral histories.

Our special evening at the museum on August 3rd for members, donors and volunteers promises to be a good one. A report on that in our next issue.

Thank you for your support,

Greg Ketchen, Captain, USCG (retired)  
President, CG Heritage Museum

The Coast Guard Heritage Museum is pleased to welcome William H. Thiesen, PhD as a contributor to the newsletter. Dr. Thiesen serves as the Atlantic Area Historian for the U.S. Coast Guard and is based out of the USCG Historian's Office in Portsmouth, VA. He earned a master's degree in Maritime History from East Carolina University and a Ph.D. in the History of Technology from University of Delaware. His books include *Industrializing American Shipbuilding: The Transformation of Ship Design and Construction, 1820-1920* and *Cruise of the Dashing Wave: Rounding Cape Horn in 1860*. Thiesen's articles appear regularly in print and on-line, including the Coast Guard's history series, "The Long Blue Line", which appears weekly on the Coast Guard Compass web site. Welcome and thank you to Dr. Thiesen. **This issue's article is on page 3.**

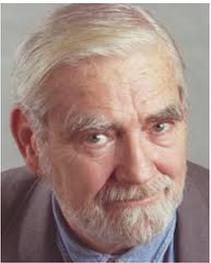


## We appreciate their Service.

In the past two months, we lost three current or former directors of our organization. Each of these individuals made significant contributions to the museum during its critical early years. We are today a vibrant and successful entity due to the efforts of a few dedicated men and women more than a decade ago. These three men were part of that early group.



Rear Admiral (USMS retired) **Jack Aylmer** (84) was one of our first board members and a very strong supporter of the museum. A graduate of Mass. Maritime Academy, he served six years as a State Senator. **Jim Walker** (82), former USCG enlisted and civil servant, was a dedicated long-time docent and active member of our Board up until the time of his death. **Francis Broadhurst** (82) was one of a handful of people who we consider to be our founders. He completed much of the administrative legwork required to create a fully functioning non-profit, served as an original member of our Board of Directors, and was a mentor for other museum volunteers and officers.



These extraordinary gentlemen will be missed.

## Board Member named Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year

The Museum is celebrating one of their own. Board Member and former USCG Reservist Nancy Viall Shoemaker was awarded the Mercy Otis Warren Cape Cod Woman of the Year Award for 2018. A founder and past president of the West Barnstable Historical Society and a lecturer of local history, she co-authored the commemorative books *Barnstable at 350* and *Barnstable @375*. She is the historian for the Barnstable Municipal Airport.

A printer and book publisher, Nancy focuses on preserving the history of Cape Cod. She was presented a bronze statuette replica of the statue of Mercy Otis Warren that is located on the lawn of the Superior Court House. We congratulate her on her many accomplishments. Well done.

## Massachusetts National Cemetery

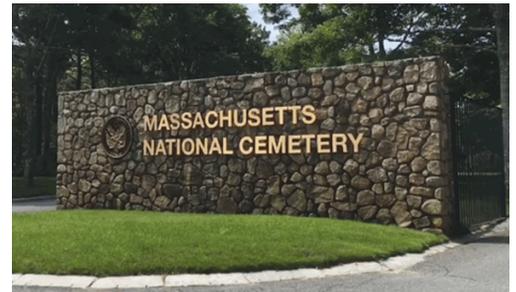
Cape Cod is known primarily as a vacation destination, but we would like to suggest adding a visit to the Veterans Administration National Cemetery of Bourne, MA or more simply, the MA National Cemetery, dedicated on October 11, 1980.

It is a beautiful and peaceful final resting place with over 77,000 gravesites, including those of two Medal of Honor recipients and the remains of an Unknown United States Soldier. His remains were unearthed during a highway excavation in South Carolina in the 1980s and identified by the Massachusetts Voluntary Infantry buttons of his uniform. Additionally, there are six unknown Union soldiers from the Civil War, interred in June, 2006.

The cemetery covers almost 750 acres of manicured grass, beautiful trees, and rolling hills. There is a memorial trail with over 50 commemoratives placed in memory of veterans from World War I to the modern era. The winding roads and precisely spaced gravestones convey the honor and dignity given to every committal ceremony. There are, on average, 50 burials a week. Each one is conducted with exacting respect, without regard for the rank or rate of the veteran.

Twice a year for the past eight years, the weekend before Memorial Day and Veteran's Day has been marked by an extraordinary event – Operation Flags for Vets. The placement of flags at each gravesite is sponsored by the SFC

Jared C. Monti Charitable Foundation, in memory of Medal of Honor recipient SFC Jared Monti, a Raynham, MA native killed in action in Afghanistan, June 21, 2006 and buried at the cemetery.



Hundreds of ordinary citizens, many armed with long shank screwdrivers to pierce the ground, arrive for a brief ceremony and remarks. Breaking into small groups, some have specific grave locations in mind (grave locations available at a kiosk at the entrance). Others, there to honor the many heroes' graves, carefully make a starter hole, insert the flag and finish with a salute. The flags remain in place for a week and are then carefully removed by volunteers to be stored until their next use.

For those two weeks, at Memorial Day and Veterans' Day, it is truly a most patriotic sight to be able to view the cemetery with the entrance lined with donated casket flags and row upon row of smaller flags marking every grave. But any time of year, visitors are urged to visit the National Cemetery and reflect upon those who have served. Against a beautiful blue Cape Cod sky, with the bright sun shining down, it is truly a sacred place of eternal rest.

# Gay Head Wampanoag Native Americans and Lighthouse Keeper Charles Vanderhoop

William H. Thiesen, Historian, Atlantic Area, USCG

Native Americans from a variety of tribes and locations have participated in the Coast Guard's predecessor services since the early nineteenth century, representing the second earliest minority group to serve in the Coast Guard.

The first Native Americans to participate in the predecessor services typically came from coastal tribes whose members were expert watermen. These tribes included the Wampanoag in Massachusetts, who were the first Native Americans known to serve in the Coast Guard. In the early 1800s, Ebenezer Skiff, the lighthouse keeper at the Gay Head Light, on Martha's Vineyard, hired members of the Wampanoag Tribe to support lighthouse maintenance and operations. In an 1815 letter to his superiors, Skiff reported: *"When I hire an Indian to work, I usually give him a dollar per day when the days are long and seventy-five cents a day when the days are short and give him three meals."* It was common for Gay Head keepers to hire Wampanoag tribal members as assistants because they proved more reliable than the local white residents.



Gay Head Lighthouse and keeper's quarters with keepers standing on each catwalk. (USCG Collection)

Of all events associated with Native American service, the 1884 S.S. *City of Columbus* rescue stands out. The passenger steamer plied East Coast waters from Boston to New York and ran aground off Gay Head on a bitterly cold night in January 1884. One hundred passengers and crew drowned within twenty minutes of the grounding. Led by Gay Head Lighthouse's white keeper Horatio Pease, Wampanoag tribal members volunteered to brave the wind and weather and launched a surfboat into the waves. In their first attempt, the surfboat capsized in the heavy seas, but the crew returned to shore safely. The surfmen tried again and reached the survivors still huddled on the steamer's deck. On the return trip, the overcrowded surfboat capsized again, however, all the crew and survivors got to shore safely.

Overnight, the Wampanoag lifesavers became heroes, imperiling their own lives to rescue nearly 30 *City of Columbus* passengers and crew. The members of this Native American volunteer force received medals and cash awards from the Massachusetts Humane Society, and several of them later served at the Gay Head Lighthouse and the Gay Head Life-Saving Service station, when established in 1895. In reporting this story, the press believed the tribe members as *"deserving of all praise and the fund for their benefit and encouragement should assume large proportions. Without any expectations of reward they periled their lives for others."*

Wampanoag Coast Guardsmen have also served with distinction in time of war. Carlton West, a Wampanoag citizen of Nantucket, served as an enlisted man in World War I and World War II. In addition, in 1919, Aquinnah Wampanoag tribal member Charles Vanderhoop was assigned as keeper of the Sankaty Head Lighthouse under U.S. Navy control. When he took charge of that lighthouse, Vanderhoop became the first known principle lighthouse keeper of Native American ancestry and the first Native American supervisor of a Federal installation.



Carlton West during World War I. (Nantucket Hist. Assoc. Collection)

In 1920, the Coast Guard appointed Vanderhoop the keeper at the Gay Head Lighthouse. His duties required around-the-clock supervision of the lighthouse, including cleaning, maintaining and refueling the lighthouse's first-order Fresnel lens. Standing twelve feet tall and weighing several tons, Gay Head's first-order lens was immense and incorporated over 1,000 glass prisms. Vanderhoop's daily routine included climbing the narrow spiraling staircase to the lantern room and lit the lamp at nightfall and during any low-visibility days. Each morning, he ascended the stairs again to extinguish the lamp and clean it. Lastly, he was responsible for polishing all the light's brass appurtenances and resetting the lantern wicks in preparation for the next illumination.

Keeper Vanderhoop was the tenth principal keeper at Gay Head and he became renowned for providing tours of the lighthouse for visitors. Over the course of his time as keeper, he did so for approximately 300,000 men, women and children, including celebrities such as President Calvin Coolidge. By the early 1930s, Vanderhoop had manned the light through hurricanes and tropical storms and provided local shipping with decades of faithful lighthouse service. However, years of climbing the tower had taken their toll on him physically and he finally retired on disability in 1933 after 20 years in the U.S. Lighthouse Service.



Locally famous lighthouse keeper Charles Vanderhoop, of the Gay Head Wampanoag community. (USCG Collection)

Native American tribal members, such as Charles Vanderhoop, have served in the Coast Guard and its predecessor services for over 200 years.

# Lightships of Cape Cod

Patricia Garrity

*The Coast Guard takes its unofficial search and rescue motto, "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back," from the 1899 regulations of the United States Life Saving Service, which stated:*

*In attempting a rescue, the keeper will select either the boat, breeches buoy, or life car, as in his judgment is best suited to effectively cope with the existing conditions. If the device first selected fails after such trial as satisfies him that no further attempt with it is feasible, he will resort to one of the others, and if that fails, then to the remaining one, and he will not desist from his efforts until by actual trial the impossibility of effecting a rescue is demonstrated. The statement of the keeper that he did not try to use the boat because the sea or surf was too heavy will not be accepted unless attempts to launch it were actually made and failed, or unless the conformation of the coast—as bluffs, precipitous banks, etc.—is such as to unquestionably preclude the use of a boat.*

The names were distinctive and vaguely familiar.... Handkerchief Shoals, Stonehorse, Cross Rip, Hen and Chickens, Shovelful Shoal, Bishop and Clerks, Nantucket to list a few. Those names, written in white capital letters, six feet tall on a red hull, were much more colorful than the official Coast Guard designation of LV (light vessel) followed by a letter or number.

In the beginning, President George Washington signed the 9th Act of the First United States Congress of 1789 which provided that the states "turn over their lighthouses, including those under construction and those proposed, to the central government." In creating the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment, the Act stated that the funds "shall be defrayed out of the Treasury of the United States." Thus, Alexander Hamilton, first Secretary of the Treasury, therefore became the person responsible for all aids to navigation.

First-generation lightships were constructed of wood, with no engine and their hull design did not differ from standard merchant schooners. Built for sheltered waters, they had oil lamps and fog bells hung from their masts, and were maintained by keepers who rowed out to light them daily. Essentially, they were unmanned beacon boats that were securely moored and served as large buoys.

The first actual manned lightship was put into service off Willoughby Spit in Chesapeake Bay in 1820. According to the details of the contract awarded to James Poole of Hampton, VA on September 2, 1819, for the vessel's construction, it was to have "...70 tons burthen, copper fastened and copper sheathed . . . a cabin with at least four berths . . . an apartment for cooking, spars, capstan belfry, yawl and davits." "The two masts would mount copper lanterns supplied from oil rooms lined with tin in the hold."

That first lightship, Willoughby Spit, was put into place in summer of 1820 but nature dealt it such a severe beating, it was quickly moved to a less vulnerable position. Sandyhook Lightship station was established in 1823 at the entrance to New York Harbor and was the first heavy duty, "outside" station. Outside lightships were usually placed in the open sea, built to withstand the elements not found in less exposed stations. Floating lights did not appear on the West Coast until 1892 and were far fewer in number.

During the period 1820-1985, lightships were operated by several differently named branches of the government (i.e. by the Lighthouse Establishment from 1820 to 1852, the Lighthouse Board from 1852 to 1910, the Lighthouse Service from 1910 to 1939, and the US Coast Guard from 1939 to 1985). However formally named, growth came quickly, and "to increase efficiency and aid in government decentralization," six Atlantic and two Great Lakes Lighthouse Districts were established to "develop a more objective assessment of the needs for navigational aids, and to allow for more responsive action to local interests."

In 1842 there were 256 lighthouses and 30 light vessels. By 1900, there were 54 lightships in place compared with 1460 lighthouses. In total, 179 lightships were built between 1820 and 1952. In 1915, at the heyday of lightships, there were 54 stations in the US - 36 off the East Coast, 2 in the Gulf, 5 on the West Coast and 11 on the Great Lakes.

Lightship design was the result of both trial and error and experimentation over a long period of time. Such results were directly affected by both the need for peak efficiency, as well as a general lack of funding to ensure that efficiency was achieved. The hull was flattened and bow rounded to keep the vessel steady in the water. The mushroom anchor, weighing up to 7,800 pounds was found to be the only reliable design to hold a ship on station, and the chain weight was increased.

Lighting apparatus went through many evolutions from whale oil and reflectors to Fresnel lenses and acetylene. Audio communication evolved from hand rung bells and steam chime whistles to compressed air diaphones, but it wasn't until the radio beacon was introduced that the lightship truly reached peak efficiency. Distance measurement could be accurately calculated by knowing the propagation rates of both radio and sound signals.

Naming conventions for designating a lightship were not consistent. For a time, alphabetical letters as well as numerical assignments were tried, but until 1867, the ship generally took the name of the station it served, and names were not permanently assigned to a particular vessel. To add to the confusion, names of stations were changed entirely. For example, in 1916 the Shovelful station became Stonehorse





# Coast Guard Heritage Museum

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Visit us at [www.capecodmuseumtrail.com](http://www.capecodmuseumtrail.com)

## BECOME A MEMBER!

**Individual** - \$25 Single membership: attending annual meeting with no voting privilege, individual admission to the museum, and a 10% gift shop discount.

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**Supporting Member** - \$100 Unlimited museum admission & 10% discount. This is for those who want to support museum but not actively participate.

**Sustaining Member** - \$250 For those who want to show a greater level of support for the museum. Unlimited admission and 10% discount apply.

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Please make checks payable to: Coast Guard Heritage Museum.

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We are a 501 (C) (3) organization and our mission is to preserve and share the story of the U.S. Coast Guard in the former U.S. Custom House in Barnstable, Massachusetts.