OLD STURBRIDGE VILLAGE

Old Sturbridge Village is an outdoor museum of rural life. Its purposes are historical and educational, to preserve and present the story of New England farm and village life of yesterday and to impart a knowledge and understanding of that heritage to the citizens of today. Chartered under the laws of Massachusetts as an independent non-profit educational corporation, Old Sturbridge Village serves the nation as a living museum of history. Its library, its collections, and its exhibit of a recreated village are in the hands of a representative board of trustees. Its affairs are administered by a professional staff. As a private institution it receives no tax support. It strives to be self-supporting through admission fees, services to visitors, income from endowment, and the help of those who believe in its aims and program. Contributions to Old Sturbridge Village are deductible for Federal tax purposes as gifts to an educational tax-exempt institution.

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The Guiding Light of Boston Harbor

by W. Scott Storer

Twenty-four men clung helplessly to the shattered wreck of the USS ALACRITY, freezing in the cold sea. Time was growing short and lighthouse keeper Charles Jennings knew he must act. Ignoring all danger to himself, he pushed his dory into the raging surf and rowed toward the stranded sailors. . . .

For over two and a half centuries the flashing eye of Boston Lighthouse has guided mariners safely into Boston Harbor. In its 257 years of service, Boston Light and its dedicated keepers have etched a memorable and exciting place in New England history and sea lore.

In 1713 John George, a merchant representing his associates in Boston, proposed erecting a lighthouse on some head of land at the entrance to Boston Harbor for the purpose of guiding trade ships into the port at night. The General Court's interest in this proposal led to the passing of the Boston Light Bill on July 22, 1715.

The act specified that the lighthouse should be erected on what is now known as Little Brewster Island, and that the maintenance of the light would be the responsibility of the Province. The act also provided for a tonnage tax of one penny per ton on all vessels, except coasters, moving in or out of the harbor to pay for maintaining the light. The construction of this, America's first lighthouse, was completed one year after the passing of this act.

On September 14, 1716, John Worthylake, the lighthouse's first keeper, climbed the high tower and illuminated Boston Light for the first time. Worthylake's salary was fifty pounds a year, hardly enough to sustain him. He supplemented this stipend by working as a pilot for ships entering the harbor, and by herding a flock of sheep on neighboring Great Brewster Island.

In 1717 Worthylake petitioned the court for an increase in salary, since the terrible storms of the previous winter had prevented him from tending his sheep. As a result, fifty-nine of his sheep had wandered out on a long bar and drowned when the tide came in. After long deliberation the court at length reimbursed him for his losses.



Little Brewster, a small, rugged, rocky isle, fulfills everyone's dream of what a lighthouse island should look like. *U.S. Coast Guard Photo.*

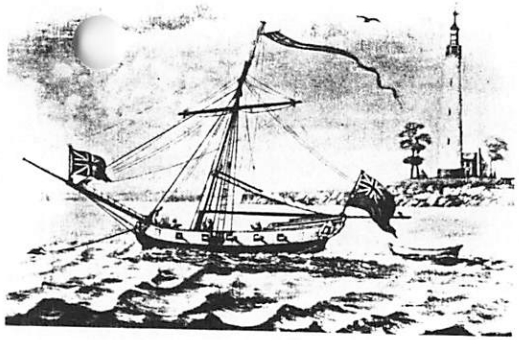
John Worthylake's reign as keeper ended tragically on a cold November night the following year. Worthylake, his wife, and his daughter were returning from Boston, bound for the lighthouse, when their craft capsized and all perished in the cold sea. Young Benjamin Franklin, then a printer in Boston, wrote a ballad about the incident entitled "Lighthouse Tragedy" and sold it on the streets for a penny a copy. Franklin did a fair business with his literary offering but later came to hate the ballad, calling it "wretched stuff."

Worthylake's successor was an ex-sloop captain named Robert Saunders. After only a few short days of service he too perished in the ocean, giving Boston Light the doubtful reputation of losing its first two keepers.

By recommendation of the Boston merchants, the court next appointed Captain John Hayes, an experienced mariner, to the position. At this time the duties of a lighthouse keeper were many and varied. In addition to tending the light, the keeper served as a pilot for ships entering the harbor and as a health officer inspecting ships arriving from plague-ridden Europe.

Hayes felt that the fifty-pound salary was inadequate and petitioned the court for a raise. In his petition he mentioned that he was in the habit of entertaining mariners on the island in order to make extra money but wished to discontinue this practice, fearing it "prejudicial to himself as well as the Town of Boston." The court promptly raised the influential Hayes' salary to seventy pounds.

In 1719 Hayes again petitioned the court, this time for improvements to the lighthouse. He requested a gallery be built on the



Mezzotint engraving of a British warship patrolling near Old Boston Light. This engraving was done by William Burgis in 1729. *U.S. Coast Guard Photo.*

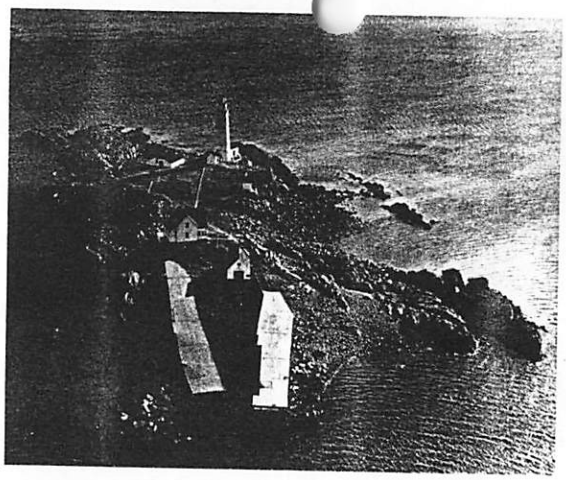
seaside of the beacon so he could safely climb out and scrape ice and snow from the glass. He also asked "that a great gun may be placed on the island to answer ships in a fog." The court again acted on his proposals, building the gallery and sending a cannon to the island. This gun remained at Boston Light until a few years ago when it was moved to a Coast Guard station in Connecticut.

In January 1720 a bad fire, caused by the signal lamp's dropping and setting fire to the wooden parts of the structure, did extensive damage to the lighthouse. Keeper Hayes assured, "ye said fire was not occasioned by ye least neglect of ye memorialist." Hayes' salary was withheld until after an investigation into the cause of the fire. Repairs were completed at a cost of 221 pounds, and the indignant Hayes was returned to duty.

Three years later the lighthouse was damaged by an angry sea raised sixteen feet by the most severe storm of the eighteenth century—The Great Storm of 1723. Hayes weathered the gale, but the lighthouse and wharf were considerably damaged.

Further misfortune ensued in 1751, when Boston Light again suffered from fire. This blaze, far worse then the previous, completely destroyed all the wooden parts of the structure, leaving only the walls standing. The lighthouse was again repaired, this time by replacing the wooden parts of the beacon section with metal.

In 1774, following the Boston Port Act, the British seized control of Little Brewster Island and in 1775 blocked off the harbor. The Provincial Congress wished to have the useless light extinguished now. Shortly thereafter a small detachment of minutemen, under the command of Major John Vose, visited the island and burned the wooden parts of the lighthouse. The British had no sooner begun repairs than General Washington dispatched Major Tupper with 300 men to spoil their rebuilding ef-



Boston Light. *U.S. Coast Guard Photo.*

forts. They landed their heavily armed whaleboat at Little Brewster, and so began the historic "Battle of Boston Light." Tupper and his valiant soldiers overwhelmed the British guard killing several, and, after destroying the work done on the lighthouse, took many prisoners away with them.

Upon attempting to leave the island, the Americans discovered that the receding tide had left their boats stranded in shallow water. Meanwhile, British reinforcements were rushing toward the island. The American soldiers had no sooner pushed their boats into deeper water than they were attacked. The thundering fire of a field piece on Nantasket Head assisted the Americans in their retreat by sinking one of the pursuing British vessels.

The British were driven from Boston on March 17, 1776, but lingered in the harbor menacing all the towns along the bay. Action, prompted by Samuel Adams, was then taken to rid the harbor of British ships. On June 13, American soldiers opened fire from Nantasket Head and drove the British out of the harbor. The retreating ships stopped at Boston Light and blew up the lighthouse, thereby repaying the Americans who had twice damaged it while it was under British rule.

Boston Light remained inactive for seven years. John Hancock notified the legislature that there was no light at the entrance to Boston Harbor, and if good shipping and trade were to resume the light must be repaired. His strictures and other proposals by the Boston Marine Society led to the eventual reconstruction of the light in 1783.

The new Boston Light was built in the same location as the old

tower and of nearly the same dimensions. It was conical in shape and was equipped with an octagonal iron lantern twenty-five feet in circumference. Its overall height, including the lens, was seventy-five feet. This tower, with various alterations and modifications, is the present Boston Light.

Keeper Johnathan Bruce and his wife witnessed the thrilling encounter between the American battleship *Chesapeake* and the British frigate *Shannon* during the War of 1812. The well trained crew of the *Shannon* made short work of the *Chesapeake* in a battle that lasted only fifteen minutes. As Captain Lawrence of the *Chesapeake* was carried below mortally wounded, he cried out the famous order, "Don't give up the ship." The crew of the badly damaged *Chesapeake* was able to carry out this order for only nine minutes before being forced to surrender.

In 1844 a "Spanish" cigar factory was secretly set up on the lighthouse island. Young girls were brought from Boston to work there. Cigars were manufactured and sold to Boston merchants, who were deceived into believing them imported. A short time later the business was discovered to be fraudulent and was promptly closed.

Of the many shipwrecks which have occurred in Boston Harbor, the wreck of the *Maritana* is considered the worst, and is appropriately referred to as the "Disaster of November 1861." The square rigger *Maritana* encountered heavy seas while entering Massachusetts Bay and approached Boston Harbor in the blinding snow of a howling southeaster. She spotted the lighthouse and headed for the beacon. Keeper Moses Barrett saw the ship's lights earlier in the evening but subsequently lost sight of them in the heavy falling snow. The gale increased at a fearful rate, and by morning Barrett could not see beyond 300 feet. When he went down to the shore, he found the mast of a ship and realized the vessel was lost.

It was later discovered that the *Maritana* had crashed onto Shag Rocks, leaving the passengers and crew fighting for their lives. When the great ship broke in two, all hands were thrown into the icy, swirling sea. Only twelve people survived the horrible wreck, managing to swim to a small isle where they were rescued that afternoon.

In November of 1898, a spectacular but equally tragic wreck occurred when the schooner *Calvin F. Baker* ran aground on a cradle of rocks near the lighthouse island. The vessel was so close to shore that people on the island felt they could almost reach out and pull in the sailors, but the turbulent sea made any rescue attempt impossible. All through the night the pained cries of the crew could be heard as they froze to the rigging in the bitter wind. The following morning the sea calmed and the survivors were landed. Three of the men had frozen to death!

In 1918 lighthouse keeper Charles Jennings performed a daring sea rescue, saving the twenty-four-man crew of the USS *Alacrity*. The vessel encountered heavy seas and was run aground on Shag Rocks, near the lighthouse island. Twenty-four men clung helplessly to the shattered wreck, freezing in the cold sea. Several attempts were made to shoot a line to the stranded sailors, but each time the rope parted. Ignoring all danger to himself, Jennings pushed his small dory over the ice and into the raging surf. He rowed through the gauntlet of ice, rocks, and surf four consecutive times, bringing all the men to safety. For this heroic rescue, Jennings received a letter of commendation from the Secretary of Commerce.

One of the most bizarre events connected with the Boston Light occurred on a sunny June day in 1923. Salvatore Ciarmataro and his two sons, Vittorio and Joseph, left the North End of Boston on a small fishing craft, bound for the Brewster Islands to harvest periwinkles. After gathering periwinkles at Great Brewster Island, the trio decided to split forces. Salvatore dropped Vittorio off at Middle Brewster Island, and Joseph was brought to Calf Island.



Boston Light stands as a sentry, guiding ships safely through the rocky and treacherous inlet to Boston Harbor. *U.S. Coast Guard Photo.*

Vittorio, alone on Middle Brewster, became very thirsty and went in search of a well. Unable to find one, he knocked on the door of a cottage but found no one home. He noticed a partially opened window on the porch and decided to crawl into the cottage and get a drink of water. He grabbed the window sash and pulled it up. Suddenly, he was blinded by an explosion and felt a stunning shock in his stomach. He had been shot! Vittorio crawled down to the shore and called for help. His father, who was on an adjacent island, heard his cries and went to his rescue.

With the help of a local fisherman, Salvatore brought his injured

son to Boston Light where they telephoned for help. A doctor was rushed to the lighthouse on the quarantine boat, but all efforts were in vain. Vittorio died on the kitchen floor of Boston Light.

Upon investigation of the shooting scene, the police discovered a rope attached to the window sash. The rope ran down to the floor, through a pulley, across the room, and up to the sink, where it was attached to the trigger of a mounted German mauser rifle. Vittorio had been shot by one of the most diabolical gun traps ever to kill a man!

The man responsible for setting the trap was a lobster fisherman by the name of Hjalmare Roose. Roose openly admitted to setting the trap but refused to tell why he had done so. Roose stood trial and was released, the court ruling that the victim was trespassing at the time he was shot.

Years later it was discovered that Roose had set the gun trap for a fisherman with whom he had been having territorial disputes in regard to the location of their lobster traps. The fisherman threatened to kill him, so Roose made ready. The unfortunate Vittorio had been shot by a trap meant for someone else.

In 1939 the U.S. Coast Guard took over the lighthouse and replaced Maurice Babcock, the last civilian keeper, with a Coast Guardsman. Before leaving Boston Light, keeper Babcock stood atop the high tower and stared silently out to sea. The days of the old lighthouse service were gone forever.

September 14, 1966 marked the 250th anniversary of Boston Light. The occasion was observed in a ceremony at the lighthouse in which Elliot Richardson was the principal speaker. Historian-Author Edward Rowe Snow recited in Greek Homer's words on the "watch fire's light."

Boston Light still stands as a commanding object at the entrance to Boston Harbor. Even though its attraction has been somewhat overshadowed by a newer and more powerful beacon on Graves Point, and its usefulness diminished by the opening of a new channel, its distinction as America's oldest light, and its illustrious history, can never be taken away.

W. Scott Storer is a free-lance writer and photographer who lives in Waltham, Massachusetts, and makes his living as a guitar instructor and furniture finisher. He is planning to move to northern Maine to set up a homestead.

Missionary to the Wilds of Maine

by Charles P. Thomas

The Rev. Jotham Sewall wearily sank down on a fallen tree. He looked into the dreary sky of a late December afternoon. He had walked more than ten miles through heavy wet snow, wading swamps and flooded streams, in order to meet with a few settlers who wanted to form a church. He wrote in his diary: "I begged God to give me one soul for laboring thither; but if He saw fit to deny me this request, I would have no reason to think hard of my blessed Master, or of His cause or service." In those words he stated the purpose for which he toiled for more than fifty years, during which time he preached 12,593 times in 413 places, an average of four and a half sermons each week.

Jotham Sewall, the youngest of five children, was born in York, Maine, in 1760. He disliked school because he was bashful. As a schoolboy, he did not study and was considered a dull scholar. He did develop in his early teens an interest in reading history, geography, and religious books. At the age of twelve he read *The Sincere Convert* and from that time prayed daily, without exception, until his death.

Henry, his elder brother, joined the Continental Army, which must have influenced Jotham to enlist when he was only sixteen. He was no doubt a big lad because, man-grown, he was well above the average in height and weighed more than 200 pounds. But he was no soldier. He returned home from the campaign against Burgoyne when his three-month enlistment ran out. He explained in his diary "I was glad to be called into no engagement as my convictions of sin made [me] much afraid of death."

Jotham learned the trade of masonry from his father. He acquired some knowledge of arithmetic, plane geometry, and surveying but gave no attention to grammar until twenty years later. At age eighteen he began a diary which he faithfully kept for seventy-two years.

Jotham, strong and vigorous at twenty-three, joined the migration sweeping into northern Maine. He acquired land in Chesterville when there were but two families estab-