THACHER ISLAND TIMELINE Draft 4/16/99 updated

1604 – Samuel de Champlain discovers Cape Ann and 3 islands (one of which is Thachers and calls area Le Cap aux. Isles (Cape of Islands) also called them "Les Trois Sauvages"

1614 – Capt. John Smith comes across three islands and calls them the Three Turks Heads.

1635 – Anthony Thacher is wrecked with his family on the island. Only he and his wife survive 3 children and 17 others drown. Called " Thacher's Woe" after that.

1636 – Thacher given the island by Massachusetts General Court and called Thacher's island.

1717- -Sold to Rev. John White for 100 pounds.

1726-27 – Sold to Joseph Allen for 175 pounds.

1771 – Colonial Government bought it back for 500 pounds. Erected 2 twin lights on 45 foot wooden towers light on Dec.21st.and a Keepers Dwelling.

1773 – Cape Ann Light Station officially established by Mass Bay Colony.

1780 – Abandoned lights during Revolutionary War.

1781- Stephen Choate appointed caretaker from 1781-1784

1784 – Back in service. Sam Huston assigned as keeper. Repaired the light and candles. Finished in 1792.a "small boat and a small barn ' was built for new keeper.

1789 – Aug.7th Congress passes act that created a Lighthouse Establishment and places all lighthouses (12 in all) under the Treasury Dept. Presidents Washington, Adams and Jefferson all personally approve future lighthouse dealings.

1790 – Lights turned over to the newly formed government to be in charge of all lighthouses in exisistence, 11 in all, Boston light (1716) Brant point (1746), Plymouth Light (1768), were only New England lights built before Cape Ann (1771).

1792 – Secr. Of Treasury Alexander Hamilton placed lighthouse establishment under commissioner of Revenue. Joseph Sayward Asst. keeper till 1814.

1793 – Lamps changed to 5 flat wicks called "spider lamps"

1802 – New Secr. of the Treasury Albert Gallatin resumes control.

1810 – Winslow Lewis experiments with his new lamp at Boston Light and then at South tower at Cape Ann. Finally installed after War of 1812 at Thacher's.

1812 – U.S. Lighthouse Service adopts use of Argand lamp. War of 1812-1815 with the British starts in June

1813-1820 – Comm. Of Revenue takes over again.Stephen Pleasanton takes over. First stone keeper's house built.

1814—Aaron Wheeler new keeper till 1834.

1816 – A new Keepers house built by Winslow Lewis, inventor of the Lewis lamp using the Argand Lamp with parabolic reflectors. Built for $ 1415.

1828 – Original towers are renovated. This may be the time towers were made of stone and brick. A new lantern house was constructed of iron and copper roof, lightening rod, towers white washed, cost: $2300.

1829 – Federal government surveys Sandy Bay and began Breakwater, L-shaped 1 ½ miles long. Appropriations ran out and project stopped in 1885.

1840 – Town of Sandy Bay now called Town of Rockport incorporated and later adopts twin lights as town seal in 1888.

1841 – Renovated again. "Brick walls same thickness as the stone walls where they commence" new lamps, 10 lamps and ten 20in. reflectors on two tiers, plated with silver and brass rims installed by Winslow Lewis.

1851 – Congress ordered investigation of light systems, Thacher lights at this time are described as "two white lights, fixed, of eleven lamps and 21" reflectors each, elevated 90' above sea level and visible 16 miles.

1852 – The Lighthouse Board is formed by Congress on Aug.31, 1852 and lasts for 58 years until July 1910.the country is divided into 12 lighthouse districts.

1858—Repair of the boatway was authorized Nov. 8.

1859 – Thacher and Cape Canaveral lights only ones without Fresnel lens at this time. Canaveral gets theirs before ours so we are last in nation to get a Fresnel lens.

1859 – Fog signal installed. On Apr.4, J.S. Choate was assigned as Supt. of Construction of Lighthouses at Thachers. Proposal for a keepers dwelling was made on April 10.

1861 – New stone towers built 298 yards from each other, of granite from Swenson Quarries of Concord N.H.163 above sea level (124fthigh base to focal plane 112 ½ ft.) lights are visible for 25 miles on a clear day. Lit on Oct 1,1861.First order Fresnal lenses fixed and oil wick lamps. Civil War starts April 12,1861.

1861- Acknowledgement of order for Caloric engine for fog signal, Sept 5.

1862- Fog signal declared inefficient and was cause of sinking of steamer Sanford, Aug 2.

1863- Report on burning of lard instead of sperm oil, Nov.9.

1864 – Maria Bray keeps lights lit during massive snowstorm while husband is off island for 3 days. Also records show that path was widened to the towers and the fog signal so there must have been a whistle house constructed at the time of the towers. Also noted that they "repaired and repacked the fog signal that had been installed in 1859.Civil War ends on April 9,1865.

1864- Another report on burning of lard oil, July 25.

1867 – Coal shed built near south tower and old fog signal. Need of steam whistle reported.

1868 – Boatway repaired (was originally built 25 years earlier 1843).

1869 – A second keepers house built near north tower. Subsequently burned down by Coast Guard in the 50's.A steam fog signal and its duplicate were in place by 1871(Parsons) pg. 65.(A 12by 14 foot engine house with 12 ft. posts was built for the hot-air engine signal, and a 32 inch engine and 15 foot trumpet were set up as the fog signal for the station)(Parsons pg. 67) report stated they got it from Sandy Hook station June 14.

1870 – Duplicate fog signal installed as back-up.

1871 – Steam fog signal installed.

1875 – Attic of main principal keepers house has four rooms added. Fog signal house moved 30' to south and height reduced to 6'.stone foundation and cement floor added.

1874 – Recommendation on Jan.30 to erect a keepers dwelling from Inspector Perkins.

1876 - A new storm signal station was set up to connect island with mainland by means of submarine cable carrying telegraph wires in 1874,this was for purposes of defense. It was taken down after the Spanish American War after 1898.A 11/2 story frame dwelling was erected near the south tower, making this the third keepers dwelling and called the "principal keepers dwelling".

1881 – A second keepers house of wood clapboards was built near the brick house near the South tower.

1882 – Signal Officers accommodation and boat house enlargement for signal boat requested.

1884 – SS Faraday lays transatlantic cable just past island onto Pebble Beach. Both fatigues and dress uniforms were introduced by the lighthouse service.

1884 – Mineral oil introduced on Aug. 6,1884 in letter from Engineer Mallery on Aug 22 .in both towers.

1885 – Discontinued use of Signal Station.

1887 – Brick boiler house 32'x32' built .for fog signal.

1888 – Town of Rockport adopts use of Thacher's Island and the twin lights as key device in the corporate town seal which will include the date " February 27,1840."

1889 – Kitchen with pantry added to assistants house (north dwelling?).Brick oil house 16' 10"x19' was built. Estimated cost $750.

1894 – Keeper Hadley rescues crew of Lottie B.

1895 – cellar added to brick house and storm porch over back door.

1895 – Bi-valve lens intended for Fire Island is used at Thacher.

1896 – Hoisting engine put to use for landing supplies at the signal house. Cistern in fog house needed repairs. U.S. Signal house is removed.

1898 – Telephone line to Rockport and Pools Hill Naval station set up.

1899 – L added to brick house adding 1 room, cellar and cistern.

1900 – Railroad expanded to north dwelling and turntable added. Steel stack added to fog signal house

1902 – Telephone lines connected to towers and houses as well as to mainland by underwater cable. Electric power also put out to island.

1903 – Brick chimney added to fog signal house Lighthouse Board transferred to the Dept. of Commerce and Labor.

1904-05 – US North Atlantic Fleet anchors off harbor in Rockport within site of island.

1907 – A hoisting engine house built of masonry added located near the boat ramp.

1910 – U.S. Bureau of Lighthouses formed and takes over all lights in U.S.

1919 – S.S.America with Woodrow Wilson aboard narrowly escapes disaster on island in thick fog only to be saved by fog- horn. This signal was installed in 1871.

1922 – Rumors start that the lights were to be discontinued.

1930 – Survey of island done by government dept. of commerce.

1932 – North light discontinued. New lights electrified in the South tower. Made up of 4 flashing 250watt bulbs surrounded by 174 piece circular lens. The earlier fixed white light was now a flashed 2 seconds with 1second interval. Now 70,000 candlepower, shining 19 miles. Prior to this the light only had 22,000 candlepower. Powered by 6000foot underwater electric cable to mainland. No one knows what became of the north tower Fresnel lens. Some think vandals destroyed it. I discovered 3 pieces of the lens at the Sandy Bay Historical Society. Light power increased to 160,000 candlepower Five flashes at one-second interval then 10 second of darkness.

1939 – US Coast Guard takes over all lighthouses. Hurricane of 39" destroys the boat way.

!940 – the North dwelling is still up and had been turned into a duplex and kitchens added at both ends.

1942 – Radio building abandoned in this year. North dwelling also abandoned.

1948 – Serious fire threaten the island the Radio building put up by the Navy in 1909? Is burned down by the Coast Guard.

1950 – The North dwelling is destroyed by fire in the 50's per Mr. Dees video.

1960 – Still using fresnel lenses.

1967 – Joseph Barboza Baron is placed on island with his family as protection .He is a key witness against Cosa nostra.

1970 – GSA declares Island "unused property" on Apr.22 and was about to start disposal proceedings.

1971 – Town appointed committee urges citizens to fight this. Oct 7,1971 was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

1972 – In June town agreement reached to create a partnership with Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife to care for and maintain north part of island (about 20 acres).GSA transferred to Sport Fisheries earlier in year.

1975 – Fresnel lens removed from south tower and sent to US Coast Guard Academy in Groton CT.

1976 – Thacher Island Committee (TIC) formed by Town

1979 – South tower automated, unmanned, a rotating red beacon consisting of two lamps focused 90 degrees apart. Rotating white beacon too bright for mainland changed to red and smoked glass installed in northwest to reduce intensity.

1980 – Coast Guard departs island in Dec. New Town Committee appointed headed by Ned Cameron. Russ Grubb becomes first civilian keeper in island's history. Nov 20,first license/lease with Coast Guard signed for a five- year period.

1981 – Thacher Island Association (TIA) is formed as a fund raising arm of the TIC.

1982 – Landing craft to island is christened in July.

1983 – Outside weatherproofing of 2 Keepers Houses completed.

1984 – Severe storm heavily damages Boat Ramp.

1985 – New ramp completed and 3000 gal fuel tank donated for keepers house.

1987 – Helicopter pad built by Coast Guard

1988 – North light relit and approved as a private aids to navigation and is almost a replica of the original kerosene oil light. Restoration of the north tower was begun12v system. Amber light reaches 8 miles.

1990 – North tower project completed.

1991 – "No Name" storm hit island and blew out brick wall on eastern side of the whistle house and damaged the boathouse.

1992 – December hurricane badly damaged the ramp and caused power outage and damage to furnace of dwelling.

1993 – Repaired ramp using FEMA funds. First steps to have island deeded to the Town by Coast Guard.

1994 – Deeding process continues. Over 1156 visitors to the island.

1995 – C.G installs proper oil tank for south tower generator. Dec storm again severely damages the ramp; it's totally gone now. Island no longer has keepers living there, to dangerous without a boat ramp.

1996,97, - Not much happening. Clinton signs bill on Oct.19, 1996, to make property transfer from C.G. possible.

1998 – Budget bill earmarks $250,000 for Thacher Island ramp restoration as part of a Coast Guard bill for aids to navigation. April 13 started solarization of south tower and new fog signal. Optic is VRB-25 (vega industries) 480 mm red backup 300mm red beacon. October north tower changed to 15watt electric bulb.

1999 – Still no decision by Coast Guard as to if and when they will rebuild ramp with appropriated funds. Also deed acceptance by town of Rockport to southern part of island will not be executed until ramp decision is made.