

Island Opinion

• LETTERS •

The lighthouse and housing

The comments following are my personal views and not necessarily those of the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association or any of its members.

Jamestown's Affordable Housing Committee once again is proposing the use of the Beavertail Lighthouse as a revolving affordable housing residence.

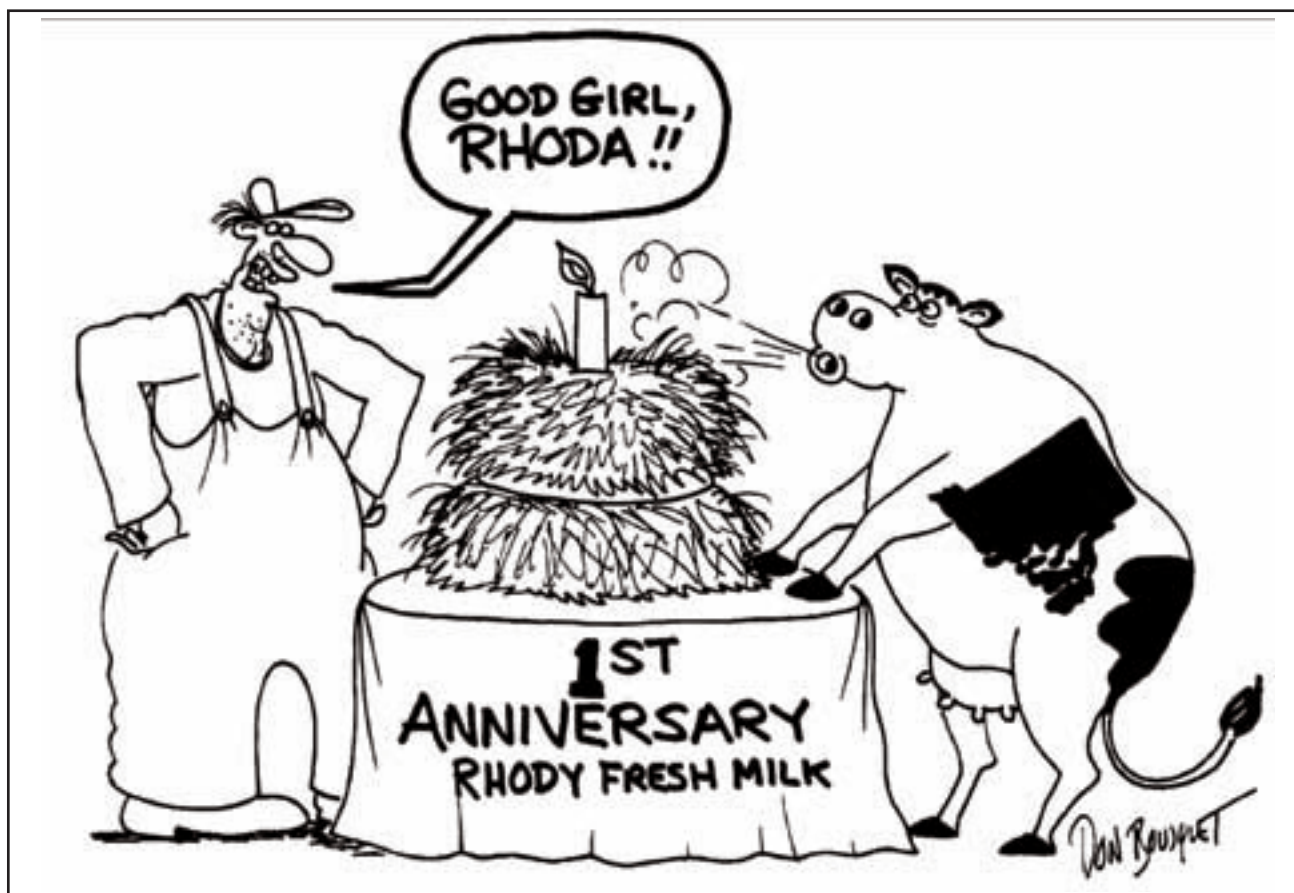
They are under the impression that the town's license from the U.S. Coast Guard, allows them to use the premises as they see fit. Nothing is further from the truth. Neither the Affordable Housing Committee nor the Town Council seems to recognize the status of the lighthouse or the terms and conditions under which the property can be used. The USCG license agreement prohibits any discriminatory or discretionary "use" of the site (affordable housing is discriminatory) and limits use of the site for "maintenance, recreational and historical" purposes only. "Affordable Housing" is a "use" that is in violation of that agreement and not consistent with intentions and the important needs of site preservation.

Beavertail Lighthouse is one of the most important visitor destinations this side of Newport and in southern Rhode Island. Thousands

of people visit the lighthouse each year from every state and many countries. The site is registered in the National Registry of Historic Places. Originally built in 1749, it is the third oldest lighthouse in the country and considered by some as the most photographed and painted location in Rhode Island. It is the most significant compound of buildings on Jamestown and an unquestionable valuable asset to the people of Rhode Island. Historical content must be maintained with preservation being the overriding priority.

The residence and granite light tower were built 149 years ago in 1856 is maintained by the dedicated custodian residing in the dwelling and the BLMA. For the past 12 years, the BLMA has spent thousands of dollars of membership funds, donations, and grants in restoration and stabilization tasks, plus the enormous amount of time devoted by its volunteers and docent staff. It expects to spend even more as plans for museum expansion begin. Neither the state nor the town of Jamestown has allocated any funding for the preservation of the site. The USCG undertakes only emergency repairs to the rotating light and the foghorn signal.

The proposed periodic cycling of families in and



out of site is counterproductive to addressing the preservation of these historic buildings. Preservation requires astute care in keeping quarters pristine both externally and internally without any further modifications. Experimentation by sequential occupancy of families moving in or out jeopardizes the integrity of the historical components of the building by adding wear/tear and possible accidental damage. This position is supported by many National Museum organizations, including the RI Historic Preservation Commission.

Coupled with potential risk of damage by inhabitants, high heating costs of the uninsulated building (1,800 gals. last year), the site is not within walking distance of nearby stores or services recommended by the affordable housing guidelines. It is over four miles to town. More important, there is inconvenience for families to vacate when the light station is exceeded by the government and museum expansion is initiated.

The lighthouse should not be considered as convenient living accommodations for the economically disadvantaged. The build-

ings require custodial services dedicated to preservation. The two uses are not compatible. The concept of rotating affordable housing families through this valuable and historic site is absurd. It's analogous with sending the needy to reside in the White House or one of the Newport Mansions.

During the April 2005 government sponsored North East Lighthouse Conference, affordable housing inquiries were made to the General Services Administration property managers, the National Park Service, which is the officiating

agency enforcing the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act, and the USCG. Those three agencies' and RIDEM stated that use of the site for affordable housing is not in the public's interest. The congressional law covering homeless people and the umbrella, under which affordable housing is mandated, has been specifically exempted from the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000.

Jamestowners' need to

Letters continue on page 11

The news of 10 and 15 years ago is from the Jamestown Press. The news of 25, 50, 75 and 100 years ago from the Newport Daily News comes from the collection of the Newport Historical Society.

100 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, September 22, 1905:

The entrance to the harbor presented a busy scene about 5 o'clock yesterday. There were three tugs with 16 laden barges passing the Dumplings at one time. One of the tugs was the Tacony, which had in addition to her own tow four barges, which made up the tow of tug Cora L. Staples when she was burned recently in New London.

From the Newport Daily News, September 25, 1905:

Barge Prima Donna, loaded with coal for the Jamestown & Newport Ferry Company, went ashore last night at the West ferry on the rocks in front of the Thayer cottage. The barge was towed to the west bay by mistake, and in anchoring the chain parted, and not having another, anchor and barge drifted toward shore. Attempts were made to attract the attention of the tug by blowing the fog horn, but the signals were not heard and the strong westerly wind carried the barge high up on the rocks just north of the West ferry, where she lies at present.

75 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, September 18, 1930:

Frank S. Furtado was appointed a committee (at the Town Council meeting) to have the trucks used at the town's crusher put in good condition and Councilman Furtado was appointed a committee to lay the town's crusher up for the winter.

From the Newport Daily News, September 19, 1930:

Fishing at Beavertail is proving an enjoyable and profitable sport. Many are catching large numbers of blue fish. Halton Smith of Shoreby Hill catching 18 Thursday morning. Several bass have been caught during the past week.

From the Newport Daily News, September 19, 1930:

The Holy Ghost Society is to hold a series of whists at their hall on Narragansett Avenue, the first of which will be held next Thursday evening. First and second prizes will be awarded to the high scorers at the close of each series, and weekly prizes will be awarded.

50 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, September 19, 1955:

Dr. Michael F. Walsh, state commissioner of education, was



the principal speaker at the dedication exercises of Jamestown's new \$450,000 elementary school last night. The exercises, held in the multi-purpose room of the new school on Lawn and Watson Avenues before an audience of 200, marked the end of four years of proposing, planning and finally building the structure for which ground was broken December 30, 1953. . . . More than 1,000 people visited the school Sunday afternoon and evening. It opened this morning for regular classes with an enrollment of 400 pupils.

From the Newport Daily News, September 22, 1955:

Jamestown is being considered by the Fruit Industries, Inc. of Bradenton, Fla., as a site for one of its northern distributing centers for orange juice. . . . The \$500,000 processing plant, though, is still in the planning stage (Town Council president) Gobeille added. Two company representatives were in Jamestown this week inspecting the proposed site, the former Navy fleet landing at the east end of Eldred Avenue.

From the Newport Daily News, September 24, 1955:

Things are looking up for Antone Gomes of Jamestown. He'll soon move out of a grim tar-papered shack into a trim three-room shingled cottage overlooking Sheffield Cove and the west passage of Narragansett Bay. The move will be the product of a community effort to help the 70-year-old retired farmer. It all started Aug. 31, 1954, when Hurricane Carol battered Jamestown. Gomes' shack, located on the west shore of the island, tipped over by the winds and high water and badly damaged. His furniture was totally destroyed. . . . The Red Cross swung into action. An informal drive was organized to build Gomes a cottage to replace the shack.

25 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, September 18, 1980:

(advertisement) Jamestown resident. Town of Jamestown is seeking a part-time Recreation Center Supervisor. \$5 per hour.

(Advertisement). In Jamestown, this turn of the century "cottage" offers a gracious setting for enjoyment of New England

Summers, on three-quarters of an acre of smooth lawn, the 11-room house includes 7 bedrooms, 4 baths and 60 foot porch with clear, unobstructed views of Narragansett Bay and Newport, the unspoiled waterfront is protected by a large grassed common, of which the property has partial ownership. Offered at \$250,000, substantially furnished and equipped.

From the Newport Daily News, September 19, 1980:

The Waterfront Authority recently recommended that the Town Council take whatever steps necessary to buy Fort Wetherill basin for town property.

From the Newport Daily News, September 23, 1980:

The Town Council Monday night asked residents to voluntarily conserve water because of low supplies at the town reservoir.

15 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, September 20, 1990:

The Town Council, after 90 minutes of debate Monday night, unanimously approved a resolution of support for the new cross-island highway design.

The fate of the Fort Wetherill Boat Owner's Association's lease with Jamestown may be decided at the October meeting of the Harbor Management Commission. . . . Several options exist: renew the lease with the boat owner's group, lease the property to a commercial marina operator, or have the facility managed for the commission by the town's harbormaster.

10 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, September 21, 1995:

Town officials expected water from North Kingstown to start flowing through the emergency pipeline across the West Passage and directly into the island's distribution system yesterday at about 2 p.m. . . . The town will be paying North Kingstown the regular water customer rate of \$1.40 per 1,000 gallons with a \$30 minimum for up to 3 million gallons. Above that cut off, the rate drops to \$1.10 per 1,000 gallons. Eventually those costs will be passed on to Jamestown water customers. Meanwhile, the town continues to pump 100,000 gallons daily from its recently completed municipal well into North Pond reservoir.

(photo caption) A swimmer heads for a towel Saturday after completing the 1.7 mile open water swim from Newport to Jamestown. More than 140 swimmers participated in the annual Save the Bay event.