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(current 9/2018)**

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Newsletter assembled by the  
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# Friends of the Plum Island Light Summer, 2019 Newsletter

## A Joyful Interpretation of History

*At our September, 2018 Open House, the Friends had the true pleasure of meeting Una Norton, a 4th grader and neighbor, and admirer of our beloved light. As part of a school project for the Glen Urquhart School in Beverly, Una had hand crafted a model of the tower and boathouse that all of us found to be very impressive and inspiring.*

*She also provided the following essay on the light and was gracious enough to let us run it herein.*

*Thank you Una for your interest and for all your work on the model and the essay. No doubt all your readers will enjoy it!*

From Una Norton:

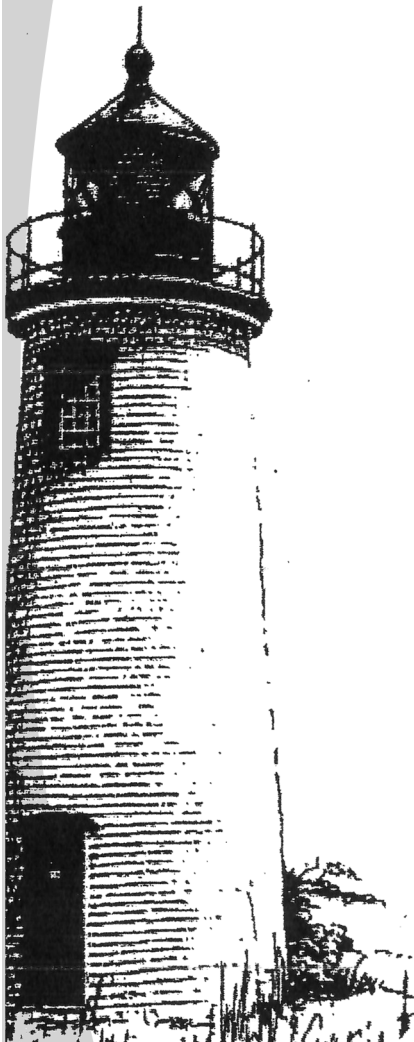
Hi, I'm Una and I'm here to tell you about Plum Island Lighthouse! In 1839 a captain and his wife were at sea on a ship called the Richmond Packet, bringing a cargo of flour and corn to Newburyport. "It's a very dark night, we'll have to be cautious" said the captain to his wife. "I'll batten down" said the captain's wife. Suddenly a wind blew. It started to thunder, the waves grew and it began to snow hard! The captain realized they were close to the rocks, and ran to the pilothouse to steer away. Then he felt a bump and heard a big creek! 'Rocks!' the captain thought 'we'll sink!' He acted fast, jumping onto the rocks with a line and holding the ship. Some sailors jumped off too, and some helped the captain's wife to get on the rope he was holding, to slide down. The captain's wife lost her grip, and they heard a

scream and a splash! The captain and crew searched and searched all night and day. Sadly, his wife has never been found, to this day. The ship may have avoided danger if Keeper George had been able to get back to the lighthouse that night to light the lamp, but the storm was bad and blocked his way. So when the Richmond Packet came, it was dark at the harbor's entrance.

There is a lighthouse that I see every day. It's called the Plum Island Lighthouse. It is located on Plum Island, in Newburyport, Massachusetts. It was built in 1898, more than 100 years after the original Plum Island Lighthouse, which was created with a twin, in 1788.

Twin lighthouses make a range light. If sailors saw the two lights - one in front of the other - they knew they had the safe way

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through the channel. When there is a storm, the sandbars on Plum Island can move because of the crossing waves. So they built the lighthouses on moveable bases. The light was fueled by whale oil.

In 1808 a tornado knocked down both towers, and they were both rebuilt. Sadly, the front tower burned down in 1856, after a lightning strike in a storm that left many things destroyed. After that storm, the Bug Light that had been added to the station the year before, was used to form a range with the rear tower, which got its 4<sup>th</sup> order Fresnel lens that year. The sea-side of the Bug Light was painted black to contrast in daylight with the rear tower, that was painted white.

The Plum Island Lighthouse was the thirteenth lighthouse in the United States and may have been our country's first range light. The merchants of Newburyport paid to build the lighthouse because they were sick of losing their stock in the wrecks.

In 1789, President George Washington appointed Abner Lowell – otherwise known as “Uncle” to be Plum Island Lighthouse’s first keeper. Uncle Abner was the first of three Lowells to keep the light. His son Lewis got the job when he died. On a bitterly cold December night, Lewis lit a fire under the lantern to keep the whale oil from freezing. That was a mistake. The fumes got him and he died at his post. Lewis’ son Joseph kept the light after that, and Captain George was next, and the first non-Lowell Light-keeper. Fifty-one years after the lighthouse was built, the captain’s wife was swept away. Also, in that December of 1839, 300 vessels were destroyed and 150 people died – in one month alone!

Some jobs in the lighthouse were to light the lamp, fill the lamp with whale oil (later kerosene), clean the windows of the lantern room, sweep and clean the floors and even rescue shipwrecks!

The lighthouse I see today, got the original fourth order Fresnel lens, as a hand-me-down when it was built, and the lens is still in use today. The last Plum Island light-keeper retired in 1951 when the light became automatic. In 1981 the light was changed to flash: long ON, short OFF. [My neighbor across the street told me that after electricity

came to the lighthouse, the light was so bright that it made their dining room and kitchen (and all the people in it), glow green when it flashed ON!].

The Plum Island Lighthouse has a lot of interesting history. You can read more about it yourself. You can also visit Plum Island Lighthouse in the summertime. There is a group called Friends of Plum Island Light, and they raise money to care for the lighthouse. One way they do this is to sell bricks with the donors’ names. They put them in the walkway around the lighthouse. So if you go there, look for one that says: Fourth Graders, Glen Urquhart School, 2018



Story Author Una Norton and photos of her lighthouse and boathouse replicas, with a real working light!



### 2019 Open House Schedule

For 2019, the Friends have opted for a new, regular schedule of openings. The new calendar better utilizes active volunteers and follows a regular schedule of opening every third Sunday of the summer months.

Jul	Aug	Sep	Sep
21	18	15	29

**Tours are from 1 to 4 pm**

**A Note of Thanks** The Friends were recently honored by the surprise award of a grant from the Rodigrasse-Weare Foundation, a Donor Advised Fund of the US Charitable Gift Trust. The Friends are truly humbled at the Foundation's generosity and wish to extend our deepest thanks and gratitude to the Weare family. Nancy Weare has been a long time supporter and contributor to the Light and the Plum Island history in general. Her published book "Plum Island the Way it Was" remains a top seller and can be found on most coffee tables or bookshelves around town. Her contributions and stories throughout the years have been so appreciated.

The Friends are considering applying the grant funds to complete some maintenance tasks at the tower including repair of cracked glass, repair of small leaks and repair of a non-functioning ventilation fan in the tower. Stay tuned as we work to constantly improve the condition of the light to keep it going for generations more. Thank you again Nancy, for thinking of us. We miss you.

**Sales Table Updates** The selection of products at our Sales table during open houses has been recently refreshed, with new offerings including hats in contemporary pink and plum colors, new artwork and even new colors for tshirts. Copies of the ever-popular "Plum Island the Way is Was" by Nancy Weare are still available.

Also new this year, the Friends were pleased to receive a supply of the "ABCs of Plum Island" by Jenn Bogard. Jenn is the granddaughter of Barbara and Art Wood. Jenn uses Plum Island and some historic photos to teach the ABCs and some history along the way. We highly recommend it.

Thank you for making these available Jenn!



**We're up next!**



The Friends have been invited to participate in a forthcoming episode of the Light Hearted Podcast, hosted by the engaging and informative Jeremy D'Entremont. Friends Board members John Vogl and Megan St John expect to record later this summer.

On a recent June podcast, Listeners were treated to great stories about early navigation by Jeremy and Cindy Johnson, President of the Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouses, and an interview with Sophie Blackall, author of the children's book "Hello Lighthouse". The podcast is available from the US Lighthouse Society at [news.uslhs.org](http://news.uslhs.org). It's well worth a listen.

**MEMORIAL BRICK ORDER FORM**

Honor the memory of a loved one, celebrate the birth of someone special, commemorate even yourself - the possibilities are vast. Memorial gift cards are available. Due the size of the brick, the inscription may only contain up to 3 lines with a maximum of 14 letters. Nick names and cottage names are fine.

To order, fill out coupon below. Please print clearly. Enclose your check or money order in the amount of \$50 and mail to:

**Friends of Plum Island Light, P.O. Box 381, Newburyport, MA 01950**

Line 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Line 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Line 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_)-\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

