

BEALS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. XXVI, No. 3 (Summer 2024)

Beals Historical Society held its annual Memorial Day program on Monday, May 27, at the Beals Town Office meeting room with newly elected BHS President, Daniel F. Davis, as Master-of-Ceremonies. After welcoming remarks, Davis lead the audience in singing "America" and a prayer of invocation. The audience then recited the "Pledge of Allegiance". A poem entitled "Veterans," written by the late Clara McKenney of Harrington, was read, followed by a moment of silence and the playing of the traditional TAPS in honor of all deceased veterans. A poem entitled "Our Fallen Soldiers" was shared, and special music provided by Debbie Kelley, singing "God Bless the U.S.A."



UPCOMING PROGRAM MEETING

BHS will be hosting their Summer program with a presentation given by Renee Gray and Debbie Welch regarding their most interesting European tour. Come hear Big Ben strike the noon hour and watch the changing of the guards at Buckingham Palace and much more.

The program will be held at the Beals Town Office on August 2, 2024 at 6PM.

PERSONALIZED BRICKS

Any time is a good time to purchase personalized bricks for either the Veteran's Monument Park or the Patio. For the 4"x 8" brick, you have three lines each with 21 letters and spaces for \$75. The 8"x8" brick offers four lines with 21 letters and spaces for \$125. The Veteran's brick information includes the rank, name, branch of service, war and years served. You can be creative with the Patio brick. It can be your favorite Beal's Island memory, memorialize your loved ones, honor the living, a school memory, etc. It's your choice with the patio brick. Please find the personalized brick application attached. Thank you!

For this year's Memorial Day address, Davis shared the story of the little-known Honda Point tragedy as follows:

The Honda Point tragedy of September 8, 1923 holds the record as the United States largest peacetime loss of ships in American military history. Honda Point, also known as Point Pedernales, is located just north of the entrance to the Santa Barbara Channel in Santa Barbara County, California. The area has been known to be hazardous as far back as the 16th century, when Spanish explorers coined the area the "Devil's Jaw," due to its treacherous and plentiful rocky outcroppings. Local mariners have long known to avoid the area at all costs, and the sailors involved on that fateful September day were no exception. However, a perfect storm of radio and navigational errors, irregular currents, and poor visibility all came together at just the right time to result in tragedy for both ships and nearly two dozen members of their crews.

The story of the Honda Point disaster finds its beginning seven days earlier and

some 5,000 miles away, when the Great Kantō earthquake tore through the main Japanese island of Honshū on September 1, 1923. With a recorded magnitude of 7.9, the earthquake shattered the cities of Tokyo, Yokohama, and much of the surrounding area. Well over 100,000 lives were lost in the quake, and the damage to Japan's infrastructure was estimated to have exceeded \$15 billion dollars in today's currency. As a result of the mighty earthquake, unusually large swells and powerful currents swept through Pacific Ocean, soon reaching as far as the California coastline where our story takes place.

Despite the unusually rough conditions on the Pacific, the U.S. Navy deployed 14 Clemson-class destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 11 from San Francisco Bay to San Diego Bay for training exercises on September 8, 1923.

Led by Captain Edward H. Watson, the

Continued on page 2

squadron conducted a series of tactical and gunnery exercises during their journey between the two Bays. At the time of this incident, radio navigation aids were a relatively recent addition to navigational departments and were not yet wholly trusted by navigators aboard ships. The ships in DesRon 11 thus relied on dead reckoning for the bulk of their navigation, and only used radio navigation aids as a supplement to their preferred methodology.

As the day progressed, weather conditions worsened and reduced the visibility surrounding the destroyers. Captain Watson, who flew his flag aboard the USS *Delphy*, had DesRon 11 form a column to decrease the risk of any mishaps. Using dead reckoning, the navigator aboard the flagship determined that the squadron was ready to turn east into the entrance of the Santa Barbara Channel at about 9 that evening. The radio navigation aids aboard the *Delphy* indicated that they were off course by several miles northeast, but the squadron's navigator believed the reports to be erroneous and chose to ignore them in favor of his own traditional calculations.

Though the squadron could have stopped to take soundings of water depths to confirm safe passage, Captain Watson had DesRon 11 simulating wartime conditions as an exercise and did not want his ships to reduce their speeds. Captain Watson ordered the ships to travel in close formation and barreled into what he believed to be the Santa Barbara Channel at a speed of 20 knots. Heavy fog blanketed the area and concealed the perils of what was actually Honda Point from their sights. To complicate matters, the rough seas frequently raised the propellers out of the water, throwing off calculations of speed as determined by the props' revolutions.

Unfortunately, the men of DesRon 11 would not realize their mistake until it was too late. A mere 5 minutes after turning east, the *Delphy* plowed ashore at 20 knots. Sailors aboard the *Delphy* scrambled to sound the ship's siren, but the wheels of disaster were already well in motion. The USS *S.P. Lee* saw the *Delphy* come to a sudden stop a few hundred yards ahead and quickly turned to port to avoid the flagship, but swung herself broadside into the nearby bluffs instead. The USS *Young* made no move to change her course and sailed directly over a series of sharp, submerged rocks which tore a gaping hole in her hull. As the *Young* capsized onto her starboard side, rushing water trapped much of her fire and

engine crew in the lower compartments of the ship. The USS *Woodbury*, USS *Nicholas*, and the USS *Fuller* all struck rocks and ran aground in shallow waters. Stunned by the unfolding chaos, men aboard the USS *Chauncey* decided to make way to the capsizing *Young* to save her crew, instead making for the nearby shore.

While the perilous rocks of the Devil's Jaw ensnared the first 7 ships of DesRon 11's column, the blaring sirens of the damaged vessels bought time for the remaining 7 destroyers in the latter half of the formation. The USS *Farragut* and the USS *Somers* slowed just enough to hit the ground but were able to back up and out of danger. The USS *Percival*, USS *Kennedy*, USS *Paul Hamilton*, USS *Stoddert*, and USS *Thompson* avoided the disaster altogether by breaking formation and diverting their courses.

The sound of sirens, twisting metal, and shouting sailors did not go unnoticed by locals in the area. Nearby fisherman raced to the area to gather sailors from the wrecked ships, and ranchers rigged up breeches buoys from atop the bluffs to haul men away from the danger. The five destroyers of DesRon 11 that avoided the rocks immediately jumped into rescue efforts, sending out lifeboats to collect men and bring them back to the safety of their decks. While the disaster occurred on 8 September, the last of the sailors were not rescued until the afternoon of 9 September.

When all was said and done, 7 destroyers were declared a total loss, and 23 men (20 aboard the *Young* and 3 aboard the *Delphy*) were lost in the catastrophe. On this Memorial Day, 101 years later, odd pieces of wreckage from those seven-grounded destroyers are still there to remind us of that great tragedy of American Naval history. Their story and those remains serve to remind us of the brave men who were lost in the Honda Point Tragedy, and all who have served our nation in times of war and peace. They lived, served, and died, having given their all to help preserve this great nation and the freedoms we enjoy today. May their efforts and the great heritage they have secured for us be preserved for our children and extended to future generations in years to come.

The program closed with a poem entitled "Ode for Memorial Day," by Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) and the singing of "America the Beautiful."

BHS NEW ADDITION

Beals Historical Society is located in a small fishing village on Beals Island, on the Downeast Coast of Maine. It is a 501©(3) non-profit organization that was established in the year 2000. Since establishment, through grant funding and private donations, BHS has built a 28'x40' Cold Storage Area, which connects to the 28'x32' Heritage Center. At this time, we would like to

build a 12'x32' addition that will square the two buildings.

The addition will be used to create a 19th Century room, as would be typical for Beals Island's National Folklore Legend, Tall Barnabus Coffin Beal III, a.k.a. Tall Barney.

The room will have an antique treadle sewing machine that has the honor of being the only sewing machine on

Beals that would sew canvas sails for one of the boatbuilder's wives.

It will also proudly display a loom that still works and belonged to the wife of the original settler, Manwarren Beal, circa 1775.

We will also display a replica of the chair used by Manwarren and Tall Barney. It is a one-piece chair with table top. The table top lifts and lays flat against the back of the chair, so it becomes the chair back.

We have two cushioned wooden benches and three beautiful wooden chairs that came from the Beals Wesleyan Church.

Plus we have other antique furniture and artifacts to display in the 19th Century room.

Life and Culture in the 19th Century was far different from what it is today. It is our main objective to utilize this "room" to exemplify life as it was in those days. Dishes, pottery, pickled pig's feet jars, and much more will be on display to indicate the quality of life and how it compares to the lifestyle in the current century.

We are thankful that our local students attend Beals Heritage Center on an annual basis, and look forward to sharing with them stories and visual artifacts as they walk into a room filled with an unfamiliar setting that will enable them to take a walk back in time, as they learn about the denim clothes that were made on the loom, how and where the food provided originated, and so much more.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation, please know that BHS needs to raise \$5,000 more dollars for this most worthy cause. We thank you for your consideration! The mailing address is BHS PO Box 280, Beals ME 04611.



THE CURRENT BHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Daniel Davis
Vice President: Pam Libby
Treasurer: Carol Davis
Secretary: Teresa Carver

Membership Chair: Bettina White
Other directors:
Ray Beal and Jason Lord

Beals Heritage Center



Beals Historical Society Membership Application

Please check one: Renewal New

Name(s) as you wish it to appear on membership card and member roll on website:

(Please type or print clearly)

Your mailing address: Street or Post Office Box: _____
City: _____ State _____ ZIP: _____

E-mail address: _____

Type of membership (Please review all types and check the one that applies)

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Annual | \$10 annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual/Life | \$200 one-time payment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couple Annual | \$15 annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couple/Life | \$300 one-time payment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior/65 Annual | \$5 annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior couple/65 Annual | \$7.50 annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student | \$5 annually |

Over and above dues, I wish to donate _____ for __ operating expenses, __ building fund, or __ endowment fund. Receipt and membership card will be sent to you.

**Instructions: Please print, complete and mail this application, together with tax-deductible check or money order payable to Beals Historical Society to:
Membership Chairperson, Beals Historical Society, P.O. Box 280, Beals, ME 04611**

Annual memberships are for the calendar year and expire Dec. 31.