

SLM068

Letter from Gridley Bryant to Alexander Parris

Boston May 27th 1847

Capt. Parris,
Sir,

In a conversation I had with you shortly after your return from Washington, you stated that the Fifth Auditor might be disposed to allow a small sum for the purpose of making a landing, or of opening an avenue to the shore of some part of the Matinecus Rock; and while there, about ten days ago, I made a survey of the Western Shore of the Rock, and have had the accompanying plan made, so as to show as near as possible, the great danger and extreme difficulty of landing, whenever there is much of a swell.

You will observe by the plan, that the Rock can never be approached at low water, without leaving the boat some 200 feet from highwater-mark, and if it be a large, or even a suitable sized boat, she must remain there until the tide rises, at which time the sea begins to increase, and it is with great difficulty that she can be preserved while reaching the shore. Even when it is moderately smooth, the only time that a landing can be effected as the shore now is, being a little before high water, at the very time in which there is generally the greatest swell; and for more than nine months in the year, it is very seldom that a landing can be made, with any safety to the Boat or the lives of those who may be in her. The Light Keeper informs me that more than half the time both are exposed, and while I was myself on the Rock, last fall, it was impossible to approach

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or leave the place for more than three weeks, during a considerable part of which time my men were idle for want of material to work with; this has occurred too, more or less, during the whole time I have been engaged in erecting the building.

I think that a greater part of the difficulty and danger might be obviated, by blowing out three or four passages, as indicated by the letters on the plan, beginning at A – This cove or opening can only be used for landing in smooth weather and at high water, but in no case can a boat be got on shore, or remain with any safety. B – This opening extends, about 300 feet from low water mark, and would be a very convenient landing place for family stores, and for landing the oil for the Lantern, etc. but in its present situation no landing can be effected until about an hour before high water, and even then the boat cannot be got on shore, or remain in safety, but by blowing out a channel through the rocks, as shown on the plan, it might be very much improved, and rendered useful for half or three quarters of the tide, besides which it would be accessible at almost any time, when the wind was in shore. C – This opening is about 450 feet in

length, and can be approached with an in shore wind, the same as at B, and by clearing out a channel could be made usefull as long, or longer, than the entrance at B, and the boats, when once entered within the surf, would lay in safety, or could be drawn high up on the shore in case of a storm.

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D – This entrance is an opening from the extreme north-easterly end of the Island, and extends in, about 770 feet, to the end of a small Wharf, which has been built by Mr. Abbot, the Light Keeper, (at his own expence; he has also been at considerable expence in removing some of the loose rock, which makes this more easy of access than any other part of the shore). But even here, he can not get to his Wharf, untill about one hour before high-water. From the southerly side of this Wharf, there is a gravelly beach, extending 150 feet, to the termination of the entrance C. – This entrance, as also the entrance at C. are the most important to the Island, as one or the other are available in almost any wind, provided the swell is not too heavy; but the great difficulty in making any of the openings safe and usefull, is the great number of small, round and pointed rocks, scattered through their whole length, some of which reaching nearly to the top of high-tide, and others rising above that height (altho' partially sheltered by those on the outside, which are much higher and connected together.) produce eddies and whirlpools in every direction, whenever there is a heavy swell, and make it impossible to guide a boat between them, and she is tossed from one to the other untill she is filled, or stove to pieces, (which I am informed has been the case more than once) and the boatmen are left to reach the shore the best way they can.

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There is also an opening at E. which extends nearly through into the main entrance; this would at particular times be very usefull, and Boats might obtain an entrance here when they would be unable to succeed in any other place.

If the Fifth Auditor should be disposed to improve and facilitate the landing at this place, I should reccommend that the obstructions in the opening at B. to be removed so as to admit a Boat at one third ebb tide, and also at C. at half tide; likewise at D. at three quarters ebb, or as low as can be done in the detached boulders, without cutting into the solid ledge, and I would undertake to open a passage to each of these entrances, wide enough to admit a boat, for the sum of Two-Hundred and Seventy-Five dollars; and if the weather and other circumstances should prove favourable, I would also make an opening at E. without extra charge.

I am Sir your ob[edien]t serv[an]t

Gridley Bryant

Capt. Alex. Parris
Navy Yard
Portsmouth, N. H.

[written in Alexander Parris's hand]

G. Bryant's

Letter relative to improving the Landing at M. R.