

A VERY SPECIAL GUEST RETURNS TO HER ROOTS

by Amy Robinson

Photos by Dick Parsons, Sean Murphy and Barbara Burke



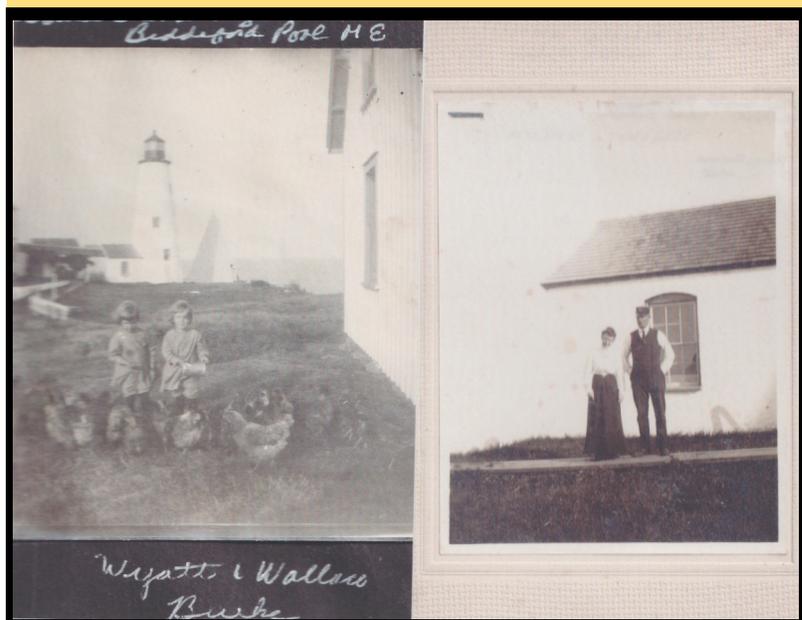
On Saturday evening October 12, 2019 a call went out from AbbyLynn and Bob Haskell, new FOWIL volunteers this season and also operators of Broad Reach Sailing. They found out unexpectedly that their guest for Sunday's excursion was none other than Barbara Burke, granddaughter of Charles A. Burke (1905 - 1914) who was the first keeper to serve in the newly redesigned keeper's house and is the focus of all our restorations. Her father, Wyatt and his twin brother Wallace were born during Keeper and Mrs. Burke's time on the island and spent their first 6 years enjoying growing up out there. Barbara was visiting the area from Missoula, Montana.

Bob and AbbyLynn very generously invited 3 members of FOWIL to accompany Ms. Burke where we were able to arrange an actual visit to the island for her including inside the restored to 1906 Keeper's house, and the tower. Accompanying the sailing excursion along with Barbara were, Dick Parsons, FOWIL historian; Amy Robinson, FOWIL Secretary and long time docent; FOWIL member and supporter David Mokler, 2 additional guests, and Master Captains Bob Haskell and Jonathan Boyd.



Barbara is a wonderful lady in her 70s and was so excited to be able to get out to Wood Island to see, for the first time, where her Grandfather was the Keeper and her Dad Wyatt and his twin brother Wallace grew up in their early years. Believe it or not Barbara walked to the Saco Pier from the inn where she was staying, about 4 miles away. Being quite fit, the walk across the island was an easy stroll for her.

During the tour of the house, Barbara told Amy and Dick she was VERY impressed and kept saying how much the furnishings looked like the family pieces she now has. She said the Dining Room, Boys Room and Bedroom furnishings were nearly identical to the pieces handed down from her grandparents, and from her family recollections. Barbara also said that at some future date she will donate to FOWIL a caned rocker from which she has a photo of her Grandmother rocking, with the twins in her lap. Barbara also plans to donate her Grandmother's photo album as well as a few other items from Keeper Burke's time at Wood Island.



Barbara said Grandmother Carrie lived much longer than Keeper Burke, so she got to know her quite well, however her Grandfather died before she was born. Grandmother Burke told Barbara that her boys (Wyatt and Wally) never really forgave her for taking them off the island. They loved it there. According to Barbara, her Dad, Wyatt and Uncle Wally were as different as night and day. Wally was the one with all the stories, while her Dad had a much quieter personality. Barbara's Dad passed away of lung cancer 2 years ahead of Wally, even though Wally developed diabetes the year they synthesized insulin and spent six months in Boston with other newly diagnosed kids while they learned to use it. He lived into his 70's.

As we returned from the island, we enjoyed a glorious sunset and a full moon rising, with the Wood Island light flashing behind us. It was a magical time to be out there. Barbara confided this was a deeply personal reunion with her family. She also now enjoys a connection with FOWIL and said she felt we are now part of her family. Before Barbara left the boat, Captain Jonathan, who is a world renowned opera singer (and will be singing twice in France this winter) used his magnificent tenor to sing her a song in German, her choice from the 5 languages he offered up to her as possibilities. Barbara told Bob after her sail: "Thank you again for the most amazing of experiences."

Dick Parsons has just finished drafting a chapter of a book he is working on regarding Charlies Burke. Barbara has gladly agreed to review this with him as well as providing more photos from Keeper Burke's tenure. This should be a wonderful connection that will have lots of future benefits for FOWIL as well as for Barbara.

The Executive Committee would like to deeply thank AbbyLynn and Bob Haskell , for their generous inclusion of our 3 members to make this a special trip back in time for Barbara, and helping her to reconnect with her family.



Submitted by Amy Robinson



Friends of Wood Island Lighthouse
A chapter of the American Lighthouse Foundation
P.O. Box 26, Biddeford Pool, ME 04006



<http://woodislandlighthouse.org>