

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with Florence Burkhardt
Daughter of Lighthouse Keeper 1930 – 1938
October 28, 1984
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Editorial notes in parenthesis ()

Today is October 28, 1984 and I'm Elaine Harmon working for the Sandy Hook Museum tape recording the reminiscences of Florence Burkhardt who lives at 25 Ocean Blvd., Atlantic Highlands. Florence Burkhardt is an important person to interview because she in fact grew up at Sandy Hook Lighthouse while her Dad was the Keeper here, Henry Burkhardt, from 1930 to 1938. She was good enough to bring his letter of retirement dated February 18, 1938.

We are standing right outside of Quarters 84A which is the south side of the Lighthouse Keepers residence. This is the 1883 house, and the fourth such house built on this location.

EH: Florence Burkhardt is now at the staircase. Why don't you describe to us what it was like in 1930.

FB: Well this is about the same as it was when I was here.

EH: The staircase is the same? Okay.

EH: What were the grounds like though, Florence?

FB: Bigger. This is all cut in. We never had those roads over there.

EH: The road outside the Mortar Battery, really?

FB: It was, you know, one car or two cars, now they make a big highway out of it.

EH: So, the road now is much wider?

FB: Oh yes.

EH: You had much more grass then?

FB: Oh yes, a lot of it to cut.

EH: Did your father do all of the mowing?

FB: Oh, yes he did everything.

EH: Also, how about the trees? There's a wonderful old pear tree. Do you remember that pear tree also?

FB: Oh, I remember a tree a little further out there which I fell out of. (Laughter)

EH: Do you remember the lilac bushes, the huge lilac bush too?

FB: There used to be a lot of those around.

EH: Okay. The pear tree is pretty spectacular. There are those miniature pears...

FB: No, that I don't remember.

EH: What about this driveway just south of this house now?

FB: It looks like its cut in more. There was quite a bit of ground and they widened it. That road over there was not there.

EH: The road just approaching the Mortar Battery, then, where there's a stop sign and a Firehouse now?

FB: That was not there. It wasn't there at all.

EH: Do you remember the road being in between the barracks and the mess hall originally?

FB: Oh yes, that's been there.

EH: Right. That was the original road. What about the foot path? Was there a brick path or was it the slate slabs?

FB: No it was more of a ...It was a foot path. I don't know how to describe it. Then the restaurant was right over there.

EH: Restaurant?

FB: That's where we ran for ice cream all the time.

EH: Really?

Unknown voice: Is that where the PX was?

FB: Right there in the bottom there.

EH: In building 53 where that car is parked over there? Okay, we are talking about Brookdale Center now, which we are told, originally was an old post exchange and you are saying in the basement of it was an ice cream parlor?

FB: Remember when I gave you the picture of (inaudible Mitalli) Her brother and father worked there. And this was the Gym.

EH: Okay the Gym is still the one with those long windows?

FB: Right here.

EH: Oh, 70, building 70?

FB: That was the Gym.

EH: Gee, That has the bowling alleys in the basement and still does today.

FB: And in the front was the jail.

EH: Museum building 28 was the post jail, guardhouse and jail. Does it look dramatically different to you?

FB: Well, a lot has been built-on like the YMCA. This has been built-on since.

EH: The garage?

FB: That was added to it. That wasn't there.

EH: Who lived by the way on the other side of this house? Do you recall the name?

FB: Well, when we first came here it was Enoch Keene and his wife.

EH: And he was what, assistant keeper?

FB: First assistant. Then there was a second assistant, but he lived way down the road. I think it was Bill Mason. He was here when Daddy left. And who took over from Dad, I don't know.

EH: It might be the name of Poe. Does that sound familiar?

FB: That sounds very familiar. Daddy took over from Poe.

EH: So Poe left in 1930. He replaced Keeper Poe. People have told me that name.

EH: We are going to be walking into the house. As we go up the steps – there's about five wooden steps and it's a wooden porch. Its like an addition to the house and Florence mentioned something about this being originally the bathroom?

FB: No. Inside was the bathroom. This was an entry.

EH: The porch was an entry. There was nothing in there. So the kitchen today was partitioned off to have a bathroom with a closet type of pull-chain arrangement.

FB: And that was taken out when they put the set-tubs in.

EH: What do you mean set-tubs?

FB: They're like two tubs together.

EH: Deep porcelain tubs, like a wash tub?

FB: A wash tub.

EH: Were they used for laundry by your mother?

FB: Umhum.

EH: Because she did hand laundry on a scrub board type of thing?

FB: Um-hum.

EH: That's 1930's. The time frame is 1930 to 1938 here.

FB: Then out here there was a coal stove.

EH: So you had a coal stove right in the kitchen.

FB: Right in the kitchen. Right in the center, I'd say it came out right about here.

EH: And the sink on the end of the room. Ok, just to the right of where the counters are. What was the ceiling like? Do you remember if it was the pressed tin ceiling?

FB: I don't remember, but it didn't look like this. In fact when we came here there was no electric.

EH: No electric at all in the house? Was it installed in the eight years time?

FB: Yeah, shortly after, they put the bathroom in, then they put the electric in.

EH: About what year? Early on in your father's.....

FB: A couple of years after we moved here, I'd say it started.

EH: So what did you use, lanterns? Kerosene lamps?

FB: Kerosene lanterns.

EH: Really? Isn't that interesting. Gee, the rustic life.

EH: Now the pantry is still a pantry in there and that is what you are recalling.

FB: Yeah, that I liked, that was nice.

EH: Did your mother do canning and stuff like that?

FB: All the time and she did all her own baking.

EH: How many children were living in this house?

FB: Me and my brother that's all.

EH: The two of you, right.

EH: Was anything on this far south side that you remember? I guess the pot belly stove took up so much room.

FB: It did.

EH: Was it wainscoting like wood paneling? The narrow lap board, wainscoting, do you remember that?

FB: That I don't remember.

EH: Underneath that maybe?

FB: It has been changed.

EH: The woodwork is probably original, don't you think all this molding?

FB: The trim is the same.

EH: Okay, that's what I figured and there are picture railings that are probably original, where you would hang pictures.

FB: You don't see those today.

EH: So we walked from the kitchen into what is like a living room but was actually a dining room.

FB: This was our dining room.

EH: Okay, and what was the floor like? Was it oak floor?

FB: Wood floor and I think there was linoleum on it.

EH: And what was it like as a dining room? Old fashioned table and chairs, just a wooden set.

FB: Similar.

EH: Anything really special about it?

FB: It's really not changed, this room.

EH: What was your dining room then. And then you said the room beyond it just east of it, that was your living room, ok, which is now like a dormitory bedroom.

FB: That was the living room.

EH: And what did you have? Did you have a sofa?

FB: Regular.

EH: Anything special about it?

FB: Well, I tell you its all done over even the doors. That's the only thing I see. We had the regular doors, the painted doors.

Unknown voice: Did you have radiators?

EB: I'm trying to remember, we had a coal stove; a coal furnace down stairs.

EH: Did you have anything in the basement at all?

FB: All of mother's canned goods. There used to be a door on here and this used to be a coat rack along the wall here.

EH: The basement, is there anything you want to tell us about the basement besides her canning shelves?

FB: She made grape juice one time and it all popped.

EH: It popped in the basement?

FB: Oh, yeah.

EH: Maybe you would rather not go down, the stairs are pretty steep today and they probably are even the same as they were.

We are going down the stairs and there's brick sort of foundation. And your mother made wine, from what?

FB: Well, she was making grape juice?

EH: Was it concord grapes that grew wild out here?

FB: No. Someone told her to put sugar in it, which she shouldn't have done and it started to ferment. When we were sleeping, it sounded like fireworks going off. (LOL) We had a purple cellar.

EH: Oh my gosh! How interesting. There's an old time door on the south wall here.

FB: A cellar door.

EH: Right. Was there a coal chute?

FB: That (door) was just to get in from the outside. That's the one I told you Henry slides down.

EH: We were talking about your brother sliding down the cellar door and getting splinters. It's actually a small cellar. Its kind of deceiving, you would think it would be much bigger.

FB: They had shelves and all her canned goods.

EH: And did your father have equipment to take care of the light? You know, lanterns? Was it stored in a tool shed outside?

FB: There was a tool shed and a garage and a workshop.

EH: Now, we are back up on the first floor. Did you slide down the banister?

FB: Yeah, you bet ya.

EH: I bet you did. It's kind of an odd staircase. As far as the newel post here is kind of short and fat thing. But did you use the back porch for anything Florence?

FB: No, just in and out.

EH: Did your mother have plants back there or anything? What was the main entrance, by the way? Did you use the entrance now used?

FB: Either one. It all depends on where you were coming from.

EH: Yeah, because they really don't use what we call the back porch as much.

FB: Which is the back porch?

EH: Where we are now.

FB: This is what we called the front porch.

EH: And we are talking about the southeast corner of the house.

FB: This wasn't enclosed. It was added.

EH: So that's an addition on the southeast side then. And that's definitely the original molding on the windows. But this entrance was as equal used as the other one? Hmm. That's interesting.

FB: Oh yes. I think there was a well out there. I heard all that carpet is really cut down. There used to be a building right out here. That was there where they kept the paint. The paint shop is what they called it. I think there was a well out there.

EH: Well how did you get water?

FB: We had running water.

EH: It in the house already?

FB: It was in the house.

EH: Because I wondered if you pumped water in 1930. At the end of our tape we will walk out to the back of the house on the east side and if you can tell us the function of the buildings. There are some foundations. The staircase is the same?

FB: Oh, yes.

EH: Was it painted? Now it's like a two tone, brown and beige, but was it dark brown?

FB: The lighthouse was green and white and another color that I don't remember.

EH: The lighthouse, outside?

FB: No inside. You could only paint what they told you.

EH: Oh really, is that true. In other words the colors were prescribed for you.

FB: Oh yes. You had green walls and white ceilings and white trim.

EH: Is that right? The green was like a light green?

FB: Not too light and not too dark. That was the colors.

EH: No kidding. And your father was in charge of the upkeep as far as painting?

FB: The keeper as well as doing the lighthouse. He had to keep all this stuff up.

EH: Before, you remarked, that your father white-washed the lighthouse every year.

FB: Once or twice I'm not sure but I know it was once a year, and painted.

EH: Now on the second floor...

FB: That's all the bedrooms.

EH: The master bedroom? The southwest corner was your parent's master bedroom. And was the floor a hardwood floor?

FB: Hardwood.

EH: And the walls were green and white as everything had to be?

FB: Green and white you had to do what they told you.

EH: Was the bathroom today, then the bathroom?

FB: We had no shower.

EH: But it was like an old tub the claw foot tub?

FB: Only the shower area. The lighting was different.

EH: But you had running water in the house and all.

FB: This was put in after, as I said, this was one bedroom. They split it in half and put a bathroom in on the other side and one on this side.

EH: This room, the bathroom now, actually did go into the other half of the house, is that what you are saying?

FB: Yeah and it was a bedroom for over here.

EH: So it actually shortened the space for the north quarter.

FB: It was the Keepers side so it gave them more room. That was the only way to put another bathroom in.

EH: Then whose bedroom was this at the time when you arrived?

FB: By the time we got here, everything was in there. And this was my bedroom.

EH: So your bedroom was the southeast corner on the second floor. And what did it look like?

FB: It hasn't changed much, outside of the lights but everything was much older.

EH: Old woodworking, right.

FB: I never thought I'd be here again.

EH: You were about 8 years old, more or less, when you lived here, 8 to 15?

FB: I was a little over 8 when we came here.

EH: Do you remember this is pretty much the same, the hallway leading up to the third floor? Now who lived on the third floor?

FB: My brother.

EH: So he had the "pent house" all to himself.

FB: Oh yeah, he had one room but you know how he got around he could always get into the other side.

EH: Was the room divided like it is now on the third floor? Yeah this is actually the "hip" of the roof that we are looking at and this was actually 2 distinct rooms like this. Is there an attic?

FB: This is it. There was a big closet that went way back. Is that still in there to the wall.

EH: Gee, you have a good memory. So in the third floor southeast was Henry's bedroom and the southwest has a gigantic closet?

FB: See how deep it goes?

EH: That's a pretty good size closet. Fantastic. So your brother had this space to himself?

FB: He would be in that room but you never knew where to find him.

EH: And how many years difference, you said 2 years difference?

FB: Well there's really 18 months to the very day. He was born on the 25th of March and I was born on the 25th of September. Eighteen months to the very day.

EH: My goodness. So actually, it seems to me, that the house isn't that tremendously different.

FB: The only thing is the kitchen. That's the big change.

Unknown voice: Lets go to the other side.

EH: At the top of the stairs on the third floor is a door that adjoins to the north side Keepers quarters.

(talking in the background)

EH: Could we look at the grounds with you outside? And give us an idea of the lighting.

FB: I don't know how to explain, real old fashioned that's all I can say.

EH: Was it brass fixtures?

FB: That I couldn't say.

EH: Probably, I guess it might be, for the time period. Do you remember the color of the stairs?

FB: They were a brownish.

EH: This is the natural wood. The top floor luckily hasn't been painted as far as the spindles and all.

FB: Its creamy white. We were all green and white. Things have changed.

EH: Well, we are talking almost 45 years.

FB: A long time. I used to run up and down these stairs. I don't run anymore.

EH: Let's head out. Is there anything else you can think of... any incidents, other than the corks popping off the wine?

FB: That was funny. We loved grape juice. 'Til someone said put sugar in it.

EH: Did your mother gather things like beach plums and prickly pears and stuff like that?

FB: Oh yeah. We used to have a lot of wild asparagus up here.

EH: Oh yes and there still is a lot of wild asparagus. Absolutely.

Muffled voices walking outside building.

EH: Okay we are outside again and you were saying on the other side of the house was the Hand family, is that right?

FB: Yes.

EH: And the other name was Mason?

FB: Mason.

EH: I'm just curious to get your ideas of what the purpose of the buildings were outside the lighthouse keepers. Do you remember that there was a lot more? One, is that basically it? Was there still that triangle there where the firehouse is?

FB: That was all land there was no road or nothing. And that curve and stuff.

EH: So there was much less in the way of a street or a road.

FB: Two cars could just about get by.

EH: ... and much more property which your Dad did all this mowing. My god, plus the whitewashing of the lighthouse tower itself. And we are walking around to the, let's see, east side of it looking at the lighthouse. Is it any different, Florence, as far as the entry way?

FB: No the entry looks about the same.

EH: Okay. And there's the big lilac bush just east of the house.

FB: Right there was a little house, it was like the paint shed. He kept all his stuff in it all the paints and all.

EH: Where was that building?

FB: Right about in there.

EH: Just a little south of the brick foundation there?

FB: Right in here I would say.

EH: Just east of the lighthouse, then. The tool shed was what, just a wooden structure?

FB: It was similar to that but it was small one piece house. And that was a garage and half of a workshop down there.

EH: The garage has two big doors and what I thought always was a hay loft. Do you have any idea what that center door would be for? I often wondered what was the purpose.

FB: It's almost like an attic up there.

EH: Right, a white building just northeast of the lighthouse. How about this brick foundation? Do you have any....

FB: This was where the other house was.

EH: Little house?

FB: The little house where he stored all his paints and stuff. That's where I learned to ride my bicycle, down the hill. You had no choice you had to stay on it or fall. Yes, this is where the little house was.

EH: And it was just for paint and supplies and tools, and stuff like that?

FB: umhum.

EH: Was there a road that came from the street in between the lighthouse and out the west side? Like what we are looking at is a small dirt road, service road that got as far as the lighthouse itself?

FB: It goes further now?

EH: Oh yeah, it goes from the tower straight out to the other street there.

FB: That was the front lawn.

EH: That's right. Actually it is. So the road we are looking at right now ended.

FB: All these trees that we are looking at right now, that's all grown up now, we never had that.

EH: Oh really. Did your Dad have cars for the garage? Did he have automobiles?

FB: No, they had a car. I don't remember the double doors on it. They must have done that over. They had the doors on one side, but they never opened like that. It was big doors that just opened on one side. And you had a little door that you walked in. It was like a work shed too. They probably made it into two garages.

EH: Today it's a double garage but what you were saying in your time it was just single.

FB: Just one garage.

EH: Did your mother have a garden on the grounds here? An actual vegetable garden?

FB: No

EH: She did all this canning, you said. Did she buy it.

FB: On the outside.

EH: Was there a favorite place that she went to, like a farm that she went to?

FB: That I don't remember.

EH: Did she have any like chickens, poultry?

FB: No.

EH: Stuff like that. We always wondered, you know, how self sufficient...

FB: Maybe before that they did.

EH: Right.

FB: See that is funny. See that was all the lawn that continued this side.

EH: Continued... That was a lot of property for your Dad to take care of.

FB: Well this side, the second assistant would take care of.

EH: That's true.

FB: But this, they all done together. The painting and stuff.

EH: How much of an operation was it? Was it a week or 2 weeks?

FB: Oh, it would take quite awhile. They had the what do you call it, scaffolding up and down.

EH: Was the top red, of the tower, the dome?

FB: I don't remember that but it seems like it wasn't.

EH: Oh, really?

FB: I don't know. I have black in my mind, but I might be wrong. And you see, when we were here, it wasn't automatic. You went out every night and you pulled the switch.

EH: Where was the switch?

FB: Inside.

EH: Inside the tower itself?

FB: Yes. There was a box in there.

EH: And which wall was that on? Do you remember?

FB: Well when you first walked in, they used to have a ...what you would call like a little desk.

EH: A desk.

FB: Well, I don't know how to explain it. Well like when the men went away they would have to sign out and sign in they were leaving. Like a log.

EH: So it was like a journal of the keepers.

FB: And a little further on the wall was a switch.

EH: The power switch. And it was electric.

FB: You had to put it on every night and take it off in the morning.

EH: What actual maintenance, besides the painting, did he do?

FB: Keep the light, and they had the fog signal station down at Battery Peck.

EH: Oh really? Did that include your father's responsibility?

FB: Oh yes, the point light...

EH: Oh wow. Do you remember the fog signal?

FB: Oh yes.

EH: Gee, that's fantastic. We have to...

FB: I gave you a picture of the fog horn.

EH: That's right.

FB: They were on 8 hour shifts and each, you know, they would change each week. 4 (o'clock) to 8, 8 (o'clock) to 12. But they had all that. They didn't just take care of this light.

EH: My goodness, I didn't realize.

FB: When it was foggy, you had to run down to the Coast Guard Station and put on the bell for the point light. And you would have to stay there to make sure that they worked.

EH: How interesting. So his responsibilities, you know, were much broader than I actually knew.

FB: He had a lot of work to do. But at that time it didn't seem that way.

EH: Right, of course.

FB: You know when you get used to it.

EH: Right. And the North Light, you are talking about, was it called the "North Beacon?"

FB: The Point Light.

EH: The Point Light?

FB: That was way down here, but they had a switch ...well I don't know where the Coast Guard Station is now. Has it changed?

EH: Well, what is now Building 1 the white double ended building. It's no longer the Coast Guard station today. (Main building that it was in the 1930s.)

FB: Well it was near that, like on a light pole there with a switch on it. Every night you had to do that and in the morning you had to go down and put it off.

EH: Did your father drive up there, or walk up there?

FB: No. Mother used to drive, Daddy didn't drive.

EH: Your father didn't drive. My gosh.

FB: Daddy never drove. After we came here, mother learned to drive.

EH: The house was always white?

FB: Oh yes.

EH: Did it have battleship grey porches? Was the standard color for the porch?

FB: Um-hum.

FB: Well if you look at one of the pictures I gave you, you would know where it (?) went. It was like a little shed where you put your garbage pails. And they came around and picked it (garbage) up.

Unknown voice: Did anyone in the family fish? Catch fish to eat?

FB: Well sometimes, but not too much. We had a friend over at the firehouse and he used to do all the fishing. Twelve o'clock at night he'd fish and bring it in.

EH: So he brought you the...Oh, how funny.

FB: What do you call that in the winter?

EH: Frost fishing.

FB: Frost fish. He'd come in around 12 o'clock and say I caught fish, let's have fish.

EH: My gosh. Did you have many children to play with? You were 8 years old at the time.

FB: There was a lot of children.

FH: Next door the Hand family?

FB: No they didn't have any. There were all the kids on the post.

EH: So you played with the military families.

FB: Oh yes.

EH: There was no barricade that you were not part of the historic, you know, people.

FB: No it was all the same. They were all the kids. Whether it was the officer's kids or the private's kids, they were all together.

FB: It is beautiful.

EH: Today is a perfect day to be out here.

FB: I can't think of anything.

EH: We were talking about going to school out here, by the way, and you talked about Pearl Murray was your teacher, Mrs. Conover, and Mrs. Muller. That's a name I'm not familiar with. Pearl Murray was probably the most notable because she was here for 30 years.

FB: Well, she was the head of the school.

EH: Exactly. Do you remember where the school was?

FB: It's that big red brick building, first....

EH: That's Building 102 now.

FB: Then you go down the street a little bit on the left hand side. That small, I think at one time it was a telephone building. The telephone building.

EH: So that's where your phone calls would come in and you said you had like a crank hand phone and you would actually give the numbers to the operator. That's interesting. Do you know who the operator was? Did you ever meet her?

FB: No.

EH: Who did you play with, by the way? We didn't talk about that.

FB: There was a lot of kids and my brother.

EH: Any one in particular? Can you think of any family names?

FB: Well, Emma and Walter Dill.

EH: Dill?

FB: Their father was a master sergeant.

FB: I don't know where it was, there used to be the S-turn, houses off to the right – they lived down there. We used to ride all over the place on our bicycles, all of us, way down there.

EH: That's quite a good pedaling, huh?

FB: Then when you heard the gun go off to take the flag down, you would go home. That was hometime.

EH: Do you remember, actually, the daily bugle calls right down on the parade ground?

FB: Yeah, at night, that's when you came home.

EH: That was your signal, how interesting.

FB: All the kids, you would see them go in all different directions.

EH: Did you hear the morning calls and all that, the whole series?

FB: Oh sure.

EH: It was right near by you.

FB: Then there would be all the parades out there on the ground. Beautiful.

EH: Then you can remember the elegant and pretty high style of military life.

FB: It was lovely.

EH: You were tracing your father's career, a minute ago you were talking about it, prior to being a lighthouse keeper in 1930. He spent 13 years with the Navy? Do you remember what rank he achieved?

FB: That I don't know. He was a tailor in the Navy.

EH : – (Looking at photos) A tailor, really? How interesting. In the photographs, that we are loaning from you have some interesting snapshots. You are donating a photo, there are two photos that you are donating. One is "The Inner Light at Stepping Stone Light" which is later called Saybrook Point, Connecticut where your grandfather served as Keeper. And the second photo that you are donating is the "Bell Tower at North Dumpling (Long Island Sound) which is actually a continuation almost of the residence.

FB: It was right on the hill. You didn't have to go outdoors.

EH: and the other photos, just very quickly are you and your brother, your Dad with the family dog at North Dumpling we are still at North Dumpling right? Then there is a view

of the porch. And that's yourself. That's the Keepers residence which is attached to the Bell Tower. Then there is a very appealing picture of Florence Burkhardt with her fathers' Keepers hat on her head and then sort of a family group picture of the 3 of you. Which is your Dad, your Mother and Henry Burkhardt on the knee of your mother outside on some steps. And there's your Dad in full Keepers uniform at North Dumpling light station. Do you know where exactly the inside of the structures....?

FB: I can't really place it to be honest with you.

EH: And some post cards of North Dumpling light off of Fishers Island. Most interesting, what looks like the earliest snapshot here, is a photo with the automobile are your grandparents- Elmer Ellsworth Gildersleeve, the Keeper of Stepping Stone Lighthouse- and your mother with a vintage car behind them and a small shingled residence. And the keeper's uniform is absolutely...he has a star on his sleeve, by the way.

FB: Daddy has one too, I think.

EH: Must denote years of service for the Lighthouse Keeper.

FB: I think it was.

EH: Then there is a picture of your brother.

FB: That's my uncle.

EH: Excuse me, your uncle Lawrence Burkhardt aboard a vessel somewhere. The Cornfield Lightship, excuse me. He was on the Lightship for 11 years then he left the ship in 1939 is what it looks like. It's a black and white snapshot. Then we have some postcards of the outer light at Saybrook Point and then the North Dumpling Light off of Fishers Island, New York. Then you brought in your father's retirement papers from February 18, 1938.

TH: When you walk up to the house....

FB: Well, that wasn't enclosed when I was there.

EH: The porch that we entered...

FB: Well I call that the back porch.

TH: Well is that the porch that...

FB: The one that well that was probably from the old coal stove.

EH: The brick chimney, you mean?

TH: Was that used for cooking? Was that for both sides?

FB: Probably the chimney was a double one that backed up to one another.

TH: I wish we had a picture to look at.

EH: We are looking at a black and white photo #280.13, which is from the George Moss collection showing the Lighthouse Tower and the Keepers residence looking northward. We are asking Florence Burkhardt about this very tall chimney that extends out of the center of that front porch, which at that time she calls the back porch, which is simply the west side of the residence. It's a huge tall chimney that looks out of proportion from the porch almost up to the roof line, the peak of the 1883 house. So what's your recollection of this?

FB: Well it's for the stove. This is your kitchen section.

EH: The porch is enclosed.

FB: And the kitchen is on the other side backed up to it.

EH: Back to back.

FB: That would be the chimney for the stoves, the old coal stoves. You could put either coal or wood in them.

EH: And that was for cooking and heating the kitchen.

FB: Then we had the coal (stoves) in the other part of the house for heating.

EH: This picture shows a good view of the grounds. It shows the back porch which is the east side of the house being, as you remarked, not enclosed at all. The back porch was post and rail and spindles. It was actually an open porch.

FB: All open.

EH: But the tower looks the same and interestingly enough in this photo the top of the dome looks pretty dark. You mentioned that you thought it was painted black. And in this photo it appears pretty dark and you would really suspect that it was black and not the bright red dome of the lighthouse today.

FB: I don't understand why it is red.

EH: And then you mentioned that the tool shed you talked about with your dad's paint and all is actually in this photo #280.13.

FB: Its hard to see it in here, now that we are talking about it.

EH: And it's captured in the photo. It's a small white structure just east of the lighthouse with a huge tree right in the center of those two structures.

FB: There's not so many bushes in here as back then.

EH: It's pretty overgrown and it looks a little bit wild and a bit "shaggy" today, compared to your father's time when it was absolutely manicured. I'm sure it was the essence of neat and trim.

FB: They kept on it all the time. How often do they do it now?

EH: Painting the lighthouse and residence?

FB: Yeah, the tower.

EH: The lighthouse tower was done 5 years ago wouldn't you say Tom?

TH: The Lighthouse tower was last painted back in 1977.

EH: In '77, my goodness, really. It's owned by the US Coast Guard. It's not owned by the National Park Service.

FB: Shortly after Daddy retired, the Coast Guard took it over.

EH: In 1938, your Dad retired.

FB: A couple of years after, I think it was.

EH: In your parents time you did not have a vegetable garden or anything like that.

FB: No nothing.

EH: Okay, that's interesting. She was remembering First Assistant Keeper Hand, on the other side of the house.

TH: Was that the person who was hard of hearing?

EH: Who had no children. Was he hard of hearing? Was he extremely deaf?

FB: Oh yes, very hard of hearing. He was a big man and his wife was short.

EH: Keeper Hand was tall and his wife was short. You never really described to me your father's appearance. I'm glad you mentioned that. What did your Dad look like and what was his personality?

FB: I don't know. How do you describe dads. Just dad. On the shorter side, not heavy, wore glasses.

EH: And the Keepers uniform?

FB: Well, they didn't wear them all the time.

EH: Right. But on a day to day basis, what did he wear?

FB: Just work clothes.

TH: Just regular clothes of the time. Something to work in and get dirty in?

FB: Anything. Plain old work clothes, anything that you could work in.

EH: On what occasions did he wear the Keepers jacket and hat?

FB: When he got dressed to go out or anyone coming important. You know, the higher ups, if he knew when they were coming.

EH: Were there a lot of unannounced inspections?

FB: I think they used to come around once a month.

EH: Pretty often.

FB: I know that out on North Dumpling they did because they had to bring the supplies out. They used to bring all the supplies, medication. They had a library. They changed the books around. So they were regular out there. But in here you really wouldn't know, but on the water you knew all the time when they were coming, you could see them.

EH: That's right (LOL) and then polish up quickly.

FB: You would say, "Dad, there comes the ship," and he would start running.

TH: Was Mr. Hand at the Sandy Hook Lighthouse for a long time?

FB: He was there when we came there. I really don't know how long, that I couldn't tell you.

EH: And when you left was he still....

FB: No, no. Mason was there. He was the second Assistant but who took over from Daddy, I don't know. When he left at that time, I don't think there was one appointed.

TH: We saw at Snug Harbor lighthouse exhibit they had that “brass dust pan”.

FB: I wish I had one.

EH: Your father had all those accessories?

FB: Oh sure.

TH: What was that for?

FB: To clean up.

EH: To clean up the steps?

TH: And that was issued?

FB: Oh yes. Everything was issued.

TH: That too was brass and had to kept polished.

FB: Um-hmmmm.

EH: Her father and the assistants would white wash the lighthouse once or twice a year.

TH: Sure, in this weather.

EH: And did he also maintain the fog signal?

FB: Yes and the fog station.

TH: Where was that? Was that the one that was way up...

FB: Down at Battery Peck.

TH: Yeah, the remains are still there.

FB: That’s what I wanted to ask you... Did you ever...

EH: The big maps is what she’s after.

EH: But what was your Dad’s personality? Was he a rough kind of hard individual? Or was he a really good down to earth...

FB: No, - very quiet. He just wanted things done. Just do them and leave him alone.

Tom: I have a feeling, here were are, I am trying to ...I realized what it was like to live in an era when you didn't have a TV. Kids today have TV's, stereos, headphones, little radios.... You know what do children do, especially at a Lighthouse?

FB: We had our bicycles here and we rode all over the place all the time.

TH: Was across the street off limits to you as children, because that's the old mortar battery over there?

FB: I used to go over there. (Laughter)

TH: They used to have a tower behind the wall for looking for enemy ships.

FB: We got over there. (chuckles)

EH: You explored all the nooks and crannies?

FB: In and out, all over.

TH: I'll get a copy of that map. I had forgotten about it. It's the 1967 map that shows where the fog horn building was, the wreckage of it. The roof which is all rotten and everything and laying right in the sand up on top of the sand dunes and you can see two concrete walls that I guess held the fuel oil to run the generator.

FB: There was one house that was like a big building that had all the motors in it then off under the sand, like hid almost, the horns came out of that, they came up.

EH: Did the horns stay in place?

FB: Oh yeah, they were huge. Hugh things. It was like two buildings with the horns and the other stuff was on the sides.

TH: I've got to find a map of that.

FB: Leave it alone for some other time.

EH: We have a charter bus coming here.

EH: The beginning of this tape was taken at the quarters 84A the south side of the Lighthouse Keepers residence with Park Ranger Larry Bova, who presently occupies that dwelling, along the interview adding a few comments. At the end of the tape we closed with comments in the museum with Park Ranger Tom Hoffman adding extra questions and bringing out the photographs.

End of Interview