Seacoastonline.com

The haunting of Boon Island

Tuesday
Posted Oct 28, 2014 at 4:48 PM
Updated Oct 28, 2014 at 4:48 PM

By Laura Dolceldolce@seacoastonline.com

Editor's note: This article first appeared in 2009

In October, when the veil between the worlds is at its thinnest, it's easy to believe in restless spirits that still walk the earth and make themselves known to the living.

Of course, the coast of southern Maine is not without its share of such tales, and none are as eerie, perhaps, as the tale of Boon Island Light.

Six miles off the coast of York, the lighthouse can be found on a rocky island in the sea. According to William O. Thomson, the Kennebunk author of 26 books including "Stories and Legends Along the Maine Coast," the story begins sometime in the 1840s when a young lighthouse keeper, Luke Bright, brought his new wife, Katherine, to the island to live.

The couple was married only a short time, Thomson said, when December brought a howling Nor'easter to the island. Despite the danger to himself, Luke Bright decided he needed to make his way from the house to the light tower to light the light so any ships out in the storm would be guided safely to shore.

"He tied a rope to his waist and went out in the storm," Thomson said. "He was trying to secure the bolt in the tower when he slipped into the ocean and drowned."

His widow, Katherine, dragged Luke's body back to the tower and sat with her dead husband

"She held his hand," Thomson said. "And she kept the light going for five days, climbing 164 steps each time. Finally, the lantern went out because she had run out of fuel."

Once the people on land realized the light had gone out, fisherman rowed out to the island to check on the Brights. They found Luke dead and Katherine beside him in the freezing cold tower.

"It was 10 below in the tower," Thomson said. "She died a short time later."

It wasn't, however, the last people heard from Katherine.

"Keepers on the island reported hearing a woman's voice," Thomson said. "It cries, 'Luke'."

On dark nights, keepers have also reported strange things.

"They hear a knock on the door," Thomson said. "When they go out, they see an apparition in the form of a woman. It floats away to the tower."

That isn't the only strange things that have happened in the tower, he said.

"Dogs and cats will not go in that tower," he said.

And several keepers have reported that when they were unable to get back to the island to light the light, someone's done it for them.

"It goes on all by itself," Thomson said. "Foghorns have gone off by themselves.

It's like someone's looking over the place."

That may be the case at Nubble Light as well, Thomson said. While there are no reports of scary ghosts or ghouls, there have been tales of doors and windows opening when no one was there. Most of all, though, there is the feeling of well-being that many keepers and visitors have reported.

"Ever since World War II, every keeper has wanted to stay," Thomson said. And they're not the only ones. As a volunteer there, Thomson said he's talked to hundreds of visitors over the past 15 years and most have reported the same thing.

"A very uplifting, positive feeling," he said. "Like all your stress is gone, your worries disappear. You're just so happy."

While Thomson said no one knows for sure what causes the feeling, legend has it that three keepers' families had gone to live on the island between 1910 and 1920. Each of the families lost a member while they were there.

"Everyone had a person die," Thomson said. "Two had sons die, one a wife."

Then, in 1921, keeper Fairfield Moore brought his wife, daughter and son-in-law to the island. Moore's daughter gave birth to three children while living there.

"They were the only children ever born there," Thomson said, adding that one daughter is still living in York.

Once the children came, the feeling around Nubble Light changed.

"It sent out vibes of happiness and love," Thomson said. "It was a breath of new life, from that point on, for every keeper."