

Charlotte Perry Barringer

Interviewed on Nov. 30, 2010 by George N. Lindsay, Jr. at her home in Essex, CT.

GNL: Mrs. Barringer, you are known as Shar'-lee. How do you spell your nickname?

CPB: S H A R L I E

When did you start being called Sharlie?

My mother's name was Charlotte and I had an aunt named Charlotte, so I became Sharlie to make it easier. I never remember being called Charlotte by any member of my family – or anyone else, as a matter of fact.

You grew up in Connecticut?

I grew up in Southport, CT, where my family had been since the late 1600's. My maternal ancestors were sea captains who sailed out of Southport. So that's where the family homes all were – along by the harbor.

Were they all Perry's?

Buckleys and Perrys. A Buckley married a Perry and then they were all there.

When did you first encounter the Atlantic Class?

I grew up right across the street from the (Pequot) Yacht Club, and theoretically you couldn't join the Yacht Club until you were ten. My parents were not sailors, but my brother Hoyt O. Perry, Jr. (Hop) was three years older and he always left the house to go the club and I kept running after him. I was there as soon as I was ten. I remember that there were about eight Atlantics, but we started sailing in Cape Cods. My brother had a Star boat, and my father decided that I should have an Atlantic. Smith Richardson, who owned Atlantic #6 and had named it "Carolina" because he came from the Carolinas, wanted to sell his boat. Since I was kind of a favorite of my father and since he was championing me as a sailor, he bought "Carolina" for me. I was fourteen at the time. I began racing in the fleet, which included Fred Bedford, "Swing" Starring, Briggs Cunningham, Joe Bullard and, a little bit later, John Hersey. We had some pretty wonderful people sailing Atlantics in Southport – all of them a great deal older than I was. They taught me a lot.

So what year was that when you got "Carolina"

I'm going to say 1940. (NOTE: *H. Smith Richardson, Jr. won the 1939 National Championships sailing A6.*) But I had sailed with Joe Bullard as a crew when I was quite young, and I had sailed with Bill Watkins at Larchmont Race Week when I was about twelve. So I really grew up sailing in the Atlantics and I always loved them.

In 1944, the Atlantic Championships were held as a part of Larchmont Race Week, correct?

Yes. During the war, they combined a lot of the regattas. I can't remember if we raced in Larchmont before, but I think we did – probably in 1943. (NOTE: *Atlantic Class archives show that the Championships were held as a part of Larchmont Race Week in both 1943 and '44.*)

Was the Atlantic Championships a separate series of races, or did races count for both the Championships and Larchmont Race Week?

There was only one set of races, and they counted for both series.

According to the class records, there were thirty Atlantics in the 1944 series. How old were you, and who were your crew?

I was eighteen. My father was one of my crew. He didn't know anything about sailing, but he was wonderful! He loved being there with me. And I think I had Sissy Clark Rudkin – and I honestly can't remember who was the fourth. It must have been a boy, except a lot of them were off at war.



Winning 1944 crew:
Sissy Clark Rudkin, Dexter Covell and Sharlie
(perhaps her father took photo)

NOTE: Photo was found after interview and photo answered crew question

Do you remember who was your main competition?

Well, I remember George Hinman and the Romagnas – I think they were from Manhasset Bay. I can't remember if Bobby Mosbacher was racing that year, but Bus was probably off in the war. Probably John Hersey was there.

Were you surprised to end up in first place?

Of course I was surprised. There were many comments about Atlantic #6. A lot of people said that the boat had been shaved down and was lighter than the other boats. My father heard this comment directed at me some time later, because I was always being teased about winning the championships. My father, who was probably 250 lbs., stood up and said, "Young man, if you shaved 250 pounds off that boat, there wouldn't have been enough boat left for me." He was implying that he made up any difference if the boat was light.

I was surprised – I was young and I really didn't think I would win. It was exciting. But I had some real mentors in the International Class. We started just after the Internationals or the S

Boats at Larchmont. Corny Shields and Arthur Knapp were both sailing in the Internationals and I got to know them fairly well. They were much different on shore – they were fierce warriors on the course, but ashore they always took time to help us out and showed a special interest in the young sailors. They gave me a lot of hints, spurred me on and taught me the secrets of Long Island Sound – where to go when it was blowing from the East or the West. I tried to follow their advice, and it worked.

Were there other girls skippering in those series?

Aileen Shields was skippering. (*Ed. Note: Aileen finished second in the 1944 series, according to the NY Times.*) Rusty Shethar, Lorna Hibbard Whittelsey, Leggy Mertz – but I think I'm getting mixed up with the Women's championships, which were also raced in Atlantics. Truthfully, I don't know that I remember other women racing Atlantics at Larchmont, although my memory isn't very good and I don't want to leave anyone out. Later on, Ruth Bedford and Helen Bedford McAdam – Fred Bedford's daughters – both raced. I also remember a woman in Maine who was very good, but I don't remember her name. And, of course, there was "Aunt Nan" Wood in Cold Spring Harbor.

You must have attracted some attention as a young woman Champion.

Yes. Everett Morris was the sailing editor for the New York Times, and he was my big champion. Whenever we won a race, he wrote about it and it was very flattering. Because of the war, there weren't many young men racing, but I was competing against men who were ten to twenty years older than me. They made a pretty big thing of it.

It's still a big thing – almost sixty years later, and we haven't yet had another woman champion.

You know, there were little things about Larchmont Race Week that you had to learn. Our mentors made sure that we understood the currents running in the Sound. Then there was the South-Westerly that came out of Hempstead Harbor at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. There were hundreds of boats at Larchmont Race Week, and Long Island Sound wasn't known for its big breezes. You'd have all these smaller boats sitting around the finish line without any wind, and then the bigger classes would come up from Hempstead with this wind behind them and their spinnakers set, all converging on the crowded finish line. It was a challenge.

In the 1940's, race committees were not so adamant about perfect windward – leeward courses. What were the races like?

Most of the time, we did have windward starts. There were so many boats that anything else would have been total chaos. The race committee did a pretty good job, but the winds were not good. It was still a wonderful experience – I have such great memories of so many helpful "older" men (they were probably in their thirties!) looking after us younger sailors.

I also remember that there was one young man, Johnny Benjamin of Westport, who had an Atlantic. He really wanted to come race with us in Southport, and the Pequot Yacht Club wouldn't let him. Ultimately, the fleet at Cedar Point YC fleet thrived and led the class in modernizing the fleet and maintaining a great competition – while the Pequot fleet languished and disappeared. But I always wondered, "What if they had let them all race together?"

You mentioned over lunch that you met your husband, Rufus Barringer, sailing Atlantics.

Yes. At the Atlantic Class Championships in Cold Spring Harbor in 1950. I was crewing for my brother, Hop, in A6. Rufus had chartered a boat to come to the championships. We met that August, at a party at "Aunt Nan" Wood's house, were engaged by October and got married in January. After we were married and came to live in Huntington, LI, we first shared A73 with Walter and Jane Page, and then other Atlantics with Andy and Molly Hewitt, Jay & Joan Hyde and Ted Janeway. Eventually, we brought "Carolina" down from Pequot, and my brother Hop got his own boat (A32 "Myth")

I remember that in the late 1960's "Carolina" was the last wooden boat racing in the Cold Spring Harbor fleet.

Yes, that was a decision that was both philosophical and economical. We just didn't go that route. Most of the time, we were competitive. But when it blew hard or if there was a sea, the fiberglass boats seemed to sail through the waves better.

Did you change the rig?

No – she still had a wooden rig when we sold her to a sailing club in Norwalk, CT. The next time we saw her, she had a cuddy on her and wasn't being raced anymore. Then, much later, my brother found her up on the Hudson River, looking very sad. But a few years ago, I got to visit her at Brooklin, Maine, when Steve White was restoring her. It does my heart good to know that she is back racing today.

There is a prize at Pequot YC in my brother's name, and I was talking about some of the history with my nephew, Dave Perry. When I was starting out, the LIS Junior Championships (15-18 year olds) were raced in the Atlantics – the Midgets Championships (under 15) were raced in Stars! When I look at them today, I think, "How in the world did they put us in these boats at such a young age?"

I still think the Atlantic is one of the most beautiful boats ever. We used to go cruising in the Atlantics -- sleep with our heads in the cuddy and let our feet get wet. We had so much fun in those boats.

After Atlantics, what did you and Rufus sail.

When we left Cold Spring Harbor, we moved up to Farmington, CT, and for a number of years we had only kayaks on the river. Then we bought "Ursus," a 37' Pearson Invicta sloop and kept it down at Shennecossett YC, near Groton. We didn't race, but we cruised a lot around Long Island Sound and Buzzard's Bay. One time Roger Page came to visit and gave us a beautiful old map of Newfoundland, and we hung it on the wall and dreamed of going there. Finally, in 1980, we took "Ursus" up to the Bras D'Or lakes in Nova Scotia, and for the next twelve years we sailed around Newfoundland and Labrador. "Ursus" leaked – she was fiberglass, but her deck leaked and, although we tried everything, we could never stop it. You had to love Newfoundland a lot to keep sailing across Cabot Straight with a leaky boat! Finally, in our seventies, we decided we were crazy and came home. At that point, we lived in Lyme on the Connecticut River, and we first bought a small power boat – but we didn't like that. The next year we purchased a Nonesuch. That was a wonderful boat – but still nothing like an Atlantic. I would love to sail in an Atlantic again.

You would be an honored guest in any Atlantic. All you have to do is ask!

I would love to. Norm Peck has often invited me, and I never seem to get around to it. But I would love it.

Thank you Sharlie, for a wonderful lunch, a delightful afternoon and for your support and enthusiasm for the Great Atlantic. Keep on sailing!

NOTE:

Charlotte Perry Barringer is an honorary member of the Atlantic Class Association, as was her late brother, Hop Perry. Hop won the Championships in 1956 racing "Carolina" and in 1959 racing "Myth." He was also an officer of the Class from 1951-56. Charlotte's late husband, Rufus Barringer, was Chairman of the Rules Committee for 1965 & 1966. Virtually all racing sailors today are familiar with her nephew (Hop's son) Dave Perry -- champion sailor, author and mentor to generations of racers.



Sharlie Barringer & Family, December, 2010