

## Cape Ann Museum exhibit honors 75th anniversary of Virginia Lee Burton's 'The Little House'

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It's taken six years and a team of collaborators that stretches from Gloucester to Tokyo. But at last, Virginia Lee Burton's "Little House" has come home to the North Shore.

The Cape Ann Museum is celebrating the 75th anniversary of the publication of Burton's children's book "The Little House" with an exhibit that will feature drawings, book illustrations and prints, and an artfully created scale model of her "Little House."

The exhibit, titled "The Little House: Her Story," will open on Nov. 3 and run through March 31, 2019.

Martha Oaks, curator of the Cape Ann Museum, said museum officials have been working on this exhibition for almost six years, with the most intensive work taking place between 2016 and 2017.

The project has been led by Michiyo Okabe, the curator of Gallery A4 at the Takenaka Corporation in Tokyo, Japan.

Oaks said this process has been "a real team effort," with partnerships between the University of Minnesota (whose special collections include works by Burton), the Sawyer Free Library in Gloucester, the Tokyo Children's Library and the Demetrios-Burton Family.

Virginia Lee Burton was born Aug. 30, 1909 in Newton Center. She spent time living on both the East and West coasts and attended art school in San Francisco.

Burton married George Demetrios in the fall of 1930 and then moved to Folly Cove in Gloucester, where she lived for most of her adult life and raised two sons, Aristides (born in 1932) and Michael (born in 1935).

Burton was one of the 20th century's most admired children's book authors — a versatile and uniquely talented artist who enjoyed dance, design, writing, illustration and teaching. The final act in her book "Life Story" illustrates the story of her family's life at Folly Cove.

Her work includes heroes and happy endings, with cheerful illustrations and "a dash of nostalgia."

Burton's wide range of children's books included "Mike Mulligan and his Steam Shovel," "Katy and the Big Snow" and "Maybelle the Cable Car." But she achieved her widest acclaim and was awarded the coveted Caldecott Medal in 1943 for "The Little House."

It was her fourth book, published by Houghton Mifflin Company, and was translated into Japanese in 1954 by Momoko Ishii, later becoming an international success and opening new doors for Burton.

In 1964, Burton traveled to Japan for two weeks, invited by the American Cultural Center in Tokyo and hosted by Ishii.

"There are many reasons why the story resonates so strongly with Japanese readers," Oaks, said, "including the strength of the translation, Burton's skill at beautifully combining written words and illustration, and the themes touched upon in the story — including the importance of historical perspective, the redemptive opportunities inherent in the passage of time, and the value and importance of embracing nature and a simple way of life."

Ronda Faloon, the museum's executive director, is excited about the exhibit.

"We are overjoyed to host this exhibition which celebrates the life, art, and work of Virginia Lee Burton, one of Cape Ann's most important artists whose legacy lives on today through her books and in the lifelong memories created for so many children," Faloon said. "This exhibit gives us a chance to offer a cross-cultural conversation and experience through her stories, particularly with her fans in Japan who have been enamored with her work for decades."

The inspiration for “The Little House” derived from Burton’s own little house. It’s a timeless story of a small, simple house in the country that gradually changes as urban expansion threatens its quiet, pastoral existence.

Larger buildings, traffic and development encroach on the house as it endures unwelcome change through the seasons and neglect once its owners move out. But the family’s descendants realize its value, load it onto a trailer, and relocate it into the country once again.

“It’s really a story about honoring beauty, the past, the natural world and all of its peacefulness,” said Faloon, “so it’s no surprise that it has captivated readers from all cultural backgrounds for decades. It’s a universal story. And, we are so happy to be packing up the lovely Little House and bringing it home again to Cape Ann.”

This is the first time Cape Ann Museum has received an exhibition from abroad.

Museum officials have borrowed individual objects for the exhibit. Oaks said she hopes the exhibit “will spark the creative spirit in visitors, helping to inspire future generation of writers and artists.”

The Cape Ann Museum anticipates that the exhibit will serve as an “entry point” for visitors to the rest of the museum and the many other stories that are told through their collections, exhibitions, and educational programming.

*For more information about “The Little House: Her Story” exhibition, please visit the Museum’s website at [www.capeannmuseum.org](http://www.capeannmuseum.org).*