

Malevolent Maine

Episode 10: The Doctor's Last Call

Malevolent Maine is a horror podcast, and may contain material not suitable for all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

INTRO

A race of aquatic creatures that call Maine's extensive waterways their home. A scientist with a penchant for grisly discoveries. And the spirit of a woman who still roams the blueberry plains. These are the stories we'll be bringing to you in the coming weeks. Don't forget to show your support by following us on social media. Just search for Malevolent Maine. Thank you to our supporters who have purchased t-shirts from our merch store and joined our Patreon team to get exclusive first listens and our exclusive side-story, *The Black Tarot*. We appreciate all you do to help us keep investigating and reporting on the mysterious happenings around Maine.

A lonely stretch of road in rural Maine. You're all alone. In the distance you see a black speck on the horizon. As you get closer you see it's... a black horse drawn wagon, abandoned on the side of the road? And just up ahead...is that a man in an old black suit? Where is he going and why does he look so scared?

This is Malevolent Maine.

Guys, what was that?

I saw it with my own eyes

No, seriously, what was that?

It's just not scientifically possible.

I can't explain it.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

This stuff is wild, man. It's real wild.

But... what was that?

Hey MMers, we're checking in today with a listener suggested story. This one comes to us from Tracy in Shapleigh. She says she's been told this story since she was a little kid. She first heard it from her grandfather, but since then she says it's been told and retold in the area for a long time. It's the story of the Doctor's Last Call.

Shapleigh is a small town in western York County. It was first incorporated into the state in 1785, Maine's 43rd town. As of 2020 the population was just under 3,000. It's home to Mousam Lake, Boonie's Country Store, and not much more. In the past, during the heyday of the textile industrial boom in Maine, Shapleigh was home to the Hargraves Woolen Mill which among other things most likely made uniforms for the Union Army during the Civil War. There were also several sawmills and for a short time, a blast furnace that processed bog iron taken from nearby Little Ossipee Pond. Like many Maine towns, it's full of hardworking, blue collar people trying to carve out an honest existence.

Today's story took place in the late 1800s according to Tracy. It involves a local doctor named either Emory or Ephraim Camble, depending on who you talk to. Our research did uncover a Dr. E. Camble on a town meeting registry from 1881. For the sake of simplicity, we'll refer to Dr. Camble as Emory, which seems to be the more popular of the two given names.

Dr. Camble was said to be an older gentleman at the time of the story, somewhere in his mid-sixties. He had served as a

regimental surgeon with the 23rd Massachusetts Infantry Regiment during the Civil War and had retired to Maine with his family after the conflict. By the time of his Last Call, Dr. Camble's children had moved away and his wife had passed away a few years prior. For history's sake, the Ricker Family Cemetery, located in Shapleigh does contain a grave for one Dorothy Camble who died on March 7, 1877, lending some credibility for the rest of the story to follow.

Dr. Camble in various stories and reports was described as a kindly man with a shock of wild, curly hair that had turned mostly to gray and a drooping mustache. He wore spectacles and was constantly pushing them back up his nose as they often slid down. As was often the case in the 1800s, Dr. Camble made a lot of house calls and was known to be seen, his black horse, Old Pete, pulling his black medicine wagon up and down the Shapleigh Corner Road.

The work of a doctor in the 1800s was never done. There were dozens of ailments, both major and minor that families needed. Unlike today's modern medicine, where doctors specialize in specific fields, back then, a doctor was expected to be a physician, surgeon, and nearly everything in between. His work was often exhausting, treating pneumonia, broken bones, and even more extreme conditions. He was often known to take a drink of whiskey at Fullman's Saloon located in North Shapleigh after a long day's work. He was known to only ever have one drink, though he would often stay to the late hours, discussing town events with the locals who would come in. Overall, he was a well-liked and respected member of the community.

Which made the events of our story all the more shocking.

According to the story Tracy told us and that plenty of other Shapleighans backed up, one evening Dr. Camble was enjoying his evening drink at Fullman's. It had grown dark, and as is often the case in Maine even to this day, once the moon began to rise, life began to settle down. So, the good doctor was shocked when

young Timothy Trafton, son of the local carpenter, Hiram Trafton came bursting into the saloon.

The Traftons lived at the other end of Shapleigh, down near where Square Pond fed into Mousam Lake, about seven miles away. Ten year old Timmy had made the long ride, galloping on the old family nag. He was white and shaking and the horse was nearly spent from the treacherous dark ride.

It was his sister, Constance, he told the men assembled at the saloon. They had been helping their father with some boards he was milling for a job he was supposed to take in Lebanon the next week. There had been an accident with the saw and his sister was hurt bad. He didn't know just what had happened but there had been a lot of blood and screaming before his daddy had told him to go get the doctor. Timmy had run out of the barn as quick as lightning and rode as fast as he could to find Dr. Camble.

The doctor knew the way to the Trafton home and despite the long day he'd had, he hitched Old Pete up to his little black wagon and set out at once. At a good pace, it would take him about an hour to get from Fullman's saloon in North Shapleigh down to the Traftons home at the southern end of the town. Knowing how serious a sawmill accident could be, he prayed he wouldn't be too late.

Dr. Camble never made it to the Trafton's. The following morning, his wagon was found with a broken wheel not far from where the Shapleigh Memorial School is now. Old Pete was still hitched to the wagon. He was dead, one leg broken, and his carotid artery slit open.

Emory Camble was found about a half mile down the road, lying face down in the dirt. He had been stabbed thirty-one times.

His wagon had not been ransacked and his wallet and all of his possessions were still on him when his body was found. The leading theory was that Dr. Camble's horse and wagon had some

sort of accident on the road and that Camble had abandoned both in his desperation to go help little Constance Trafton. Along the way he had run into some ruffians who had done in the poor doctor. With no other evidence, the case was closed and the good doctor put to rest.

Which is where we come in. According to our listener Tracy the ghost of Dr. Camble has been seen traveling the Shapleigh Corner Road off and on since his death almost 150 years later.

Tracy herself claimed to have seen Dr. Camble one night, last summer just after dusk. She was driving home from a little league game when she saw what appeared to be an old man walking up the road. She slowed to help, but as she got closer and she could make out the man's appearance she suddenly remembered the stories her grandfather and others had told her.

The man on the side of the road was older, with crazy curly hair sticking up at odd angles. He was dressed in an old black suit and he wore thin wire glasses.

She said as soon as she saw him, she knew just who he was. "Of course I knew," she told us. "My grandpa told me about Dr. Camble when I was young and everyone in Shapleigh knows who he is. Not everyone's seen him, but enough have, and word gets around. Once I saw him, I knew right away who he was."

She said she didn't stop, but slowed down and tried to get a picture with her phone. She sent it to us, and though it's extremely blurry, it's impossible not to make out a dark man's shape standing on the side of the road. You can't see his face or many details. Some of this can be attributed to taking a picture from a moving car - not something we advocate for - but one has to wonder if there's something else at play here, distorting the picture.

Tracy said she drove for maybe a quarter of a mile before she saw the abandoned wagon on the side of the road. "There wasn't a

horse. Not that I could see, at least, but it was an old time buggy, parked there on the side of the road."

She said she turned around on a side road soon after that, but by the time she got back to where she had seen Dr. Camble, he was gone. There was no trace of either him or his wagon.

"My husband and I got out and looked for footprints on the side of the road," she told us, "but we couldn't find any. It was dark and getting late, and to be honest it was starting to freak us out a little, so we got back in the car and went home, but I know what I saw. I saw him, Dr. Camble. He was real, like you or me, not see through like a ghost on TV. He looked pale, I guess, but he looked real."

There are dozens of stories of Dr. Camble. We talked to several others who had their own experience with the slain doctor. Sometimes he's riding in his wagon, pulled by Old Pete. Other times he's walking. He always appears sometime just after dark, before midnight. He usually looks distressed, some have even described the look on his face as fear. Those are usually the ones that see him on foot. He never acknowledges the people who see him. He doesn't respond to calls. And just as suddenly as he appears, he disappears.

It would appear the good Dr. Camble, reliable until the end, is still attempting to make his last call, unaware that he's late by about one hundred and fifty years.

The Last Call of Dr. Camble is such a well-known and well experienced story in Shapleigh that it's a wonder it hasn't gotten more attention. The sheer number of people who came forward to tell their own story or that of a late loved one seeing the doctor on his final journey is astounding. It would appear he's somewhat of a beloved local legend in the area, more curious oddity than boogeyman. And if his story ended here, we at Malevolent Maine would be satisfied.

But as it turns out, there's more to this story. Much more.

When dealing with anything historical, we tend to research every name, date, and place we can find, looking for evidence these people actually existed. As we've already mentioned, we did find records of a Dr. E. Camble in the town records, and Hiram Trafton is a well-known historical figure in Shapleigh. It was fairly easy to document his existence, as well as his son, Timothy, who went on to inherit his father's carpentry business and made quite a name for himself in the area in the early part of the Twentieth Century. It was when we looked into Constance Trafton, the daughter who had been horribly injured in the sawmill accident that things became interesting.

One has to wonder what the Traftons did when Dr. Camble never arrived. The extent of the injury to Constance was never known, but if it was severe enough to send for the doctor right away, one can only imagine some sort of nasty laceration, perhaps a hand caught in a saw blade, maybe a severed limb. Young Timmy was scared for his life when he arrived at Fullman's saloon, so the injury must have been grievous.

Records indicate that Constance Trafton lived a long, full life. She would have been twelve at the time of the accident, but five years later she was married to Thomas Parsons, the son of a local farmer and mason. She went on to have six children, one who died in her second year, but the rest lived full lives. She died at age 87 and is buried in the Stiles-Parsons Cemetery in Shapleigh, alongside her husband Thomas who died five years prior. We even found a newspaper article from the *Shapleigh Register*, a local newspaper that ran until 1942. The article was from 1915 and was about a local National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage rally in Sanford, Maine. Constance Trafton Parsons served as the secretary of the Maine chapter and was quite vocal that women did not need the right to vote.

Nowhere in the article does it mention a physical handicap such as a missing limb.

This does not disprove the story Timmy Trafton told Dr. Camble that night. Constance could have recovered, the injury might not have been as bad as originally believed, or perhaps it simply was never mentioned. However, it begins to sew some doubt on the story, especially with what we discovered next.

We sent our lead investigator Lucas to Shapleigh to dig around a little. Once he explained who he was and why he was there, he was able to look at old town records both at the town hall, and historical documents in the local library.

I'll let Lucas explain what he found:

LUCAS: I went to the Shapleigh Community Library and explained I was looking into the story of Dr. Camble. The librarian there, Mary Stiles, was incredibly helpful. Camble's story was so popular there was a lot of information to go through. At one point in the 90s, one of the librarians at the time had even begun collecting Camble-sightings. There was a whole box of old dot-matrix printed sheets with typed stories going back all the way back to the Thirties.

When I explained I was looking for historical documents pertaining to the story, she let me down into the basement and showed me where they kept the old ledgers going back almost all the way to the town's founding. In one of the books from 1879 I found a note in the town records of a meeting of the H.B.C.C. that was to take place following the town meeting at Thomas Ricker's store. According to the notes, one H. Trafton was set to attend the meeting, along with an E. Camble.

Thomas Ricker was a well known shoe and boot maker at the time. He was a business leader in town and served as one of the town clerk's for a time. His shop was not far from where Dr. Camble's body was found in an area of town called Shapleigh Corner.

It's interesting to note that both Hiram Trafton and Dr. Camble, who feature so prominently in our story, are both mentioned as attending the meeting at Ricker's store. Lucas kept digging.

LUCAS: I couldn't find any other mentions of the H.B.C.C. in any of the historical records and an internet search didn't turn up anything that made sense in context. I pressed the librarian, Mary Stiles, for any information she might know about it. She grew quiet for a moment, like she was debating something internally.

She told me her Great-great-great Grandfather was Abner Stiles and he had actually helped build the library and that his wife, Ruth was the first librarian. She had some of his old things, documents and notes from the time, and that I might find them interesting. After a little coaxing, she said she was willing to show them to me.

She kept them in an old steamer trunk she said had been passed down from her grandfather. Inside, wrapped in old linen, and stored in plastic Zip-loc bags were ten leather-bound ledgers. Each one was hand-written in an angular script. All of them were written by Abner Stiles and each book was labeled, "The Hermetic Brotherhood of the Cardinal Court" - H.B.C.C.

What Mary Stiles showed Lucas were the meeting notes, the philosophical writings, and the founding tenets of an until now unknown esoteric order.

The Hermetic Brotherhood of the Cardinal Court was not founded in Shapleigh, or by any citizens of Shapleigh as near as we could tell. It appears the group was founded by someone known only as Brother Magus in Brunswick as early as 1854. It is unclear how a chapter of it was formed in Shapleigh, but the

ledgers made perfectly clear the organizational structure of their chapter.

The order believed that a group of extremely long-lived individuals were secretly influencing the world. This so-called Cardinal Court was responsible for many of humanity's discoveries and advancements. They believed these so-called Masters had discovered magical abilities to extend their lives, to project their spirits to any place on Earth, and to even influence the minds of others. The Masters had advanced knowledge not just of magic, but also of science and technology that allowed them to transcend mortal life and to mold the world in their image.

The core belief was that this power came from blood, hence the name cardinal, not a religious position, but a color, the color of blood. Through practice and ritual, one could move through the seven circles or orders and theoretically, eventually become a member of the Cardinal Court.

I've asked Tom, one of our investigators, to read a passage from one of Abner Stiles's books on the Cardinal Court:

TOM: "We are followers of the Secret Eye that sees the world. We are the followers of the Great Hand that moves the world. We are the followers of the Old Blood that creates the world. Seven circles of perception, concentric, always moving inward to the center. Circle One, The Neophyte ['nea-fight'] who has taken the first steps to see the world beyond. Circle Two, The Practitioner, who uses the blood to shape his world. Circle Three, The Philosopher who seeks the secret wisdoms. Circle Four, The Adept who uses the blood to shape the wider world. Circle Five, the Magister who governs the secret signs and rituals. Circle Six, the Magus who teaches the hidden truths. Circle Seven, the Master who makes the world. We are the followers of the Eye, the Hand, the Blood. We are the followers of the Cardinal Court.

According to Stiles's records, members of the Brotherhood would meet in secret at one of the member's homes or special locations. They would dawn the crimson robes of the order and begin with a simple blood ritual, meant to harmonize the group. A ritual pricking of the finger along with a ceremonial chant would bring the members intune with one another. After that, the meeting would begin in earnest. Discussions would be had about the wider world, messages read that came from higher up in the order, directives given. Sometimes rituals would be performed - bathing in the blood of animals for instance or sacrificing a living creature, usually a sheep or goat. There would be ceremonial piercings of the skin, often in places that would not be seen by the outside world such as the nipples, genitals, and surface skin sights on the legs or back. The members often took drugs - opium, laudanum, and mescaline - in an attempt to pierce the veil of secret knowledge.

The records went back to 1877, when it appeared the chapter was opened. At each meeting, the members in attendance would be listed, each with a symbol after their name, a series of concentric circles, no doubt indicating the level to which the member had ascended. The membership appeared to be about ten members, sometimes swelling up to fifteen and at one point falling as low as six. The most common names to appear were:

W. Parsons, Circle Three
J. Coffin, Circle Three
R. Goodwin, Circle Two
E. Bodwell, Circle Two
A. Stiles, Circle Two
T. Ricker, Circle Two
P. Ross, Circle Two
S. Maddox, Circle Two
H. Trafton, Circle Two
E. Camble, Circle Two

It would appear that Dr. Camble was a member of a secret esoteric society.

Here's Lucas again:

LUCAS: As far as I can tell it seems that Walter Parsons was the leader of the Shapleigh chapter of the H.B.C.C. He and Jacob Coffin appear to be the highest ranking members. It's interesting to note that Jacob Coffin appears to have had a brother, George Coffin who attended Bowdoin College in Brunswick several decades prior. I only point that out because Brother Magus, who I believe was the founder of the Cardinal Court, appears to have been based out of Brunswick. Anyway, Abner Stiles was their secretary, something they called the Secret Keeper. It was his job to document not only the meetings but the philosophies and theories they uncovered as they expanded their studies.

They would receive coded messages from the person they called Brother Magus. These were all written from bottom of the page to the top in a substitution cryptogram. These messages were decoded by the group and recorded in Stiles's ledgers. Most of them were the sort of thing we would call typical esoteric order stuff - it sounds deep and inspirational, but doesn't actually say much. A few of the messages were instructions for rituals and spells the chapter would need to perform in order to advance their cause. Stiles would record these events and their results in his book, to be encoded and sent to Brother Magus. Again, most of them were relatively benign - pierce the flesh above the heart with a silver blade, collect thirty-one drops in a glass vial, then cast into a fire while dancing naked around it. That kind of thing. But a few of them were more serious...

One of the rituals Lucas discovered in Abner Stiles's books was quite disturbing. We'll share it with you now, but more sensitive listeners may want to skip ahead to the ___ minute

mark. The ritual detailed the sacrifice of either a sheep or a goat that was to take place. The animal was to be tied down and its entrails pulled slowly from its body, each member taking a hold of its intestines as they were unwound. They were to bathe in the goat's blood, which was to be collected in a large basin, each member rubbing the blood into the other's skin. The goat's head was to be mounted on a pole and carried by each member through a ritualistic dance before being burned. The basin of blood the members had bathed in was to be dropped into a deep pit dug in the earth at a sacred spot, save for one goblet which was to be drunk by all the members in a sort of blood communion.

Abner Stiles reported that all of the members in attendance, the ten men we listed previously, performed this ritual, though that two of the men, Brother Maddox, who we believe was Simon Maddox, a resident of Shapleigh at the time, and Brother Camble, our doctor, grew sick and vomited the goat's blood onto the floor of Brother Bodwell's barn. This, apparently, was considered a bad omen, by the members of the Brotherhood.

It was a meeting that took place in May of 1881 that caught Lucas's attention. Here he is to share his discovery:

LUCAS: So the May 1881 meeting referenced a letter sent by Brother Magus instructing them on how to enter the next circle. For Brother Parsons and Brother Coffin this would mean moving to the Fourth Circle, which apparently was a huge step up or inward or whatever. Stiles's notes say that the ritual they were to perform was so secretive that they had destroyed the coded message from Brother Magus after they had read it, at his request. He doesn't mention what the actual ritual was, only that it required a large quantity of blood and something called "essence" which would be mixed with this pure blood. The rest of the notes of the meeting seem pretty mundane at first. There was no ritual, aside from the Harmonizing one to start the meeting, the men took a small amount of mescaline, and for a while it seems the men are just

discussing the town and its citizens. That, in itself, isn't all that uncommon. This was a group of the important people in Shapleigh, the community leaders, the men who steered the town. They often discussed local business, contracts that would be given out and deeds granted. It was small town politics 1880s style.

But the more I read, the more I noticed they only seemed to be talking about women. Stiles wrote, "Sarah Davis was mentioned but Brother Goodwin informed the group she was unfit." They mention other women, Olive Stanley, the Ferguson sisters, Adaline Baker, and a few others. It became clear to me as I read that they were discussing these women like they were mulling over some major decision. I researched the names they mentioned, and all of them were young women at the time, most between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. One of them, Lydia Walker, was only twelve.

At one point, Stiles notes that Dr. Camble spoke up. He writes that the doctor denounced the ritual, calling it, and this is exactly what Abner Stiles wrote, "complete lunacy and evil. This isn't someone's old ewe. It's someone's daughter." Apparently the group broke into a heated argument. Stiles writes that insults were hurled and threats were made. He says at one point Camble even threatened to involve the authorities. In the end, the notes state that Brother Parsons was able to calm the group down and it was decided by the group to table the discussion for a future meeting to give members more time to contemplate the ritual. In the meantime a letter would be sent to Brother Magus asking for clarification.

By the time of the next meeting, June of 1881, Dr. Camble was dead, murdered on the side of the road while making his last call.

All of the men listed as attending the June meeting of the Hermetic Brotherhood of the Cardinal Court, it should be noted, had an extra circle drawn beside their name.

No one knows what that final ritual was, but at least from the notes we can surmise it was an escalation of what had already been done. The way the men were talking certainly seems to imply they were picking a young woman, presumably a virgin, for some sort of sacrifice. It is interesting to note that as near as we can tell none of the women discussed died in 1881, nor did any young women in the Shapleigh area. That doesn't mean it didn't happen, however. Just that it wasn't recorded.

Was Dr. Camble killed by the secret society he had grown disillusioned with? Did the group fear the good doctor would reveal their secrets to the world and ruin them? Did they set some sort of trap for him that night, convincing him that little Constance Trafton needed aid, only for them to waylay him and sacrifice him?

It's difficult to say. Hiram Trafton was a member of the H.B.C.C. and would have known how disgusted Dr. Camble had become. The implication that he either coerced or convinced his ten year old son to go along with their plot is chilling. Then again, according to the stories, the boy appeared genuinely afraid when he arrived at Fullman's Saloon. Would a young boy have been able to pull off such a deception?

It's curious to note that none of the doctor's possessions were stolen, which would seemingly dismiss the idea of roadside robbery turned murder. The broken wagon wheel and horse's leg could have been some kind of trap, some hidden obstacle in the road or a hole of some sort. Could with the trap sprung, his wagon sidelines, and Old Pete injured beyond saving, Dr. Camble put down his faithful steed with the only means he had? That might explain the horse's severed artery.

Did Camble know then that he was being stalked by his former brothers? Or did he continue down the road assuming he was the

victim of some unfortunate accident? There would have been little to no traffic on the Shapleigh Corner Road at that time of night, and there were no houses along that stretch of the road. Perhaps, fearing for the girl's life, the doctor simply ran on, hoping to get there soon enough to save her.

But if that's the case, why didn't he take his supplies with him? Even his doctor's bag, the classic, almost stereotypical black leather bag that contained his instruments and supplies was left on the wagon.

Perhaps, Dr. Camble knew what had befallen him. Maybe the trap had already been sprung and he ran for his life. Could the Hermetic Order of the Cardinal Court have chased down one of their own and stabbed him to death on the side of the road?

It's interesting that the number 31 occurred in two different places in this story. According to every version of Dr. Camble's death we could find, he was stabbed thirty-one times. Also, according to the ritual Lucas read about in Abner Stiles's notes, thirty-one drops of blood were collected. And of course, one cannot dismiss the advancement in rank of all surviving members of the Brotherhood.

Could it be that after consulting with the mysterious Brother Magus, an alternative sacrifice was arranged? Could it be that Dr. Emory Camble's blood was the key to the Brotherhood's ascension?

No one will ever know. According to the records, the Shapleigh chapter of the Brotherhood of the Cardinal Court disbanded sometime around 1885. At this time it is unknown what happened to the chapter, but it appears to have simply dried up. None of the members advanced any further after 1881. Maybe their conscience ate at them or maybe they simply lost interest, but after 1885 there are no more records of the group. The last ledger is only half full.

Mary Stiles wouldn't let us keep her ancestor's ledgers, but she did allow Lucas to photograph them. We will be studying them even further in the coming months and digging deeper to see if any other traces of this enigmatic order still exist.

In the meantime, if you're traveling along the Shapleigh Corner Road, some time after dark, especially in the late spring or early summer, keep an eye peeled for an elderly man in an old black suit walking up the road. Maybe he looks distraught, maybe terrified. You don't have to be afraid; he isn't coming for you. He's just a good doctor making one last call.

Stay safe out there, Maine.

Malevolent Maine is Lucas Knight, Tom Wilson, and myself, Chris Estes.

If you'd like to read more about our investigations check out our website at malevolentmaine.blogspot.com/

While there, don't forget to check our merch store. And, if you're so inclined, support us on Patreon at patreon.com/malevolentmaine

Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.