

Malevolent Maine

Episode 15: The Cranberry Bog Boys

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

INTRO

TOM: A singer whose spirit seeks revenge on those who wronged him over seventy years ago. A crustacean-like cryptid who stalks the shorelines of Eastport. And a plane that took off...but never landed. These are the stories we'll be bringing you in the coming week.

I'm Tom, one of the investigators at Malevolent Maine. We're able to make this show because of viewers like you. We really appreciate you telling your friends and family about our show, sharing our posts on social media, and supporting us on patreon. If you'd like to join our Malevolent Mob, then visit www.patreon.com/malevolentmaine, where for a small monthly donation, you'll have early access to our shows, behind the scenes information, and our side story podcast, *The Black Tarot*. Again, that's patreon.com/malevolentmaine.

Thank you all so much for making this show a success. We honestly couldn't do it without you. Keep listening. Keep sending us your stories. And keep believing.

The wet, squishing sound alerts you that you're not alone. Your head snaps around, but before you even see it, its foul stench fills your nostrils. It's an earthy, salty smell with an almost rubbery undertone. Standing before you is a man, or a man-shaped thing. It drips foul mud and ooze. Its arms reach for you and a low, menacing moan escapes its open mouth as it takes another wet step towards you.

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?

Try not to get bogged down with this one, MMers! Today's story comes to us from Turner, just outside Auburn in Androscoggin County, where rumor has it, there's a cranberry bog with quite a disturbing history of missing young men.

Before we begin with our story, however, a note about cranberries and how they grow. While cranberries are not what comes to mind first when thinking about the state of Maine, we actually have a very good climate for growing them. Cranberries grow in wetlands called marshes or bogs. A bog is layered gravel, peat, and sand that gathers and collects water. Cranberries grow a lot like strawberries except in a bog instead of soil. These aren't typically deep, maybe three feet at their deepest. You've probably seen the juice commercials with the guys standing up to their hips in a bog. From a distance it can look like a field of red berries, and you might not even realize until it's too late that it's actually water. During the harvest, the bog is flooded and the cranberries rounded up using large floating rings or traps. They're not typically dangerous...

except for the wolf spiders that serve as a form of natural insect protection.

We were contacted by Leo Guerin, a longtime resident of Turner. Guerin is 78, a retired machine fabricator who worked forty-two years at Pratt & Whitney. An amateur gardener and somewhat of a local historian, Leo heard about the cranberry bog boys when he was a teenager. He is a lifelong member of the Elks club in nearby Auburn, and it was there that he first heard the stories of the so-called Bog Boys.

Leo was eighteen when he first joined the Elks Club in 1962. Back then, the drinking age in Maine was eighteen, and Leo would often come to the Elks after work and have a few beers before heading home. He said at the time there were a lot of World War II veterans who were members. Leo had always wanted to join the military and readily admits he would have signed up to go to Vietnam, but an earlier ski injury that resulted in a broken hip kept him out of the war. Still, he loved talking with the veterans and hearing their stories. It was through them that he developed his love for local history.

"Some of those guys, those vets, are the ones I heard about the Bog Boys from," Leo wrote us. "That's what they called them. Bog Boys."

It's nearly impossible to hear the term Bog Boy and not conjure images of bog bodies - human remains that have been preserved in peat, only to be uncovered years later. Unlike most mummified remains, bog bodies typically retain their skin and internal organs. Highly acidic water, combined with low temperatures and little to no oxygen causes the skin to darken, sometimes to an almost black color. Bones usually dissolve because unlike skin, hair, and nails, they lack keratin, creating a preserved sack-like body. Many of these bog bodies date back to the Iron Age, between 1200 and 600 BC. A quick google image search for 'bog bodies' will reveal some nightmare fuel for our more adventurous listeners.

While bog bodies share some similarities with Leo Guerin's Bog Boys, these appear to be something far different.

The old GIs told Leo the story of an eighteen year old boy named either Tyler or Thomas Martin. Leo claimed he heard the story with both names, and we actually found conflicting reports when we looked into the story. Whatever the boy's real name was, everyone in town called him Rooster.

Rooster was the town trouble-maker. He lived over on the Country Road, off Route 4, with his father, who was by all reports a mechanic, but whose full time job appeared to be drinking. "Everyone knew that Rooster was pretty much on his own," Leo Guerin told us. "His pop didn't care much what he did - and what Rooster did was get himself up to some mischief."

We couldn't find a police record for either Tyler or Thomas Martin. That's not surprising as the incidents occurred a long time ago, and mostly while Rooster was a juvenile. According to the story Guerin was told, Rooster would often steal cars to joyride around in, often with a bottle of booze snatched from his father.

He was known to terrorize the local kids, and more than one of them owed a black eye or two to Rooster. In a lot of ways he was the typical small town bully. You can picture Keifer Sutherland as Ace Merrill in the film *Stand By Me* or Johnny Lawrence from *The Karate Kid*.

So it wasn't surprising to the locals when Rooster Martin disappeared one day in late October of 1947. Most people assumed he took off for Portland or Boston or who knows where, and no one was too upset about it.

Rooster's father, however, hounded the police. He might have been something of the town drunk, but he was fiercely protective of his son. He was convinced the boy wouldn't have split town. Not at least, without taking the St. Christopher's medal Rooster's mother had left him on her deathbed. To placate the

man, the police did a few half-hearted searches around the areas Rooster was known to hang out and some of the woods at the edge of town. They didn't find anything, and in the end concluded the boy had run off.

But that's not what the GIs believed and it's not what Leo Guerin believes either. Guerin believes that Rooster Martin fell into a wild cranberry bog. Maybe he had been out drinking, maybe he just got turned around and lost, but Guerin believes he somehow fell into the bog and drowned.

"Think about it," he said. "If you were disoriented and fell, the layers of peat and muck that would get kicked up, plus the tangle of cranberry plants, it could be enough to snarl you all up. Maybe hold you under just long enough to drown."

The rumors began that Rooster had drowned in the bog, and eventually they got loud enough that the chief of police had it searched. They didn't find any evidence of the boy and the case officially went cold. That didn't stop the whispers though.

And by the summer 1948 there were stories that Rooster Martin had been seen out in the woods in the area around the bog. Only he had been changed. They said the ghost of the Martin boy had returned, mixed up with all the muck of the bog. The stories went that he had gotten lost in the bog and was trying to find his way back home, not realizing he'd been dead for almost a year. And thus the first Bog Boy was born.

According to Leo, the creature called a Bog Boy is a humanoid being, but it appears to be covered in layers of mud and ooze, as if it has just emerged from a muddy swamp or puddle. Bits of sticks and plants cling to its surface. Its face is partially concealed by the ooze, but it appears to have eyes of some sort and their mouths continually yawn open as if searching for something.

There were over ten sightings of that first Bog Boy in 1948. Some came from Rooster's "friends" and I use that term loosely,

who went out into the woods looking for them. Another purported sighting came from a couple who had gone for a romantic stroll near the cranberry bog. At least one of them came from a soldier who would later tell Leo Guerin about his encounter.

Leo couldn't recall the veteran's full name, but he was pretty sure his first name was Bill. Leo said Bill's story, and many of those early ones went something like this:

The person was walking in the woods, somewhere in the area around the bog. It was usually afternoon or perhaps early evening. Everything seemed normal at first, but then Bill or the young lovers or whomever heard the snap of a dry twig or a wet squelching sound. They turned and saw the creature. It was covered in dark brown, almost black, mud that seemed to *just* cling to its frame. Some claimed the Bog Boy had red eyes that glowed like a hot coal, others said they were a dull, lifeless yellow. Either way, the creature's eyes seemed to stay locked on the potential victim.

The Bog Boy would take slow, lumbering steps toward the person, leaving behind oozy mud. Its mouth hung open wide and a low moan reverberated throughout the woods. The creature would reach for the person, trying to grab them. The creature was slow moving, but relentless. A Bog Boy is easy to outrun, Leo Guerin would later tell us, if you know where you're going, but it is easy to get turned around out in the woods around the cranberry bogs. The victims all managed to escape the Boy Boy, running back to safety.

By the end of 1948 the sightings of the Bog Boy stopped and the story, like many local rumors, dried up.

By 1962, when Leo Guerin was old enough to drink at the Elks Lodge with the WWII veterans, rumblings of the story of the Bog Boy had begun again. That's because that year Ellis Saucier, the seventeen year old son of the local barber, had gone missing. Leo says he knew Saucier who had been a few years younger than him in school.

"He wasn't what you'd call an angel or a teacher's pet," Leo said. "I think the polite term is ne'er-do-well. Always getting into some kind of trouble, always looking for trouble, you know?"

The area around Turner was searched, including the bogs, but Saucier was never found. There was a rumor he had run off to Boston to join a gang, but there wasn't much evidence of that. Again, the town was in a bit of a minor uproar for a few weeks, but eventually the chatter died down and life moved on.

By the spring 1963, however, Bog Boy sightings had started up again, only now the stories claimed there were two of them.

The sightings continued for most of 1963, but as the winter settled in, the sightings dried up. And remained that way for almost fifteen years.

"Every fifteen years," Leo Guerin told us. "Like clockwork." Every fifteen years another young man goes missing from the town. Rooster Martin in 1947, Ellis Saucier in 1962, then Michael Sanborn in '77, Joshua Landry in '92, and most recently, Zachary Clarke in 2007. All of them were between the ages of sixteen and nineteen. All of them missing, no trace ever found.

In 2007 Leo Gurein was 63, preparing for retirement. A lot of the veterans who had told him the story of the Bog Boy back in 1962 and passed away or were living their last few years in assisted living centers, but Guerin said there were still whispers of the Bog Boys.

Leo says he doesn't know exactly how the story continues to be passed down to each new generation. Perhaps it's spread by parents telling their children, warning them to stay out of the woods at night. The Bog Boys have become something like the boogeyman, used to frighten the youth of the town into behaving and becoming the general scapegoat for anything that goes wrong. Sure enough in 2007 when the Clarke boy went missing, the

stories started up again and the sightings started again. This time there were five Bog Boys.

The stories claim that if you encounter the Bog Boys to run as fast as you can. They're not terribly fast, but their open arms and gaping mouths are easy to get tangled in, especially now that there's a pack. The stories say that if they catch you, they'll drag you back to the bog and pull you underneath the waters to lie with them until they rise again. The missing boys, presumably are victims of the Bog Boys, forced into the muck and turned into one of the growing pack.

The only pictures are blurry and can be written off as tricks of the light, strange angles, and active imaginations. In recent years, and as technology has gotten more advanced, there is still no evidence of any bodies buried in the cranberry bogs. Still, the stories persist. Whether they are an elaborate prank or the actual ghosts of the missing boys, no one is sure. But Leo Guerin is.

"Oh, it's them, all right," Leo told us. "The missing boys. The dead boys. They're angry they died or they don't want to be alone, or whatever, but it's them all right. I've got no doubts about that."

After talking with Leo Guerin, we had Lucas do some research into this story.

LUCAS: Guerin's timelines does seem to check out. Tyler or Thomas "Rooster" Martin, Ellis Saucier, Michael Sanborn, Joshua Landry, and Zachary Clarke all went missing from the Turner area. No bodies were ever found, and no evidence of them turning up anywhere else has ever been presented. The youngest, Joshua Landry, was sixteen. Michael Sanborn was the oldest, just nineteen years old. To date their cases are unsolved, though every lead has since gone cold.

This does not take into consideration the many other missing peoples that have happened over the years. In the

Turner area, just outside Auburn, there have been 46 missing persons since 1947. Their ages range from 6 to 81. Many of them are assumed to have moved for various reasons. The most infamous was the Britney Redlon case from 1997. Britney was eight when she went missing under suspicious circumstances. Her father, Bradley Redlon was the prime suspect in her disappearance, though he refused to say anything. Many people believed Redlon killed and disposed of his daughter, though no case has ever been brought against him.

Still, the similarities in Guerin's stories are perhaps too much to discount. All five of the missing boys are around the same age. All of them were described as less than popular or well-liked. They were all, for lack of a better term, misfits with penchants for the kind of irritating trouble teenage boys find themselves in. Interestingly enough, they all came from broken homes.

So the question remains, what exactly do the Bog Boys want? Knowing what we do about revenant spirits, it would make a sort of twisted sense that the boys, seemingly killed in the cranberry bog would come back to haunt it. There are thousands of such cases all over the world. As for their appearance, many lingering spirits take on the form they had at the moment of their death - submerged in the peat and the mud, they would perhaps resemble these "mud men." So what exactly do they want? Why do they claim new victims? And why the fifteen year window between missing victims?

The last question is perhaps the easiest to answer. It is possible that sated by the capture of their newest victim the Bog Boys got into a kind of hibernation, maybe returning to the mud from which they are born. The power of the sacrifice or perhaps the energy expended by making the sacrifice is enough to allow the Bog Boys some rest. It takes roughly fifteen years for the hibernation to wear off and the Bog Boys to resume their hunt.

So, why take a new victim at all? Unfortunately, we don't have a good answer for that. It doesn't appear the Bog Boys feed on their victims, at least not in a traditional vampiric sense. It does not appear their killings are for sustenance. And while the boys were known to be angry at times, these don't appear to be mindless rage attacks. There has to be something more behind their attacks. Too many potential victims - that don't fit the young, troubled male stereotype, by the way - easily escape these creatures. And yet, every fifteen years, a healthy teenage boy is somehow caught and added to the growing faction.

If Rooster Martin was the first Bog Boy, is there anything in his nature that would drive him to seek a companion?

That's almost impossible to say. Nothing, not even the boy's real name, has survived the seventy-five years since his disappearance. Any records or personal belongings belonging to Martin have long since been destroyed.

It was when we investigated the fourth Bog Boy, Joshua Landry, that we discovered something that might give us a clue as to their motive. We reached out to Landry's mother, Lisa Murdock. She had moved away from Turner, remarried, and moved on with her life, but when we asked if she had any of her son's personal belongings, she told us she thought she had some of his notebooks in storage somewhere. Sure enough, two days later, we received an email with images of dozens of pages of Joshua Landry's notes.

Landry was an aspiring musician, inspired by the wave of grunge music that was sweeping the nation at the time. Many of the pages of his notebooks are covered in doodles of snakes and skulls, with half finished lyrics to songs he was working on. A few of them are actually pretty good. Tucked between the songs and tattoo ideas, were pages of rambling writing, almost like a journal. Most of them covered typical teenage angst, a few of them were rather violent fantasies about finding his absent father and paying him back for abandoning him.

One of the passages, however, stood out to us. As near as we can tell it was written sometime in the spring of 1992, just months before he went missing. We've asked our intern Mark to read the passage:

MARK: There are times when I feel like no gets me. That no one ever can get me. I'm totally alone. No father. No real mom. Friends? What the hell are those? Even the teachers at school - the ones who keep telling us we all have bright futures and whatever else bull crap nonsense - even they hate me. They don't get it. None of them do. I hate it here. I just want to go somewhere where I belong. I'm leaving Turner. I'm leaving Maine. Maybe there's someone out there who will accept me for who I am.

This passage, and several others, were used by the police to justify their theory that Joshua Landry had run away from home. And maybe he did. Lisa Murdock admits she wasn't home much during the late 80s and early 90s, around the time Landry went missing. As a single mom, she was working two jobs, trying to support her family. Still, she does not believe that her son would run away, especially without leaving her some sort of note or finding a way to contact her in the years since.

Joshua Landry was not Ellis Saucier, or Zachary Clarke or Rooster Martin. Each of those boys was unique, though in each of their own ways they fit the mold of troubled youth, an outcast by the society around them.

Is it possible that these Bog Boys are just looking for acceptance or a group of people to like and support them? The fact that all of the missing boys came from broken homes, all of them had run-ins with the law, and all of them were described as "troubled" seems to lend some support to this theory. If the spirits of the missing teens, somehow mixed with the mud of the cranberry bogs, were trapped by their need for acceptance, it might explain their desire to expand their numbers and grow their new muddy family.

Leo Guerin has never seen the Bog Boys, but we spoke with several people who have claimed to have encountered them at various times. Their stories are all different, different times of day, different years, different numbers of Bog Boys. Many were out hunting or hiking. A few of them had snuck off into the woods to drink or smoke without the watchful eyes of their parents. And a small number actually claimed they had gone into the woods around the cranberry bogs to look for the Bog Boys, themselves.

For all their differences, the stories are consistent about several things - the appearance of the Bog Boys as moaning, mud-covered creatures with open mouths and reaching arms, and the location of all the encounters. Every one of them has occurred around the wild cranberry bogs.

Now, we couldn't quite find an exact street address for these bogs, but after a little while traipsing through the woods, and with a little help from Leo Guerin, we were able to locate them. This was late August so the cranberries hadn't fully come in yet, and the bogs hadn't been flooded for harvest. Without the extra water and bright red berries, the bog looked more like a slightly muddy field. It was hard to imagine five bodies decomposing just beneath the surface.

But the longer we lingered there, we began to feel something. There was a stillness in the air. There were no birds chirping or bugs buzzing. I don't think a single plane flew overhead. We all agreed that we had the sensation of being watched. After a few minutes and a few final pictures, we left the cranberry bog behind and headed back to the safety of our car.

It shouldn't be too hard to find the Turner cranberry bogs if you're willing to risk a look. We're not sure we recommend that, and maybe after hearing this story you won't either.

One last note, if the Bog Boys return every fifteen years to seek a new victim, 2022 would be fifteen years from Zachary Clarke's disappearance in 2007. If Leo Guerin is correct, that

would mean that sightings of the Bog Boys should begin happening soon, and that any young man between sixteen and nineteen years old from Turner, should stay as far away from the cranberry bogs as possible.

Stay safe out there, Maine.

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

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Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.