

Malevolent Maine

Episode 27: The Ramsdell Lighthouse

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INTRO:

A witches' coven crafting protective or perhaps harmful magical charms. A song that inspires creative genius. And Maine's most haunted road. These are the cases we're working on for weeks ahead.

Hi everyone, it's your host, Chris. Malevolent Maine is always growing and expanding and that's largely due to you. You've listened to our show, told your friends about it, and followed us on social media. We are so thankful for all of your support.

We're working on a lot right now and as we head to summer we're looking to expand even further. One of the best ways you can help us do that is by becoming a Patreon supporter. For as little as three dollars a month you'll help us continue to bring stories of the odd and the strange to you, as well as help us tell smaller, more focused stories, like *The Black Tarot*. When you sign up, you'll also receive a handwritten official Malevolent Maine postcard sent right to your door by one of our investigators. You'll also have early access to episodes, audio outtakes, and other extras as we come across them. To join our Malevolent Mob, head over to patreon.com/malevolentmaine. Thanks!

The worn wooden stairs creak beneath your feet as you rise up the lighthouse tower. The air around you is cold and despite your coat, you can't help but shiver. Something brushes against your foot, but when you look down there's nothing there. Out of the corner of your eye you see a shadow move, but when you look the lighthouse is just as empty as when you entered. Suddenly

you hear a low, menacing laugh that sounds more like a growl. There's something in here with you. And it doesn't want you here.

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?

Be wary, MMers. There's danger ahead. Our newest story comes to us from Sangerville, a town of a little over 1,000, located in Piscataquis county. Sangerville was settled sometime around 1814, named after a prominent landowner, Calvin Sanger.

In a lot of ways Sangerville resembles many Maine towns, rural, hardworking, and blue collar. But there's one thing that makes Sangerville very, very different from other towns in Maine.

Sangerville has a lighthouse. Sangerville is also one hundred and forty miles away from the nearest ocean, surrounded by tall trees.

In an empty field along Route 23, tucked back a quarter of a mile from the road is the old lighthouse. It stands eighty feet

tall and its white paint has faded and begun to peel. As near as anyone can tell it was built some time in the years after the Civil War. The door is locked and chained and according to local authorities no one has been inside since 1999.

Maine has a rich history of lighthouses. Some of the oldest lighthouses in the country are in Maine and they attract thousands of tourists every year. Lighthouses were built along the coastline to warn sailors of dangerous shallows or rocks, and to guide them to safety. The spinning, magnified light at the top of the lighthouse sends messages to offshore boats, typically warnings of dangers or directions for safe passage.

No one is entirely sure why one was built in the Sangerville field, but it clearly was not to warn passing ships.

The Ramsdell Lighthouse was built by Douglas Ramsdell, the man who owned the land in the 1860s. Ramsdell had been a soldier for the Union Army during the Civil War and had returned a changed man. He claimed the horrors he had seen had opened his eyes to new truths of humankind. Upon his return he tried his hand at ministering, but found little success at it. He attempted to become a teacher and a speaker, but again, they turned out to be failed professions. At some point around 1868 he began construction of the lighthouse.

Ramsdell would never say why exactly he was building the lighthouse or what its purpose might be. When asked he would simply say, it had come to him in a vision and that it was meant to light the way. After its completion, Douglas Ramsdell could often be seen climbing to the top of the tower and shining its signal light at seemingly random times of day and night. No one quite understood what Ramsdell was doing, but he was a kind enough man and didn't bother anyone else, so, as is the Maine way, the rest of Sangerville let him be.

Once complete, the lighthouse would shine its signal light, seemingly at random, usually at night, but sometimes even during the day. Ramsdell grew reclusive, often spending entire weeks

without leaving his property. Many assumed he was spending the time atop his lighthouse.

This lasted for several years until in the spring of 1893, Ramsdell was found lying at the bottom of the stairs inside the lighthouse. His neck, his legs, an arm, and several other bones had been broken in an apparent fall from the top of the stairs. It was determined that he had been dead for several weeks before anyone ventured into the lighthouse to look for him.

Stuck on a nail just inside the door was a handwritten letter Ramsdell had written just before his death. I've asked one of our senior investigators, Lucas, to read the note:

LUCAS: My time in this world is coming to an end, and there are things I must tell you before I am done. I have spent many years keeping this lighthouse, but there is still much I cannot explain. There are whispers in the wind and shadows in the night that haunt me still. I do not know if these things are real or if they are the fevered imaginations of an old man, but I cannot deny them any longer. I am bound to this place by some unseen force, something that I cannot name. I leave this lighthouse and the lands surrounding it to my nephew, Jacob Ramsdell. Keep her as sound as I have done. May you find peace, where I could not.

Feeling pity for the man who died alone, without any friends, the townspeople paid for Douglas Ramsdell to be buried in the church cemetery and deemed his death an accident. The strange note they attributed to a lonely man's ramblings and contacted the poor man's nephew about his unique inheritance.

Jacob Ramsdell was sixteen when he received word of his uncle's passing and came to visit the lighthouse that would become his home for the next sixty years. By all accounts, Jacob Ramsdell was not nearly as reclusive as his uncle had been. He lived in the house his uncle had left him and tended to the lighthouse as the elder Ramsdell had, but he was quite well known in town,

where he worked for the local shoemaker before eventually purchasing the business from his employer.

Jacob Ramsdell never married, but was quite well-liked by several of the eligible young women in town at the time. He was friendly, known to help around the town, and even left a considerable amount of money to the Sangerville Historical Society when he died at the age of 72.

He also kept the Ramsdell Lighthouse in perfect condition. He didn't like to talk about the Lighthouse very often. When pressed, he would say that it had been in the family for a long time and things like that deserved to be preserved.

The lighthouse continued to shine on random nights, sending its beam out across the land, but people complained very little about it. By then it had become a part of the town and the people there were used to it.

When Jacob Ramsdell died in 1949 his body was discovered inside the lighthouse, similar to how his uncle had been found. Unlike Douglas Ramsdell, however, Jacob was discovered sitting peacefully in an armchair at the top, near the lamp. His cause of death appeared to have been a heart attack.

Jacob Ramsdell's last will and testament, held by his lawyer in Bangor divided his estate, selling his business investments and gifting the homestead to his younger sister. The Lighthouse was left to a young man named Frank Drouin, with whom Ramsdell had struck up an unusual friendship. Here's Lucas explaining how Jacob Ramsdell came to leave the Lighthouse to the younger man.

LUCAS: Later in his life, some time after he turned sixty-five, Jacob Ramsdell had a bad accident where he slipped on a patch of ice and broke his hip. For several months he was laid up in his home. One of the local boys, Frank Drouin, the son of a man who had once worked for Ramsdell in his shoe shop, split firewood for Ramsdell all through the winter and spring. As the weather turned warm,

Ramsdell found himself coming up with various chores and excuses for the boy to stop by. Drouin complete the task that Ramsdell asked, and then the two would sit and talk about the town, the state, and the world at large. They would often play chess. For whatever reason, Jacob Ramsdell, perhaps regretting the fact that he never had a son of his own, took a shine to young Frank Drouin. When Ramsdell had healed from his fall, and for the next several years before his death, Drouin would often visit. The only thing Ramsdell never asked his young friend to do was maintain the lighthouse.

That changed when Jacob Ramsdell died. In his will he left the lighthouse and a small plot of land on which it sat to Frank Drouin, who was twenty-one at the time. He left instructions that the lighthouse should be kept in good condition and largely left alone.

Frank Drouin maintained the Lighthouse for seventeen years. During that time the lighthouse continued to shine out at random intervals. No one understood why it flashed on some nights and not others, and whenever he was asked about it. Drouin would offer a sad smile and say he was honoring an old friend. In 1956, Drouin was diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer, though not yet forty. His dying wish was to be brought to the top of the lighthouse so that he could look out over the land where he had spent so much time. An hour later he was found dead.

Drouin left the Lighthouse to his second cousin, Phillip Estabrook. At the time, Estabrook was only fourteen.

It was under the ownership of Phillip Estabrook that the Ramsdell Lighthouse gained its largest fame. As Estabrook came of age he thought he could turn the Lighthouse into a tourist destination, much like the statue of Paul Bunyan in Bangor. He opened the Ramsdell Lighthouse up to the public in 1964.

For awhile the lighthouse, dubbed Maine's "Oddest Lighthouse" drew decent-sized crowds. Soon, though, people began complaining that the Lighthouse always felt cold, even in the middle of summer. And more than one visitor claimed to feel a sense of unease when entered the Lighthouse, as if someone was watching them. Said one visitor, "I had the sensation that someone was always just behind me, reaching out to touch my neck. Though every time I turned around, there was no one there."

That combined with its rather remote location, proved the downfall of Phillip Estabrook's foray into turning the lighthouse into an attraction. In 1967, the Lighthouse closed its doors once more.

It should be noted that Estabrook was somewhat of a schemer. He had several money making schemes of the get rich quick variety, none of which were particularly successful. When it came to money, he borrowed a lot, spent more, and made very little.

In 1974, he was found inside the lighthouse, dead of a self-inflicted gunshot to the head. Many attributed his death to a particularly bad business deal that he had recently defaulted on, and the tragic story of Phillip Estabrook was quickly laid to rest, as was he.

A note was found by Estabrook's body. I've asked Mark, our Junior Investigator, to read it:

MARK: They won't stop. I can hear them, even when I try to sleep. Even when I'm away. I don't know what they want me to do or why they keep coming to me. I'm sorry. I thought I could help. Billy, please do better than I ever did. I'm sorry. So sorry.

The Billy in question was Estabrook's nephew, William "Billy" Provencher. Billy was nineteen years old when his uncle took his own life and inherited everything, though aside from the Lighthouse there was very little. Provencher continued to maintain the Lighthouse well into the 1990s.

It was during this time that talk first began of the Ramsdell Lighthouse being haunted. Perhaps it was because Phillip Estabrook attempted to bring some notoriety to the strange structure. His tragic death probably attributed to the story that the spirits of the dead roamed the lighthouse's interior.

The pattern of elderly lighthouse keepers passing it down to a new, young ward before dying inside the house dated back all the way to its original owner, Douglas Ramsdell. It continued when Billy Provencher died while attempting to repair part of the Lighthouse. He tumbled down the stairs and broke his neck, dying nearly instantaneously. He left the Lighthouse to Gavin Simpson, the boy who often mowed the small patch of grass around the lighthouse.

Simpson, who was thirteen when he inherited the lighthouse, was the shortest keeper in its notorious history. He was given the Lighthouse in 1993 and just six years later, he was involved in a horrible car crash. He and another young man had been drinking at a party. Gavin was the passenger when the car his friend was driving crossed over the center line on Route 23 and struck a logging truck head on. Both young men were killed.

Gavin Simpson had been too young and died too unexpectedly to have his affairs in order. For the first time in the Ramsdell Lighthouse's history, it was keeper-less, with no clear indication of who would maintain the odd building.

This might seem like the end of the strange history of the lighthouse in the middle of nowhere, but in truth, things were about to get a whole lot stranger.

The rumors of ghosts in the lighthouse only increased after Simpson's death. Stories about ghosts climbing the long stairs to the top and lighting the lamp only increased on nights when the lighthouse shined out its light randomly. Teenagers dared one another to go into the abandoned lighthouse, to take something from it as proof of their presence. Campfire stories

told of dares to climb to the top of the stairs, especially on a night when the lamp was lit. The stories said that the unsuspecting victim would get to the top of the stairs and see the ghostly forms of the previous lighthouse keepers and this fright would scare them to death.

To clarify, however, no deaths have ever been reported inside the lighthouse save those we've already noted of the various keepers.

Soon though, even the curious teenagers began avoiding the lighthouse. There was a dangerous air about the place, an eerie feeling that could only be described as predatory. We talked with several people in the area who had actually gone into the lighthouse in the mid 90s, usually after a night of carousing in some pit or bonfire. Emboldened by cheap beer and teenage bravado, these individuals had snuck into the Ramsdell Lighthouse, only to leave soon after describing the sensation of being watched. One person we spoke with actually said it felt more like they were being studied. "I felt like a bug under a microscope," the person who asked us to not reveal their identity told us.

The Ramsdell Lighthouse developed a reputation of being haunted, one of those spooky places everyone knows, but no one really talks too much about. When the beacon light came on the locals would make a reference to Douglas Ramsdell or one of the other keepers working overtime, usually with a dry chuckle and a shake of their head. And the light continued to shine, sometimes for a few hours, sometimes all night. There was no rhyme or reason to when it turned on and when it turned off. It would go days, maybe weeks without shining, and then suddenly it would blast out its bright rays...even without a keeper to maintain it.

The story of the haunted lighthouse in the middle of the woods drew the attention of ghost hunters and mediums from all over. They would often make trips to the Ramsdell Lighthouse attempting to establish a connection with the spirits said to

dwell there. The most infamous of these cases involved a medium named Victoria Perkins.

Perkins was a successful medium from Ohio who had made a name for herself doing live readings, often with large groups. For our listeners old enough to remember the TV show, *Crossing Over with John Edward*, think something similar. However, Perkins would also visit haunted locations across the country, trying to speak with the dead who still lingered nearby. She visited the Winchester House in California, Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Lizzie Borden's home in Fall River, Massachusetts. She released several of these visits as TV and direct to video specials, and intrepid collectors can still find *Speaking to the Beyond with Victoria Perkins* at yard sales and second hand shops.

However, there was one filmed visit that was never released, and it was so disturbing that it effectively ended Victoria Perkins career.

The Ramsdell Lighthouse.

I contacted Victoria Perkins in February. She's retired now, sixty-eight and living in Vermont. She prefers not to talk too much about any communication from the dead. It was only when I explained that we were planning a trip to the Ramsdell Lighthouse that she agreed to talk with me, so I drove to her home in Killington, Vermont to interview her on a chilly Saturday afternoon in February. She asked that I not use her voice for our show, but her story was too interesting to simply summarize. I've asked our producer Megan to read the transcript of what Victoria told me to recreate our interview.

RECORDING STARTS:

CHRIS: You were inside the Ramsdell Lighthouse. Is there anything we should know before we visit?

MEGAN: Don't go there. Don't ever go there. Stay as far away from the place as you can. Forget you ever heard about that cursed place and move on with your life.

Victoria Perkins reminded me a little of Professor Trewlany from Harry Potter. She had a mess of curly gray hair and large glasses. When she talked she made wild gestures with her hands.

RECORDING STARTS:

CHRIS: Why not?

MEGAN: That place is... is awful.

CHRIS: Awful? What do you mean?

MEGAN: There are forces there that should not be disturbed.

CHRIS: Do you mean ghosts?

MEGAN: I mean exactly what I just said.

CHRIS: Okay. Let's start over. You went to the Ramsdell Lighthouse in the fall of 1999, with your tv crew, right?

MEGAN: I did. Yes.

CHRIS: But you never aired the footage. Why not?

MEGAN: That place was more horrible than anything I have ever experienced. The spirits there -

CHRIS: The dead lighthouse keepers?

MEGAN: They are there, too, but that's not what disturbed me.

CHRIS: There was something else there?

MEGAN: Oh yes. Something much older and more dangerous than Douglas Ramsdell.

At this point, I asked Perkins if she still had the footage that was shot and after a moment of hesitation she confirmed that she did. I asked if she would show it to me. She said she didn't want to, that she hoped no one would ever see any of what was shot that day, but she would show it to me, if only to attempt to dissuade us from actually going into the Lighthouse.

The footage was raw, unedited and the quality, by today's standards, was quite poor. Still, it clearly showed a younger Victoria Perkins standing outside the Ramsdell Lighthouse explaining how she was going to enter and attempt to contact the spirits within.

She opens the door to the Lighthouse, crosses the threshold, the cameraman following close behind her. It's right when she crosses over, before she's even said anything, that you can see it. Something in her face changes. It's like every nerve in her body suddenly let go, and her entire face seems to slump. Her eyes go wide and her jaw tightens.

Sitting in the safety of her house, almost twenty-five years later, Perkins told me that entering the Lighthouse felt like she had been dunked into a pool of ice water, one with a live electrical current running through it. She said it took her only a moment to realize there was something else in the Lighthouse with her, something dangerous.

MEGAN: It was all around me, this... this force. Like a hundred small hands pressing on me from every direction at different times.

When I asked her if it was a spirit or a ghost, she started to say something, then stopped. She was quiet for a long time. Finally she admitted that she didn't know what it was. She said in many ways it felt like the spirits she communicated with regularly, but there was a wildness to it, a swirling sense of

pure chaos that defied any explanation. She said it felt like being inside a tornado.

Victoria Perkins told me that she could feel the presence of Douglas Ramsdell, his nephew Jacob, and all of the other lighthouse keepers. All except the last, Gavin Simpson, who died outside the Lighthouse. But she was also quite adamant that what she felt was separate from their souls. She said she thought the spirits were trapped there, possibly held in place by the dangerous force.

On the video you can see Perkins grow more and more cautious as she moves further into the Lighthouse. At one point she starts shaking. At another, she nearly falls over and the cameraman has to catch her. In another scene, just before the medium fled the Lighthouse, she actually vomits. In the video her eyes are wide and red, like they're seeing something else. She keeps flinching like someone is poking or pinching her. She screams at one point. You can hear the cameraman asking her if she is all right multiple times, but all she can do is shake her head.

Finally, right after Perkins gets sick, she bolts for the door. The cameraman, who at this point had also begun to shake so much that the footage becomes nearly unwatchable, quickly follows, nearly dropping his camera, before they burst into the fresh air outside. The camera drops to the ground on its side and sits there for several minutes, catching the muffled cries and whimpers of Perkins and the cameraman.

MEGAN: Did you see it?

Victoria Perkins asked me, staring at me intently after the video ended.

CHRIS: What?

MEGAN: Did you see it? There at the end?

She rewound the tape and played the end for me again. Just as the cameraman turns to follow Victoria out of the Lighthouse, she paused the video. There, in the corner, just behind where she had been standing, a face appeared, twisted in a scream of rage. We watched the scene several more times in slow motion. The face emerged from the shadows, not like someone stepping into the light, but like someone emerging from the water. The shadows seem to bulge outward, then the face forms. It's human...or almost. One eye seems lower than the other and there isn't much of a nose. The mouth is full of what looks like razor sharp teeth.

It's only there for a second, then it seems to break apart. It doesn't retreat or hide back in the shadows, it bursts apart, dissolving into nothing, like a puff of smoke. I watched that video at least six times and every time I saw it, clear as day. It's not a trick of the light or a special effect. There is something there in the Lighthouse with Victoria Perkins and her cameraman.

We sat for a long time, staring at the snarling face frozen on the screen. Finally I asked her what it was. She shook her head and told me she didn't know, only that it felt colder, more alien than anything she had ever felt from the other side.

CHRIS: Was it a spirit? A ghost?

MEGAN: It... it was like a screaming ball of hate. Whatever it was, it hated me, hated the living, stronger than anything I've ever known.

Victoria Perkins believes the Ramsdell Lighthouse is haunted, but by something far worse than the spirits of the keepers who passed. She couldn't explain what it was that dwelled in its depths, but she told me she thought it was pure evil. When I asked her if she thought it was this entity that kept turning on the signal light at the top of the tower, she said she was unsure, but that she believed so.

CHRIS: What is it signaling, then?

MEGAN: I don't know, but whatever it is, it cannot be good.

We sent Lucas and Mark to Sangerville to check out the Ramsdell Lighthouse, despite the warnings of Victoria Perkins. It's still there, though a little more rundown. No one has been inside it since Perkins' failed expose. Still, the boys were determined to make the best of it. Here's Lucas:

LUCAS: I talked with Dale Cabot, one of the selectmen for Sangerville, and he agreed to show us around the place. We parked our cars along Route 23, and together we walked out into the field. The Ramsdell Lighthouse has faded some since its doors were locked in 1999, its exterior a dirty and peeling gray. There was a heavy padlock on the door along with several no trespassing signs plastered over it. Cabot told me that since Gavin Simpson died without a will, the lighthouse and the field had no one to claim it. The town has since taken the deed back, though they haven't been able to bring themselves to tear it down. It took some convincing but Cabot allowed us to enter the Lighthouse while he waited outside.

Dale Cabot had the key to not only the padlock, but also the lock on the Lighthouse door on his keyring and with hands that shook only a little, he unlocked the door and let Lucas and Mark go in. Here's Mark:

MARK: It was cold in there. That was the first thing I noticed. It wasn't that warm outside, but inside it seemed ten or fifteen degrees colder. I expected signs of mice or some other animal, but the place was clean. It was mostly empty, a small table, a worn chair, but other than that it was completely empty. Only... only it didn't feel empty.

LUCAS: We were in there for maybe ten minutes. Just long enough to climb the stairs to the top, to look around for a bit, and then Mark and I agreed it was time to go. The

whole time it felt like there was someone in there with us. Numerous times I felt someone right behind me, almost breathing on my neck. I kept looking into corners and shadows expecting to find someone, but we were alone. At least as near as we could tell.

MARK: As we were coming down the stairs I felt the sleeve of my coat catch on something. I thought I must have brushed against a splinter of rough wood or an exposed nail, but there was nothing. It was like someone tugged on my arm, but there wasn't anything there.

Both Lucas and Mark said they definitely felt like there was something there in the Ramsdell Lighthouse, a presence that seemed to linger around them, pressing in like a thick fog. We have been to some pretty eerie places before but they agreed this one was different somehow.

On their way out, Lucas noticed a nail sticking out of a beam beside the door frame. It was most likely the very same nail that Douglas Ramdell attached his final letter to. It appeared to be of no structural purpose, originally intended to hang a lantern from perhaps. Lucas asked if he and Mark could take the nail as a souvenir. After a moment of consideration, Dale Cabot agreed. He had a hammer in his truck, and together they pulled the nail from the stud. It is currently on display on the wall of our office.

Soon after, Lucas and Mark returned home, but, as he will explain, something about the Ramsdell Lighthouse kept nagging at Lucas.

LUCAS: The presence Mark and I experienced inside the lighthouse felt...*malicious*. It doesn't seem possible that any of the men who kept the lighthouse for all those years could have been capable of such malice, especially when by all accounts they were relatively decent men. So I did some research. I looked into the history of Sangerville to see

if there was anything in its past, perhaps something kept secret.

It turns out that during the French and Indian Wars a battle was fought not far from where Sangerville is today. Thirty two men, split between British and French soldiers, along with three Native American guides were all killed there. According to reports from the time, they were buried in a field not far from the site of the battle.

Is it possible that the men who died in the skirmish were buried in the very field where Douglas Ramsdell built his lighthouse? We believe so. The dead, buried in a potter's field, could have grown restless. By the time Ramsdell received his vision in 1867, those mostly forgotten men had been in the ground for almost a hundred years.

It's possible that the fear, regret, anger, and despair of those dead soldiers combined, mingling together over the decades, coalescing into the hateful force that worked upon the minds of the various keepers and drove Victoria Perkins from the lighthouse. This malignant force, the remnants of all the negative emotions from the battle, could have influenced Douglass Ramsdell and convinced him to construct a lighthouse in the middle of nowhere. It could be the voices that both Douglass Ramsdell and Phillip Estabrook wrote about in their notes. It could have manifested into the snarling visage I saw on Victoria Perkin's video, and it could be the force that grabbed at Lucas and Mark when they visited the Lighthouse.

If this theory is true, then it begs the question, why. Why did this hate entity convince Douglas Ramsdell to build the lighthouse in the first place?

A Lighthouse is a beacon, sending a warning of danger or conveying a message of safe passage. Could its signal, which to this day, seemingly flashes all on its own, be a message not to the living... but the dead? Could this haunted lighthouse be

signaling a safe harbor for like minded hate-filled spirits and revenants?

It certainly seems likely.

Before we go, we'd like to leave you with some final thoughts from both Lucas and Mark regarding the Ramsdell Lighthouse. In many ways they echo the warnings Victoria Perkins gave me.

LUCAS: I have never felt a place so... dangerous as that Lighthouse. It is not a safe place and should be avoided at all costs.

MARK: Plain and simple: stay away. Don't go there. There's something evil there, something dangerous.

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/

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Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.