

Malevolent Maine

Season 2 Episode 1: Mooretown

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

INTRO:

Welcome back. We hope you're as ready as we are to dive back into the odd and the strange. We've been working hard in the months since Season 1 ended and we've got a whole new batch of eerie and unsettling stories to share with you. As always, we're an anthology podcast, but some of our episodes may reference things that we've reported on before. If you're new to the show or want to go back and listen to older episodes, Season 1 is streaming in its entirety. We'll be here waiting for you when you get back.

Before we dive into our latest story, we thought we'd do a quick recap to bring everyone up to speed. I'm Chris Estes, and I'm your host. Together with Lucas Knight and Tom Wilson, we founded Malevolent Maine, a paranormal investigation agency. We research and uncover the dark, hidden truths in the state of Maine. Ghosts, alien abductions, cryptids, and other things that can't be explained by the rational light of day are the stories we live for. We started this podcast to share what we've discovered with all of you.

Last year, we added two key members to our MM team. The first is our producer, Megan. She helps us record, edit, and arrange our stories. She's also a great sounding board for some of our wilder theories.

Then there's Mark. He started out as an intern last summer, but has quickly become an essential member of the group. You'll be happy to note that we've since promoted Mark. Starting this season he'll be a junior investigator and working on a lot more solo cases.

Most of our stories come directly from you, the fans. Last season we investigated potato gremlins in the fields of Aroostook County, the Night Jean Massacre of the 1960s, and the half human, half fish creatures known as the Maine River People. We also looked into a Mad Splicer creating monstrosities that defy explanation, a being called the Gray Fool who seems to be beckoning people into a monolith at the edge of a dream desert, and uncovered a previously unknown esoteric cult known as the Hermetic Brotherhood of the Cardinal Court. At the end of last season we had an unsettling encounter with the Cinema Nocturna, and after that we decided we needed to take a little break to catch our breaths and gather our wits.

These and other mysterious happenings are out there, lurking on the fringes of our society. They may seem improbable or impossible. Many of our listeners have had their stories discounted by their friends and families and may feel like they have nowhere else to turn. Rest assured: we believe you.

If you have a story of the supernatural or the unexplained, please, don't hesitate to reach out. Find us on social media, email us, or call the office. If you'd like to support this show in other ways, please follow us online, share our show with your friends, and consider buying a shirt from our merch store. If you're up for it, even consider joining our Malevolent Mob on patreon. There, for a small monthly fee, you'll get behind the scenes exclusives, and special side stories. Head on over to www.patreon.com/MalevolentMaine to join.

Okay, we've got that out of the way. If you're ready, let's jump right back in.

The town, a small cluster of wooden buildings and barns, lies silent as you walk up the single, dirt road. It's quiet... too quiet. There are no signs of people working, of animals moving about. There aren't even insects buzzing in the air. As far as you can tell, you're the only living thing for miles around. You walk up the empty road, looking for any sign of life but to no

avail. The entire town has vanished. Suddenly, you turn a corner and spy something twisting up to the sky. The tree is massive and gnarled, like a giant arthritic hand tearing free of the earth. It is hideous, but at the same time you can't look away. And you can't be sure, but you think it's calling you towards it.

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?

Here we go MMers. This one is sure to stick with you. This week's episode deals with ghost towns, or more specifically a single ghost town that has become one of Maine's oldest and strangest legends. We're talking about Mooretown.

By its definition a ghost town is a deserted town with few or no remaining inhabitants. Images spring to mind of deserted mining towns in the American Southwest, tumbleweed blowing through empty streets, but ghost towns exist everywhere in the United States. St. Elmo, Colorado, Dogtown, Massachusetts, and Bodie, California come to mind. In Maine alone, there's Flagstaff, the town that was drowned to form Flagstaff Lake, Perkins Township,

abandoned in the middle of the Kennebec River, and Riceville, a village that dried up when its buffalo shoe leather factory went out of business.

Then there's Mooretown.

Mooretown was established in 1692, somewhere northwest of Skowhegan. Its founder, Josias Moore, had been a minor reverend in the town of Salem, Massachusetts in the early 1690s. He was known for his fiery sermons, often depicting horrifying images of devils and demons. He married Rebecca Cummings in 1685, and together they had three children, Deliverance, Asa, and Caleb, though an additional two were stillborn. In the summer of 1686, Rebecca's sister, Mary, moved in with the Moore's, after the death of their parents. Mary was three years younger than her older sister, just twenty-two when she moved in with Moores.

There were whispers early on that Mary Cummings was different from the other young women of Salem. She had no interest in prayer, nor the young suitors who vied for her attention. She often went for long walks into the woods by herself, and was often heard talking to herself, but what she muttered was unknown.

There were hushed whispers of witchcraft surrounding Mary and even her sister Rebecca, though nothing ever came of it. It was said that as girls, they would play in the woods, often sneaking off on Sundays or staying out late. Whether it was the protection offered by being married to a minister or perhaps the hysteria that was building in Salem hadn't reached a dangerous point quite yet, but the village treated the Cummings sisters as eccentrics, but largely harmless ones.

In our season one episode about the Witch Tree of Woodland Valley we briefly discussed the history of witchcraft in Salem. The Puritans who settled in New England were powerfully afraid of the Devil and the corruption he would try to sew among them. The war against Satan was as real to the Puritans as the skirmishes they fought with the natives or the political

disputes back in Europe. The Puritans believed the Devil was a real being, and one that walked the dark corners of the world.

In order to spread his evil designs, the Devil would enlist human aids, who would sell their soul to Satan in order to gain supernatural powers. The Puritans referred to these people, regardless of gender, as witches. In mid-February of 1692, some of the young girls in Salem began complaining of witch attacks against their bodies and more importantly their spirits. This led to the arrest of several members of the community, 20 public executions, and a mass hysteria that ravaged all of New England. Most scholars now believe there were no actual witches in Salem. The Witch Trials were a result of a tightly controlled society, wound tight after years of harsh survival, and the overactive imaginations of several creative individuals.

However, several sources indicate that there were in fact occult practices occurring in the woods outside of town. Many documents that survived the time period reveal pagan ritual sites discovered in the forests, spell books and grimoires taken into custody, and unexplained circumstances occurring throughout the year. Those who have studied those texts firmly believe there was a coven of witches at work in Salem and that they were completely eradicated through the hard work of the Church and its ministers.

Which brings us back to Mary Cummings, the sister-in-law of Josias Moore. It was said that in January of 1692 Mary Cummings saw an apparition of herself. It was a relatively warm day for winter, part of the January thaw, and she had been hanging washing out to dry. When Mary came inside she began to brush her hair in front of a mirror. Out of a nearby window, she saw an identical copy of herself walking, weaving in and out of the washing. The apparition moved to the trees and beckoned for Mary to follow.

According to at least three separate reports from Salem at the time, Mary Cummings was indeed a witch. She had danced around the Devil's fire and written her name in his book. In return

Satan had given her the gift of second sight - the ability to see and perceive future events or things from a distant location. Mary Cummings wasn't shocked to see her own apparition and she knew exactly what to do when it called to her.

Mary followed it into the woods, going deeper than she ever had before. Despite the winter chill, she found herself growing warmer and warmer as she walked deep into the forest. Finally the apparition disappeared and Mary found herself face to face with the Devil himself, dressed in a black cloak to hide his features. He whispered a secret in her ear: Danger was coming to Salem and only the Devils' most faithful would be saved. He told her to leave Salem, to go north, to the Watching Place, and there start a church in his name.

In one week's time, Mary Cummings along with the Moores and several others, set north from Salem. In the town of Saco, Maine they met up with Talaz, an Abenaki woman who served as the group's guide as they continued north. Talaz was a known medicine woman and practitioner of magic. She brought them somewhere northwest of Skowhegan and there they purchased a tract of land on which to settle.

There were fourteen original settlers of the village that came to be known as Mooretown. Josias and Rebecca Moore, their three children, and Mary Cummings, Symon Bradstreet and his wife Amity, who was Josias's sister and their children, Mercy and Winthrop, Josias's older widowed sister, Kezia Moore, a woman named Renata Horne and her slave, Leah, a man named Hiram Black, and Talaz the Native American guide.

It was said that right from the start Mooretown was considerably different. Away from the watchful eye of the Church and the Governor, Maine - then still a part of Massachusetts - allowed for a lot more freedom. It was said that Josias Moore lived as man and woman with both his wife, Rebecca, and her younger sister, Mary Cummings. He was often seen arm in arm with one of the two women that lived in his home, and it was said in the later years before the town disappeared that both women bore him

children. Stories claimed there was no church in Mooretown, but that all of the villagers attended a midnight service every Sunday in the woods behind the Moore's homestead.

It was soon known that Mooretown was home to a coven of witches. Many of the early settlers in Maine refused to trade with the people of Mooretown - at least publicly. There were stories of evening meetings for love charms and potions to cure illness. Certain Mainers might seek out the Mooretownians for a prediction of the future or protective charm for their crops. Maine is often seen as a fairly conservative state, but as we've noted numerous times on this show, Mainers will allow for just about anything as long as it personally doesn't interfere with their own lives. If there was a town of witches in the state, it simply meant no God-fearing Christian would be caught dead inside the town's walls... but it only meant they couldn't get caught.

In a short time the population of Mooretown grew. The unholy trinity that was the town's leadership, Josias and Rebecca Moore along with Mary Cummings organized the town and its dark church. Under their guidance, Mooretown became known as a safe haven for those who practiced witchcraft. Witches who escaped persecution in Massachusetts in the wake of Salem, and from other parts of the world converged on the small town. By 1695 there were thirty-one known inhabitants of Mooretown.

In our season 1 episode, "The Witch Tree of Woodland Valley" we discussed a woman in the southern part of the state, Isabelle Houser, who was executed for being a witch. At the time, one of our senior investigators, Tom, uncovered some information that implied the Houser woman was far older than originally believed. Here's Tom talking about Isabelle Houser and some startling connections he discovered between the witch of Woodland Valley and Mooretown.

TOM: So, originally it was believed that Isabelle Houser had come to the Limerick area from Salem. However, as we did more research into Mooretown, we discovered that at

least at one point, she was a citizen of Mooretown. Our initial research indicated Isabelle Houser had been in England in 1591, over a hundred years before her execution in Woodland Valley. Now, this could be another woman with the same name, but we were able to trace who we believe is this same woman from England to Mooretown, and then farther south to Limerick. And that wasn't the only connection we found.

According to a journal written by Mercy Bradstreet, seventeen at the time, the citizens either worshiped or revered something they called "Mother Witch." It is difficult to piece together, but it appears they believed Mother Witch was an ancient entity that either was now a tree or was somehow trapped inside a tree. The coven would make regular blood offerings to this tree, which was somewhere on the outskirts of their village. According to Mercy, the tree was massive with gnarled branches that twisted up to the sky. Longtime listeners will remember our description of the so-called Witch Tree of Woodland Valley and see a resemblance. Here is how we described that tree:

CHRIS [from season 1]: The tree had swollen in size. Now it would take three large men with their hands linked to surround the trunk and its branches had grown gnarled and warty. The tree never bloomed again, never grew or shed leaves, and yet somehow it remained. Some say it seemed to vibrate or hum with an evil energy. Others said that on nights when the moon was full the tree would glow with a sickly red energy. More than one village claimed to have heard strange whispered chanting coming as if from somewhere deep inside the tree itself.

Mercy's description of the Mother Witch tree is eerily similar to the one a hundred and forty miles south.

TOM: Is it possible that Isabelle Houser learned some ritual during her time in Mooretown that allowed her to transfer her spirit to a tree after her death? Maybe.

No one truly knows what Mother Witch is or was. If it was just a large tree that Moore's applied some dark religious importance to, or if it was something else, a source of black magic perhaps, it's difficult to determine. Aside from Mercy Winthrop's journal there are a few scant mentions in other pieces of information that have survived from this time period.

Why the residents of Mooretown worshiped this tree is unknown. In one of her journal entries, Mercy Winthrop describes pouring buckets of chicken blood on the tree's roots. She wrote that Mary Cummings told them that when Mother Witch was sated she would awaken once more and lead them to a glorious new life.

Mooretown, sometimes written as 'Morton,' existed until 1699, but sometime in the early winter of 1700, a trapper from York arrived in Mooretown to barter for supplies. He was shocked to discover the entire town was empty. The houses and other buildings were completely abandoned. There was no sign of the residents nor their livestock anywhere. According to the trapper, the citizens' belongings were still in their homes. It appeared as if the people had simply stepped out for a moment, but it was clear that the homes had been abandoned for quite some time.

One of our senior investigators, Lucas, has been studying the history of Mooretown for a long time.

LUCAS: Where did everyone go? That's the real question. No trace of the residents was ever found. If they left their homes willingly, they did so without any of their personal belongings. Clothes were still in trunks and drawers. Pictures, books, and other belongings were still on their shelves. In some cases, food was still left on the tables, though by the time Bradley Herrick, the trapper who discovered the missing villagers, arrived, most of it had spoiled. Many believe that Native Americans attacked Mooretown, though there was no trace of any violence in the abandoned town. Others believe the villagers simply moved on, perhaps heading south.

Many of the possessions left behind seemed to indicate witchcraft. Plants typically used as spell components, strange books with unknown writing, and several tools of a unique and unknown design were found in many of the homes. Odd totems and figures were discovered carved from wood or tied together with twine in different areas of the home. Some of them were quite disturbing. Of the 46 people who lived in Mooretown and their associated horses, sheep, cows, pigs, and chickens, there was no sign.

LUCAS: There was no indication that the witch coven in Mooretown - and we're not saying everyone in the town was a witch - performed some sort of spell or ritual that caused the disappearance. That hasn't stopped many from speculating that the coven performed one final ritual, possibly a sacrifice to Mother Witch, that removed them from this plane of existence. As near as we can tell, however, there was indication that anything magical had taken place there. Nevertheless, the facts remain that items often associated with black magic and witchcraft were found in nearly every home and building in the town.

The residents of Mooretown vanished off the face of the earth. No trace of Josias Moore, Mary Cummings, or any of the others was ever recorded. Aside from Mercy Winthrop's journal, very little personal writing was discovered in the town. That's not unusual for the time period, however. The Puritan people had very little free time to record their daily lives, and a small fringe town, struggling to establish itself, would have even less.

One book known to have survived was found beside the large bed in Josias Moore's home. It was bound in black leather with some arcane symbols drawn in red ink. Inside were passages written in three different hands. The first was believed to be the handwriting of Josias Moore. What followed was a history of the founding of Mooretown and its principles.

The book itself is now stored at the Bowdoin College Library in the archives and is available for viewing by appointment only. It took a little time, but Lucas and I were able to view the book under the watchful eye of the head archivist, Laurence Smalley. In a secure room we were able to look through the book, which appears to be a sort of bible for the coven that formed in Mooretown. We were not allowed to photograph the book, but we did take copious notes.

The book itself was thick with many thin, smooth pages. It was hard to determine what the paper was made out of, but they almost felt like fabric or silk. They seemed to slide under our hands. It was a fascinating look at a piece of Maine history, but one which we agreed left us with an uneasy feeling.

LUCAS: Seeing the Mooretown book was weird. It was just an old book; as far as we could tell there was nothing inherently supernatural about it. And yet... both Chris and I left the library feeling a little queasy and unclear. Like we had looked at something we weren't supposed to. I kept checking over my shoulder to make sure I wasn't about to get in trouble, and I couldn't shake the feeling for the rest of the day that I was being watched by someone or perhaps, something.

We've asked our junior investigator Mark to read a passage from the book:

MARK: Lords of the Watchtowers of the West, ye Lords of Water, Lords of Death, we invoke you. Lords of the Watchtowers of the South, ye Lords of Fire, Lords of Rebirth, we invoke you. Lords of the Watchtowers of the East, ye Lords of Air, Lords of Tempest, we invoke you. Lords of the Watchtowers of the North, ye Lords of the Earth, Lords of Flesh, we invoke you. We do summon, stir, and call you up to witness our rites and guard our Circle.

What follows is a ritual involving someone called the High Priest (most likely Moore, himself) and two High Priestesses,

presumably Rebecca and Mary. The figures move in ritualistic gestures, creating a pentagram with various candles being lit at the five points. The ritual is usually performed at midnight, under the light of the moon, with all three of the members nude. There is a ceremonial blood letting, sometimes there is a more sexual component performed between the three, though it appears to be largely ceremonial at this point. We're going to have Mark read one more passage that we believe pertains to our story.

MARK: Great Mother, darksome and divine. I invoke thee and call upon thee, Mighty Mother of us all, bringer of all fruitfulness; by seed and root, by bud and stem, by leaf and flower and fruit, by flame and blood do I invoke thee to descend upon the body of this, thy servant.

It certainly appears to be an incantation to summon the spirit of the being they refer to as Mother Witch. Comparing it to other rituals performed by different covens of witches and Wiccans, it appears similar to an invitational or opening ritual, designed to attune the coven to the supernatural.

Other parts of the book are written by who we assume was Rebecca Moore detailing rituals for pain or pleasure, for strength or for sorrow. There are detailed recipes for potions and poultices to cure warts, or in some cases, to cause them, to heal a blackened tooth, or cause a man to forget the last day. One particular recipe described a ritual to expand a person's mind, causing reality to distort around them. All of them listed exact components in specific amounts at a nearly scientific level.

The last set of writings appear to be done by Mary Cummings and describe the more esoteric beliefs of the coven. Cummings writes about pacts with Satan, whom she refers to as the Master, and further promises made with Mother Witch, a being who seems even more powerful than the Devil, himself. Mary Cummings describes the five realms of fire, which according to her explains where a witch of the coven draws their power from. We've asked our producer, Megan, to read from this section.

MEGAN: First is the realm of pyre, where the spirits of the dead still walk. Second is the realm of ash, home to demons and fiends of the night. Next comes to the realm of flame, where the princes of Hell rule. Then the realm of inferno, where the Master, Lord Satan, consort to the Eternal Mother stands Watch. Last is the realm of embers, from where the Great Mother sleeps, dreaming her might into the world. To walk from the realm of earth through the five realms of fire is to know Mother Witch, to see with her Eye and know with her Black Heart.

By studying the black book of Mooretown it becomes apparent that Josias was the leader and organizer of the coven, Rebecca the practical magician of the group, and Mary the muse and more philosophical leader. They often refer to themselves as the Three-Headed Snake or the Beast Within and Without. In their pagan bible they lay out not just plans for their village and their growing religion, but for their future as well. According to their own book, the residents of Mooretown were preparing to awaken Mother Witch and set her spirit free upon the world, ushering in what they believed would be a dark paradise prepared just for them, her most devout followers.

Before they were able to prepare their final ritual, the Great Dousing, as they referred to it, a deluge of blood that would glut the Mother Witch with enough life force to fully awaken, the village of Mooretown disappeared.

Today, the area north of Skowhegan, west of Route 201 is fairly remote. It is mostly woods in the area near Embden Pond where researchers are fairly certain Mooretown once stood. We took advantage of the relatively warm early winter and took a trip to the area, hoping to find something related to the missing town.

Using all of the information available to us, we hiked to where Mooretown most likely was built. Any buildings that once stood there rotted away long ago, but there are several fields that probably once grew crops for the coven. We found a few stones that most likely would have served as rock walls or perhaps

cellars. Time and history has taken away any trace of the village that mysteriously disappeared sometime around the end of 1699.

To be honest, it wasn't exactly the remains of the town we were looking for. Instead, we were looking more carefully for the tree said to house the spirit of Mother Witch. We hiked through the forest as best we could without getting completely lost. We identified several trees that we believe might have served as inspiration for the Mooretown coven. None of them had the overriding sense of *menace* written about in the books from the time, but this could possibly be a result of exaggeration on part of the writer.

It is entirely possible we didn't find the right tree. In comparison, the Witch Tree of Woodland Valley, much better known and documented, was incredibly easy to find, and gave off a chill we couldn't explain despite the summer heat. We, and nearly everyone who comes across it, knows instantly the tree is negatively charged. The Mooretown trees, while impressive, didn't have that same feel, so while we are tempted to choose one of them, we're more inclined to write them all off. If the Mother Witch tree is out there, we weren't able to find it during our hours-long search.

Another possibility is that sometime in the centuries since Mooretown vanished, the Mother Witch tree either fell or was chopped down. There is a tendency when you research the paranormal to believe that many of the things the people attribute power to exist outside the realm of nature, but this so-called Mother Witch tree could have been nothing more than a larger than usual tree. We could be looking for something that simply no longer exists, just as the very village is long gone.

And perhaps a final possibility, one with a far more sinister undertone. The Mooretown coven was preparing to bring about the end of the world by summoning their dark mother to them. Is it possible that the coven did in fact complete their ritual and awaken Mother Witch? Was this powerful creature freed from the

tree and left to roam the earth? The possibility of this being, immensely powerful and, dare we say it, malevolent, walking the earth is a terrifying possibility.

It is curious to note that the disappearance of Mooretown coincides with numerous visions and predictions of the end of the world. Cotton Mather, the noted Puritan minister and witch hunter believed 1697 would be the end of the world. Both John Napier and Henry Archer chose 1700 for their end of days predictions. And the Camisards, Huguenauts from France believed the world would end in the early days of the 18th Century. There's no definitive proof that these obviously incorrect predictions had any relation to Mooretown's mysterious disappearance, but the timing is clearly suspicious.

So what happened to Mooretown? The explanations are varied and range from probably to highly unlikely. Stories of Maine's lost witch village have abounded for years. Sitting around a campfire you're bound to hear some version of what happened to the nearly fifty inhabitants. Were they killed by natives? Abducted by aliens? Did they disperse to other corners of the state to do their dark work? We simply don't know.

But we do know that people will continue to tell stories about the lost town. Mothers will still threaten to send their kids off to Mooretown if they don't behave. Old people will still tell stories of hearing a witch's cackle or seeing one flying across the moon on nights when it is full. And curiosity about Maine's most famous ghost town will carry on for generations to come.

And of course there's the curious case of the being known as Mother Witch. We did manage to find a few references that seem similar in other texts about witchcraft. The powerful mother figure is a common one in many religions and many modern day witches call upon this feminine power in their rituals. This Mother, however, is often seen as a benevolent figure, more akin to Mother Nature than the being described in Mooretown. One passage in Mooretown's black book describes Mother Witch as "all

knowing and all consuming." Another describes her "terrible black heart, stained by centuries". Yet a third claims her "love knows no bounds to those that worship at her roots, but so too does her wrath for those that anger her."

At times the writing seems to indicate that Mother Witch is the tree itself. At other points, the tree is just her earthly vessel, a prison to contain her slumbering form. This is likely caused by a continually evolving understanding of the belief system, but it does create confusion to us, centuries later. While the Mooretown coven appeared to have many of the nature-worshiping beliefs of similar pagan sects, it also appears that they were well aware of the true being they worshiped, something ancient and powerful, yearning for the freedom to enact its evil will.

Mary Cumming's vision of the Devil warned her away from Salem just before the witch trials began. It's possible that through Satan's intervention, not just her life, but those of her friends and family were spared. The Devil told Mary to go to the Watching Place, an area he told her was North. The incantations Josias Moore performed mentioned Watchtowers. What was it the Mooretown coven was watching for exactly? And did they ever find it? Were they watching for Mother Witch? Or was she watching them? One final piece of information we found interesting regarding Mooretown. The lost town was located near the modern day town of Skowhegan. Skowhegan got its name from the Abenaki word for... "Watching Place."

Stay safe out there, Maine.

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

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We believe you.