



Ghostly

Old Presque Isle

BY DIANNA STAMPFLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ED WARGIN

Lights

TENDING A LIGHTHOUSE IS OFTEN A TEDIOUS AND GRUELING PROFESSION. FOR SOME KEEPERS WHO STAND WATCH FROM ATOP THE TALL TOWERS, IT'S MORE THAN JUST A JOB: IT'S A LIFE-LONG PASSION. FOR OTHERS, IT REMAINS AN OBSESSION – EVEN AFTER THEIR LIGHTS AND LIVES HAVE BEEN EXTINGUISHED.

Michigan has more lighthouses than any other state, and nearly two dozen of these 117 beacons are rumored to be haunted, most by dedicated light keepers or members of their families. Following are a few stories that wash upon their shores.

PRESQUE ISLE LIGHTS

The Old and New Presque Isle Lights, north of Alpena, are both rumored to be haunted.

Old Presque Isle Light (circa 1840) mysteriously shines on occasion, even though the light was decommissioned in 1871. George and Lorraine Parris moved into the house as caretakers in 1977, and things were quiet until shortly after George's death in 1992 — when the light began to shine unexplainably. Extreme measures were taken to try to block the mysterious light, including covering the tower windows with black garbage bags and Army blankets, but to no avail. The light has been seen by many



passersby, both on land and on water. Even the Coast Guard has investigated but can find no answer as to the source of the light.

Locals believe George's ghost continues to reactivate the light.

Just down the road, the New Presque

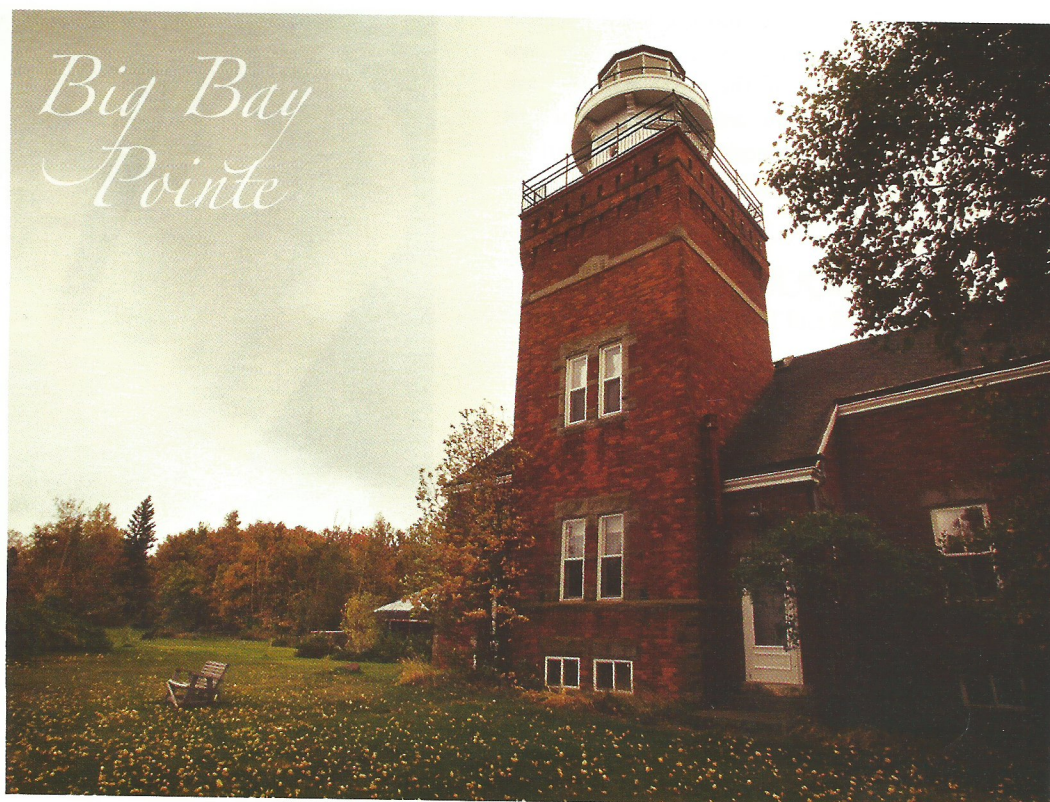


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Isle Light (circa 1871) is said to be haunted by the ghost of the lighthouse keeper's wife. As the legend goes, the keeper locked his wife in the tower when he'd head off to town to visit his mistress. The wife eventually went mad and was killed by her husband and buried in a tunnel beneath the station grounds. Many have reported hearing sobbing, crying and moaning coming from the tower, especially late at night.

BIG BAY POINTE Lighthouse

The ghost that haunts Big Bay Pointe Lighthouse could be that of former keeper William Pryor, who was known around town as a workaholic. In 1900, the keeper's son was working as an assistant keeper when he fell and injured his leg. Months later, when his father finally took him to the doctor, it proved to be too late: Gangrene had set in, resulting in the son's death. Pryor became despon-





White River

dent after his son's death and disappeared a few days later, during which time he took his own life.

Owners of the lighthouse, which now operates as a bed-and-breakfast, have heard kitchen cupboards and doors banging in the night, have had lights turned off when no one is in the room and have reported water running in the shower when guests are not around. There have even been sightings of a red-headed man dressed in a keeper's uniform walking the grounds of the light station. Coincidentally, Pryor had red hair.

WHITE RIVER LIGHT STATION

William Robinson was the first keeper at the White River Light Station in Whitehall, a position he held for 44 years — long after his beloved wife, Sara, passed. In 1919, an aging Robinson was forced out of duty by the U.S. Lighthouse Service. The day before he was to vacate the light, he died in his sleep. It is said that neither Bill nor Sara has ever left the light.

Karen McDonnell, the current resident keeper at White River Light Station Museum, has reported several ghostly occurrences during her nearly 20 years of service. She frequently hears footsteps in the upstairs bedrooms, which now house historical artifacts from the area's shipping and lumbering era. She believes it is Robinson checking in on his cherished beacon.

There have also been reports of Sara's ghost. Shortly after uncovering a portrait of Sara and hanging it proudly in the mu-

seum, Karen said the strangest thing happened. She had made her way upstairs to dust the museum display cases when her phone rang. She set her dusting supplies down and went off to answer the phone. Upon returning a short time later, Karen says the display case was void of dust, and the cloth and spray were sitting on the opposite side from where she left them. Karen said it was widely known throughout the community that Sara was a meticulous housekeeper, so her housekeeping antics were not that unusual.

For more about Michigan's lighthouses — haunted or otherwise — visit the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association at www.michigan.org/travel/attractions. ≈

Dianna Stampfer is a member of the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association and the Historical Society of Michigan. She has researched Michigan's lighthouse ghost stories for nearly 10 years.

Haunted Lights THE FOLLOWING LIGHT STATIONS ARE SWATHED IN RUMORS AND STORIES.

St. Joseph Keeper's Residence, St. Joseph
South Haven Keeper's Residence, South Haven

White River Light Station,* White Hall
South Manitou Island,* Sleeping Bear Dunes
Grand Traverse Lighthouse,* Northport
Beaver Head Island Light,* Beaver Island
Squaw Island Light, Beaver Island
St. Helena Island Light,* 10 miles west of Mackinac Island

Waugoshance Shoal Light, Straits of Mackinac

Seul Choix Point Light,* Gulliver
Sand Point Lighthouse,* Escanaba
Eagle Harbor Light, Eagle Harbor
Rock of Ages, Isle Royale



Captain William Robinson, White River Light Station

COURTESY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MICHIGAN

Big Bay Point Lighthouse B&B, Big Bay
Crisp Point Lighthouse, Paradise
Point Iroquois, Whitefish Bay
Old Presque Isle,* Presque Isle
New Presque Isle,* Presque Isle
Thunder Bay Island Light, Alpena
Tawas Point Light, East Tawas
Saginaw River Range Light, Saginaw
Point aux Barques, Port Hope

*Open for tours

BOOKS OF INTEREST

"Ghostly Lights: Great Lakes Lighthouse Tales of Terror" and **"Ghostly Lights Return: More Great Lakes Lighthouse Fiends and Phantoms"** By Anne Hivert-Carthew
"Haunted Lakes: Great Lakes Ghost Stories, Superstitions and Sea Serpents" and **"Haunted Lakes II: More Great Lakes Ghost Stories"** By Frederick Stonehouse

VIDEO/DVD

"True Lighthouse Hauntings"
By Keweenaw Video Productions; script written and narrated by Frederick Stonehouse
www.greatlakesfreighters.com/videos/truelighthousehauntings.html