

This is a program I wrote a few years ago. The program started with Greg Vokovan talking about his connection to Split Rock Lighthouse (his great-great grandfather was the first keeper at Split Rock) and some of the stories he has heard from his family. Greg currently volunteers at the lighthouse in the summer.

Split Rock Lighthouse, Two Harbors, Minnesota, 1910 Lake Superior

Perched on a 120-foot cliff over Lake Superior, Split Rock Lighthouse in Two Harbors, Minnesota has attracted tourists since its construction in 1910. It is one of the most visited and popular lighthouses in the country. The Split Rock Lighthouse is an octagonal yellow-brick structure, with a 54-foot tower. It also sits on the cliff, so it is one of tallest lighthouses in the Great Lakes area.

Commerce boomed on the Great Lakes in the early 20th Century, and lighthouses like this one were built because of the large traffic of iron ore across Lake Superior. Minnesota became the leading iron ore producer.

The lighthouse also owes its existence to the terrible winter storms of 1905, when 116 lives were lost to three violent storms. One record gale on November 28, 1905, damaged nearly 30 ships on Lake Superior alone.

Story of Construction:

- All the materials were shipped in and had to be lifted 120 feet to the top of the cliff, using a 12,000 pound steam hoist.
- Construction started May 1909, and went through November. Workers hiked through woods and took a logging train to Duluth. Work resumed the next spring, and the light station was completed and ready for occupancy by midsummer of 1910.
- The steam hoist first had to be lifted into place, and then pulled up the steep slope with lines and tackle attached to trees.
- Once it was in place, a derrick was erected on top of the cliff and secured to rock's surface.
- Then all materials and personnel were lifted in a box crate, called a skip.
- In 1916, a tramway was completed that replaced the derrick to bring supplies up to the station from lake shore.

Keepers & Life at the Lighthouse:

- Pete Young served as keeper from 1910 to 1928.
- There was an early tragedy in 1910 when two assistant keepers drowned while sailing to Beaver Bay for mail.
- Franklin Covell served as keeper from 1928 to 1944 and retired at the mandatory age of 70.
- Lightening hit the station in 1932.
- Franklin Covell and his assistant had to turn the lens by hand for two nights and had to buy eight pounds of mercury from a local druggist to fix the lens when they assessed the problem. Instead of receiving a commendation, Covell was forced to justify the purchase to his superiors in Detroit.

Although the Split Rock Lighthouse is isolated in the winter, it is still possibly the country's most visited and photographed lighthouse:

- A transition came in 1924, when a road was built, so it was no longer isolated.
- In 1926, brochures feature Split Rock as a prominent attraction.
- Keepers' logs reflected their dual responsibilities. They handled tourists by day and tended to the lights at night. Keepers wanted to fence off private gardens, but were only allowed to put up "Keep Off" signs.
- By 1940, when the Coast Guard absorbed Split Rock, it had the reputation of being the most visited lighthouse in the nation.

Present use:

- The Split Rock Lighthouse was deactivated in 1969.
- The Minnesota Historical Society administers to the station as a historic site.
- It is restored to its original pre-1924 appearance.
- Lee Radzak, an excellent interpreter, is also a trained anthropologist.
- The light is no longer lit regularly so as not to confuse mariners.

- On November 10, Lee Radzak lights the lamps to commemorate the **Edmund Fitzgerald**, which sailed out of Duluth Harbor on November 9 and passed Split Rock. There is also a memorial reading of the names of the 29 sailors who died and, visits to the tower at night (Whitefish Point and Duluth also conduct memorials).

Everyone loves a good ghost story, and these tall, isolated structures are natural settings for ghost stories. They are far removed from the rest of the population, their keepers could be both dedicated and eccentric, and maritime tales just seem to invite this kind of story.

In Haunted Lighthouses of the Great Lakes, the tales involve keepers reluctant to leave their posts, the ghosts of people who died violent or tragic deaths, and even a playful kitten.

Lake Superior's Split Rock lighthouse is said to have a very kind ghost. In the mid-1980's, a visitor to the light house realized after touring the tower that his wallet was missing. He went back to the lighthouse to look for it, only to find it was locked for the day. He knocked on the door hoping one of the museum employees was still there but got no answer.

One version of this story is told that when he got no answer, he stepped back from the tower and looked up to find a man dressed in a lightkeeper's museum on the catwalk outside the lantern room. As he was about to knock again, he noticed that the door was padlocked from the outside. He wondered who the man was in the locked tower.

He returned the next day, was given his wallet and told that no one knew anything about the old man he'd seen. Another version of the sighting is that the man pounded on the tower door for a while, and an old keeper finally opened it and handed the man his wallet. When the man ask about it he was told that no one knew anything about the incident.

Does an old light house keeper still reside at Split Rock Light House?

There is one other mystery occurrence that happened to the wife of a resident curator in the mid-1980's. She was in the bedroom of one of the keeper's dwellings one evening, when she smelled a very strong perfume scent and sensed that she was being watched.

Here are a few more lighthouses known to be haunted:

The tale of the cigar-smoking ghost of the Seul Choix lighthouse, who amuses himself by pulling pranks on the lighthouse visitors.

An account of a ghost at Chambers Island lighthouse on Lake Michigan--a spirit finally released from his earth bond through prayers of a visiting nun.

The story of a murdered beermaker, who haunts his Gibraltar lighthouse in Canada, still looking for his murderers.

The incredible account of the diligent keeper of the Old Presque Isle lighthouse on Lake Huron, who continues to turn on the lights for passing ships, even though the wiring to the lamp has been removed.

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