

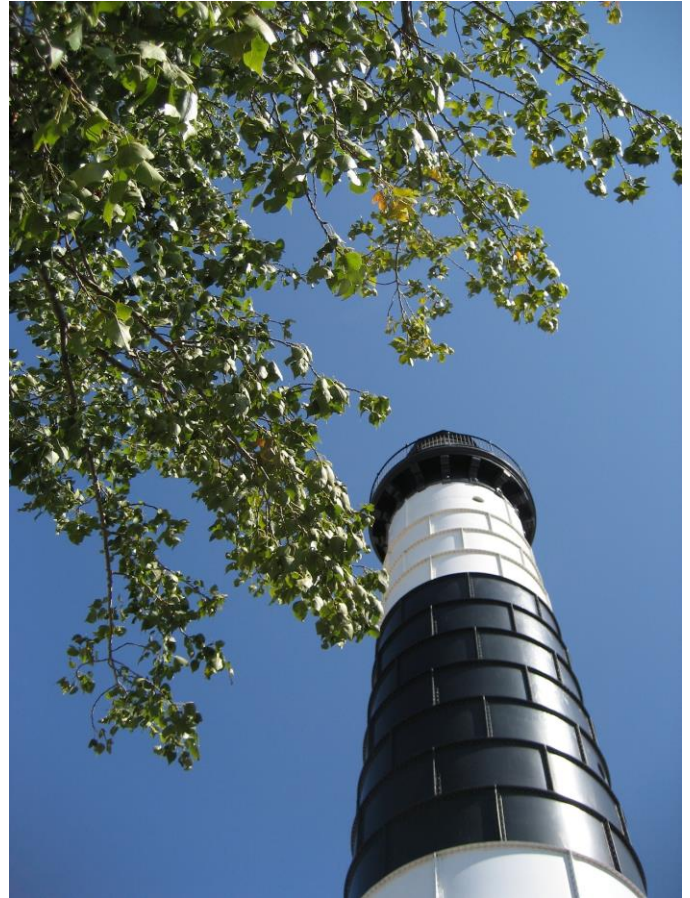
The Crypt

August, 2016

OF CLOUDLESS CLIMES AND STARRY SKIES

Summer in the Great Lakes almost always includes a trip to the beach, a cruise on a boat, or a drive along the coast to admire nature's canvas. Michigan has more shoreline than any other state except Alaska, with 129 lighthouses casting their glow across the water. It was during a visit to *Big Sable Point Lighthouse* many years ago, that the opening scene for *The Keeper's Secret* was quietly stored away in my brain. Joseph says hello to Megan (as only a ghost can) at the observation tower of the lighthouse near her home. I didn't realize it at the time, but that climb would come back to me – albeit in a more twisted way – when I wrote my first novella length story.

They're called the *Great Lakes* for a reason – these are not the small lakes where you learned to waterski – and for as long as people have braved the waters of the Great Lakes, there have been shipwrecks and disasters. It's estimated that there are 6,000 shipwrecks in the Great Lakes and that over 30,000 lives have been lost to the waves. Names like *Death's Door* and *Thunder Bay* are stark reminders of why these beacons exist. Stories of spectral lights, haunted lighthouses and phantom ships abound.



Big Sable Point Lighthouse. Photo by Robert James.

He stared at her.

They always stared.

That's how she knew he was dead.

Even with the glare of the sun obscuring his face, she could feel his cold, searching eyes unpacking her soul, memorizing her deepest secrets.

– The Keeper's Secret

Robert James

Everyone has demons
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There was a time when Lake Michigan was a fast and reliable highway for tourists. Steamships regularly ran across the lake, bringing visitors to Michigan's west shore resorts. The single worst shipwreck, in terms of lives lost, was the *Eastland*, a pleasure boat that capsized while tied to the pier in Chicago. Instead of spending an enjoyable day with family and co-workers, on July 24, 1915, 844 men, women and children drowned, trapped below deck or underneath the hull in the harbor. Contemporary accounts were vivid and detailed, and there are many photographs documenting the tragedy. One photograph of a Chicago fireman holding the limp body of a small child has haunted me for decades. Check out the website of the Eastland Disaster Historical Society (www.eastlanddisaster.org) if you want to learn more.

November gales have a bad reputation on the Great Lakes, including The Armistice Day Storm of 1940, and the storm that sank the *Edmund Fitzgerald* in 1975, immortalized in song by Gordon Lightfoot. But it was just a few years before the *Eastland* disaster that an epic November storm raged across the Great Lakes. Called The Great Storm of 1913, it took the lives of 250 sailors, sank 19 ships and stranded 19 more.

It isn't hard to understand how supernatural causes have sometimes been blamed for hurricane force winds, rogue waves, 40-foot seas and foul skies.

As you bask in the gentle warmth of the summer sun, remember that the witch of November is watching.

—RJ



The view from the top of Big Sable Point Lighthouse.
No, we couldn't see Wisconsin...

Photo by Robert James.

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