

203 years ago, a Toronto lighthouse-keeper disappeared. Today, the mystery endures

J.P. Radan Muller met an abrupt end in 1815 but the legend of his ghost remains to this day

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The Gibraltar Point lighthouse, where hundreds of ghost sightings have been reported. (Doors Open)

Unexplained lights in the windows, strange bloodstains on the staircase, his shadowy form gliding across the sand in the moonlight — for those who believe it's haunted, these are just some of the signs a ghost dwells in the walls of a lighthouse on Toronto Island.

It's been 203 years since lighthouse keeper J.P. Radan Muller disappeared from his post at the Gibraltar lighthouse, but the whereabouts of his remains continue to be a mystery.

Legend has it that on a cold night in 1815, one day after New Year's, German-born Radan Muller— who was said to have supplemented his income by brewing his own beer — was killed by some soldiers, thirsty for his suds.

As the story goes, there was a garrison of soldiers close to where the Hanlan's Island Ferry Docks stand today, who are said to have been regular customers of Radan-Muller's. The war of 1812 had just officially concluded and while the various agreements would have been signed in Europe, soldiers remained on the island.

- [CBC Archives: Gibraltar Point lighthouse ghost](#)
- [Doors Open explores Toronto's haunted buildings](#)

"They no doubt needed these rugged guys who would have been able to defend the harbour," Richard Fiennes-Clinton, a guide with Muddy York Tours, explained on CBC Radio's *Here And Now* Tuesday.

'They did their best to cover the evidence'

"It was just after New Years, the harbour very well could have been frozen. It was very, very cold. There wouldn't have been much else to do ... Certainly drinking the night away seems like it might have been a possibility."

It's said that a group of soldiers were doing just that when Radan Muller cut them off.

"But they didn't feel they were quite finished yet, and according to the main story, they chased him up to the top of the lighthouse and they had an altercation," Fiennes-Clinton said.

The exact details are lost to history, but after that night, Radan Muller was never seen again — at least not in the flesh.



DeeDee Dodds was the last keeper of the lighthouse. She was in charge for three years before it closed in 1958 (CBC)

"Apparently they struck him over the head and they ejected his body out of the lighthouse," said Fiennes-Clinton. "And when they discovered that he died, they did their best to cover the evidence and dismembered him and tried to bury him and dispose of his body. And that's really the crux of the story."

The incident was recorded in an 1815 edition of the York Gazette newspaper and while a couple of soldiers were accused of the crime, no one ever did face justice.

Body never recovered

For almost 82 years, the lighthouse was kept by a well-known Toronto Island family, the Durnans.

In 1904, then-lighthouse-keeper George Durnan is said to have discovered human remains, believed to be those of Radan Muller, and reburied them. But if that happened, the grave's whereabouts are unknown today.

No DNA testing was ever done, according to Fiennes-Clinton.



John Durnan spoke to CBC News in 1958 about the time his family found bones believed to have belonged to Radan Muller near the lighthouse. (CBC)

Incidentally, she told the CBC at the time, it got its name because John Graves Simcoe, the Governor of Upper Canada when it was built, believed Toronto Island could be fortified as strongly as the legendary Rock of Gibraltar. .

Dodds said at the time she'd never met a ghost herself, but was liable to be spooked herself at least once.

Legend persists

"When the moon is full, it's reflected back from the top of the lighthouse. This spring, when I was riding by on my bike, I was startled to see a light when the navigation system was closed. It wasn't for a few seconds that I realized the moon was full. It gave me a startle," Dodds said.

"I've never met the ghost but I can understand how the legend persists. The cooing of the pigeons is very eerie on a dark night and the wind howling through the lighthouse gives you the shivers."

In charge of the site for three years before it closed in 1958, Dodds wondered if the legend of Radan Muller's ghost would persist after Gibraltar closed.

"They're going to build a new light. But I wonder with the new light, if the old legend will die," she wondered aloud at the time.

Apparently not. Fiennes-Clinton has eager visitors still captivated by the mystery of the soldier who vanished that day in 1815.

"This is a story that's been a part of the tapestry of mystery in Toronto for a long time," he said.

"I like the fact that it's a mystery."