MYSTERY AND POSSIBILITY:
SPIRITUALISTS IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH

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ABSTRACT

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Mystery and Possibility: Spiritualists in the Nineteenth-century South
(Under the direction of Donald G. Mathews)

Spiritualism, the belief that people could communicate with the spirits of the dead, swept through the United States and western Europe in the 1850s. Rooted in mankind's timeless yearning to understand what becomes of the human spirit after death, it was complicated by the mid-nineteenth century's urge to explain the world rationally and scientifically. The rage for scientific explanation was complicating the need to understand life and death within the comforting tenets of unquestioned Christian faith. Spiritualism promised what traditional religion could not: By asking questions of the dead through a medium, people sought *proof* that the spirits of departed loved ones—and personal immortality—awaited them in heaven. This dissertation examines the interpretation of this phenomenon, long thought by scholars to have been unattractive to southerners because of its association with northeastern reform movements, by individuals in the South. It explores and explains the extent to which white southerners incorporated Spiritualism into their folk, cultural and religious belief systems. It sketches a map of how Spiritualism spread through the South along networks of commerce, community and kinship. Perhaps most significantly, this project brings to light the social, geographic and racial diversity of southerners who took an active interest in parting the veil between this world and the unknown. Did it matter, does it now? Beyond

denominational monographs, the history of the South must include studies of southerners' examination, construction, modification and uses of belief if we are to understand what being human meant to them and in turn see more clearly how the South was a part of the national discourse. At the same time, while their northern counterparts were linking Spiritualism with abolition and a host of other reforms, most southerners who communed with spirits seem to have believed that—whatever might be said to the contrary—doing so was every bit as orthodox as evangelical Christianity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The road to a completed dissertation is no simple highway, but I had a lot of fun along the way. Thanks to everyone responsible for making it so. I thank my undergraduate adviser for telling me not to pursue a graduate degree in English. He did not think I would like it, and he may have been right. Time there was and plenty to find direction; circumstances did in time show me the way and leave no doubt. I thank my mother, Ruth Verhulst Gray, for introducing me to family history. Learning that both my husband and I had family living near here in the eighteenth century ignited my curiosity and I began reading American history. One day I looked up from *Albion's Seed* (thank you, David Hackett Fischer, for making me wonder why you thought your book would infuriate some people) and said, "Dave, I want to go to graduate school." Might as well. I thank my husband, David R. Schoonmaker, for his unwavering support. He is, in the best ways, my enabler and a creature of infinite jest. Most of all, I thank Donald G. Mathews. In 2001 when I said Spiritualists, he said Methodists. It took several years of research to come to that conclusion on my own. I am grateful for his wisdom, patience and friendship. The generous gift of his time and experience coaxed coherence from words half spoken and thoughts unclear.

Our children are my life's *raison d' être.* They have been curious, bored, caustic, enthusiastic, annoyed and tolerant as they grew to adulthood during this project; you know who you are. Mom loves you all. Just the way you are.

The Center for the Study of the American South provided two summer research grants during the course of my graduate work, as well as employment. Harry L. Watson's work ethic, attention to detail, academic rigor and kindness to all as director set high standards for the Center.

The first days were the hardest days, but the last months were spent trying just a little bit harder, just a little bit more. Many people were funny and supportive, helpful and generous along the way. Those who gave significant scholarly assistance are, I hope, acknowledged in the text and footnotes. To name all the people who made graduate school such fun would be impossible. Cheryl Junk is a reliable source of laughter, friendship and good advice. Two members of my second writing group, Laura Micheletti Puaca and Pamella Lach, gave me an understanding of what lay in store when I finally started writing in earnest. Kim Hill offered a new perspective on race, gender and religion. Tim Williams and Dwana Waugh, the ultimate writing group, nudged me closer to real productivity. The Beta Theta chapter of Delta Gamma at Duke University never let me forget that a woman can concurrently embrace a full social life, sincere dedication to philanthropic projects and academic excellence. You have a special place in my heart. Finally, thanks to Connie Nelms Diederich for decades of imagining that I was a professor somewhere.

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INTRODUCTION

This project examines previously unexplored aspects of Spiritualism—the belief that one might communicate with the spirits of the dead—that were Christian, metaphysical and southern. Historical discussions of Spiritualism have made the assumption that it found little purchase in the South, and was therefore not worth the effort required to understand it there. To be sure, Spiritualism did not have the same cachet among southerners that it did in the rest of the country; but there is considerable evidence that there were enough Spiritualists in the South to make them a visible and articulate minority well worth investigating. Valuable work on Spiritualism has insightfully linked it to feminism, abolitionism and other reform movements, taking as a given the statements of earlier scholars about its failure to achieve influence in the nineteenth-century South. While it is true that Spiritualism was never a major religious movement in the American South, it *was* nonetheless a movement. Prominent and ordinary southerners were Spiritualists. They printed newspapers, recruited members, and developed a sense of local and extended community with others who thought of themselves as participants in a religious movement seeking not to break with traditional Christianity but to reform it from within, as part of a progression to a new and more compelling religious enterprise. They drew on the expectations of religious reformers who had gone before, including Emanuel Swedenborg, Mother Ann Lee and John

Wesley. When we acknowledge the very real presence of this community of believers in the South, every generalization about "Spiritualists" must be reexamined.

To understand Spiritualism in the nineteenth-century American South requires a knowledge of its antecedents. The phenomenon known as Modern Spiritualism dates to 1848, but the belief in spirits and angels communicating with mortals is intertwined with the religious traditions on which most American religions are constructed. Spiritualism was preconditioned by a particular set of religious and folk perspectives, not only in the North. The religious who were open to communing with spirits as an extension of their faith tended to embody elements of receptiveness to the miraculous, experiential religion authenticated by testimony, perfectionism, religious innovation and personal interaction with the Spirit as affirmation from the beyond. Spiritualism's antecedents—Swedenborgians; Shakers and other religions that grew out of European pietism; phrenology; animal magnetism—were also a presence in the South and so there was also a nascent tradition of spirit communion among whites there even before the rage for Modern Spiritualism began in the North and trickled southward. Not only before Spiritualism emerged, but throughout the nineteenth century, these antecedents remained a part of the southern repertoire of religious possibility. All over North America, evangelical revivals heightened awareness of the soul and its eternal destiny. Competing religious discourses reconceptualized heaven and hell, and murky language conflated heaven with the spirit world. Receptiveness to the Holy Spirit opened people to new ways of imagining their own dead, especially as having becoming loving, watchful angels. Progress as a paradigm in all aspects of society merged in religion and millennialism.

The South was, like the North, a largely Protestant and evangelical culture even though many who lived there were unchurched. Ties of kinship and commerce bound the regions, and many northerners had settled in the South after the Louisiana Purchase and the War of 1812. The locus of the print industry was the Northeast, so most of what southerners read was what northerners were also reading.

The South *was* different, though. There were millions of African Americans in the antebellum South, almost all of them the property of whites. Many, owned by farmers who could afford only a few, or house servants of the more prosperous, lived in intimate contact with whites. On larger plantations, the slave quarters gave a space for those who lived there to create cultural and religious traditions that combined elements of their various African survivals with borrowings from whites. Tracing the influence of black beliefs on the whites around them is a challenge, but scholars such as Mechal Sobel have made a strong case for such cross-cultural exchange. Spatially, southerners were more widely dispersed with fewer urban centers than the North and less infrastructure linking them. Northern religious and reformers saw the South as a mission field. By the 1830s, the South was hardening its position on slavery in response to salvos from abolitionists in the North.

Most of the individuals whose lives are a part of this study were Christians, and many could be characterized in some way as Liberal Protestants, for whom, as one early-twentieth-century writer said, belief was "not a closed religious system, strictly defined in a confession of faith or in an official catechism; it is essentially a personal matter." As such, it was "a general conception of religion, particularly the Christian religion, under

the shelter of which a great number of different doctrines may flourish."[1] For those who came to mystical experience and spirit communion as an extension of evangelical seeking, it filled a desire for something more or something different than they had found through conversion. Many were open to creating their own formulation of Christian faith, receptive to new religious possibilities and willing to reconceptualize the meaning and potential of "spirit." Like the Shakers, some would believe they had "spiritual gifts" like those of Christ and his Apostles, gifts such as visionary revelations and healing. The line between these beliefs and communicating with angels and spirits is not definitive, but for people such as the Shakers all these things were simply "spiritual gifts." Spirit communion was qualitatively different for those who approached it after the Fox sisters unleashed spirit rapping as phenomenological, as something to be planned and scheduled in advance and purposefully pursued, as an opportunity to converse with the dead rather than merely to passively receive visions, impressions and communications from the beyond. Many who sought messages from the spirit world were people of faith, but Modern Spiritualism's appeal was greatest to those whose faith was inadequate to assuage their grief following the death of loved ones. For those who approached it as part of their unfolding Christianity, it was proof—verified through experience, tests and testimony—of God's promise of eternal life. *Religion,* while it has many meanings, was for the subjects of this project the belief that there is a higher power, generally called God, that created and watches over the universe. Conceived more broadly, religion is a cultural system within which individuals negotiate questions of faith and enact their beliefs in both institutional and personal settings. *Spiritualism* signified to Americans in

[1] Jean Réville, *Liberal Christianity: Its Origin, Nature, and Mission,* trans. and ed. Victor Leuliette (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), 1.

the second half of the nineteenth century the belief that the human spirit survived the death of the body and that people on earth could (and wished to) communicate with the spirits of the dead. It was a widespread and diverse cultural phenomenon that was for some a movement that created a new religion, to some humbuggery, and to still others a possibility with too much potential significance to be dismissed lightly. There were also people before the term Spiritualist came into use to whom it would be applied retroactively. *Culture* is the shared, constructed context of lived experience inhabited by the subjects of this project, dominated by the mores and values of the whites who controlled most resources but surrounded and influenced by the values and mores of poor whites and African Americans, and fed a steady stream of ideas from the North and western Europe. *The South* will refer to the states where people still owned slaves at the start of the Civil War: Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

The stories told here are gleaned from those of hundreds of southerners who left evidence of interest and participation in Spiritualism. They are all different, but are mostly glimpses of people who were Protestant (often Methodist), white, and decidedly not living in want. A bit like pointillism, these small stories are bits of a bigger picture. The individuals' encounters with the spirits combine into a larger, if necessarily impressionistic, image when the observer steps back and views them as a whole. It is a narrative that moves across the broad canvas of a nation aborning, retracing the strands of mystery and possibility that would come together to produce a mid-nineteenth-century *mentalité* willing and able to believe in conversations with the dead.

The beginnings of the story are in the Northeast and its religious refugees and revivals. Some came to the South, providing a vocabulary and structure to use in discussing the marvelous. They arrived as migrants, missionaries, colporteurs, as books and newspapers. Once in the South, people, institutions and ideas became part of it, adapted to its climate and culture, or did not flourish. Among the earliest imports were Shakers and the ideas of Swedish scientist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg, who bears responsibility for opening the western world to discussion of the spirit world as a reality. Swedenborg's books describing his visits to heaven, his conversations with angels, and the details of spiritual progression through definite spheres of increasing purity and enlightenment in the afterlife mapped the world beyond the veil for the nineteenth-century imagination. His was among the most frequent spirit to visit circles seeking wisdom and guidance from the spirit spheres, and his name signified man's ability to converse with the beyond. Never mind that Swedenborg warned against others trying it; that point was missed or overlooked by most people from the outset. The Shakers brought their own stream of mystical receptiveness to "spiritual gifts" to these shores, and like other pietists established beachheads in the South. The Shakers, who established a thriving business peddling seeds and straw hats and other products of their workshops, were a fixture in the Upper South.

Before the Fox sisters began rapping, there were deep strains of European folk and alchemical and occult belief in American culture. Mesmerists brought from France new ways to explore the mysteries of the mind, and like Spiritualists after them many became itinerating professional purveyors. Andrew Jackson Davis was the most influential product of these traditions in the story of Spiritualist thought in the South,

though Joseph Smith took this same wellspring of mystical thought westward and laid the foundations of a religion that is still thriving today. If Swedenborg provided the early maps of heaven, Davis's harmonialism gave it a vocabulary.

The religious revivals that grew evangelical religion are central to the story as well. The things people thought and felt in the physical and emotional release of a profound conversion experience baffled those outside their pull, and appeared to be symptomatic more of madness than faith. That African Americans were particularly susceptible and responsive to the evangelical message opened for a short time an evangelical southern worship where on Sunday morning master and slave were equal before God. Slaves, in fact, if they were more true to their faith and its behavioral strictures, could in these moments of fellowship in Christ, believe themselves superior to their masters in answering to God's laws. Whites frequently perceived blacks as more spiritual, or closer to the desirable "primitive" Christian experience of the early church of Christ and his Apostles.

John Buescher and others have studied the relationship between Universalism and Spiritualism in the North, and among the few Universalists in the South there were some who embraced spirit communication. And if an eternity of agony were ruled out, what of the great immediate cause of it in the nineteenth century, death? As ministers advised and an oft-repeated hymn adapting Psalm 141 affirmed,

> Mine eyes are unto Thee, my God;
> Behold me humbled in the dust;
> I kiss the hand that wields the rod,
> I own thy punishments are just.[2]

[2] *The Poetical Works of Rogers, Campbell, Montgomery, Lamb, and Kirke White: Complete in One Volume* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1829), 87.

Liberal theologians drawn to the possibilities of Spiritualism entertained the hope that, by opening communication between the worlds of the living and the dead, their loving God might be offering a balm for the great sufferings of the living. Eminent Philadelphia physician Benjamin Rush, after converting from Presbyterianism to belief in universal salvation, began writing in favor of reforming American systems of punishment, including substituting "solitude and labour" for "the whipping-post and the gallows" for criminals and doing away with corporal punishment of schoolchildren. Drawing on the same streams of Enlightenment thought that led to Universalism, Rush reconsidered the model of a God of vengeance and its implications for American society. As historian Anne-Marie Cusac observed, "Instead of a vengeful God who demands physical hurt of those who disobey, Rush says painful punishment is Devilish."[3] It was not only Universalists who were rethinking their ideas of God, questioning whether a loving God could or would consign the creatures created in His own image to an eternity of suffering. Even Christians who could not quite give up the idea of eternal punishment for the unrepentant often preferred the more loving God of the New Testament to the smiting God of the Old, and as some imagined Him it was not out of character that He would permit faith-affirming communion with their dead.

The southern story of Spiritualism is heavily peopled by Methodists. Perhaps this was because early Methodists had an interest in understanding visions, trances, dreams and ghostly visitations. Furthermore, Methodist receptivity to the Holy Spirit sometimes allowed people who could testify to the power of God's Spirit to bear witness to that power in such a way as to be assured they were indeed children of God. The Wesleyan

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[3] Anne-Marie Cusac, *Cruel and Unusual: The Culture of Punishment in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 31–36.

message encouraged those who believed themselves justified by God's grace to be open to a further empowerment by the Spirit that resulted in a Holiness revival in the postbellum North and South. For those awaiting the imprimatur of the Spirit, the domestic pietism that emphasized the family as an essential core of religious life promised believers a continuation of that familial connection into a life beyond death. The Reverend Samuel Watson, a Methodist minister from Memphis, was certain that the Gospel of Christian Spiritualism he preached was consistent with Wesleyan principles even if his annual conference was not as convinced as he.

Watson had come to spirit communication through loss. As a minister, his children's deaths were understood as God's will and his role as devout and humble acceptance. But, like a surprising number of southerners, he was brought into communication with their spirits through the mediumship of a family slave. Watson, approaching the séance with reverence, spent time quietly exploring the mystery with other ministers, physicians and respected laymen at the same time Nashville Disciples of Christ minister Jesse Babcock Ferguson was publicly battling assaults from the orthodox element of his denomination and his congregation. Ferguson had made his own way to Spiritualism through mesmerism and his readings of liberal northeastern theologians. Ferguson's rejection of the idea of hell and his embrace of universal salvation were a version of the liberal theology Richard Niebhur described as positing that "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."[4] Ferguson and Watson both ran afoul of their denominations when they proclaimed the joyous news of communion with the spirit

[4] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University, 1988), 184. My thanks to John Kasson for the quotation.

world as a new Christian dispensation, but Watson did not proclaim his belief to the world in a way Methodism could not contain until the 1870s.

The other stories here are of the great and the middling. The great are always easiest to find and flesh out. The papers of the elite indicated that the possibilities of communicating with the dead had made deeper inroads in the South than historians had previously acknowledged. If those who left records knew and thought about Spiritualism, it was likely that other southerners did too. Finding these people would require looking outside southern manuscript collections. One cannot, to paraphrase the historian Edward Ayers, write about people if one does not know who they were.

The middling are found through digging and the occasional stroke of good fortune. The former was done in the American Antiquarian Society's a wonderful collection of antebellum Spiritualist newspapers and at the Library of Congress, which yielded a long list of names and locations in the South to follow up on. John Buescher's unearthing of an 1854 petition asking Congress to study spiritual phenomena seriously was the latter. With almost thirteen thousand names, five hundred of them from the South, the petition opened a way to retrieve hundreds of southern stories that would never have been associated with Spiritualism otherwise and to see who in the South would sign such a document. Without the petition, this project would have had to rely on the same sources other scholars have mined, with only the names from Spiritualist newspapers leading to previously unexamined southern lives. The petition enables us to recapture the human stories of scores of southerners otherwise lost to the historical record, to paint a clearer picture of who in the antebellum South believed the manifestations associated

with Spiritualism—whatever their origin—were real. Every story is a dot on the canvas, and the more one can find, the more nuanced the final picture can be.

The first source of information about historical actors who have not been studied before is public records. The census, though the indexing is flawed and there are obvious errors and inconsistencies, is the natural first step. The on-line 1850 census is not indexed and searchable, but most of the people on the list showed up in the 1860 census. This tells us where they lived, what they did for a living, and the names, ages and places of birth of everyone in their households. Sometimes it also gives their declared financial worth. State libraries have a wealth of documentation in their collections, including court and tax records, marriage records, cemetery records, and militia and military rosters. There are also family histories tracing genealogies and sometimes giving more detailed information through anecdotes, newspaper stories or old family letters. The Goodspeed series of regional biographies of solid citizens tells the stories of many families that might otherwise have been lost. For larger urban areas, there are also city directories, the precursors of annual telephone books, listing the names, businesses, and home addresses of residents. Gleanings from all of these allow us to assemble a clearer picture of the lives of the petitioners and the southerners who wrote to antebellum Spiritualist newspapers, and for many of the latter we also have their thoughts on the subject as they appeared in the columns of those publications. There *were* more Spiritualists in the antebellum South than scholars had realized, even if it was rooted and concentrated in the Northeast.

Conventional wisdom, oft repeated, was that the Civil War sparked renewed interest in communicating with the spirits. Perhaps that was so in the North, but in the South there is scant evidence to support that contention. The South and its people were

stunned and devastated; summoning the spirits required a clear, focused mind and leisure to wait quietly for the spirits to come. Those were in short supply in the immediate aftermath of Confederate defeat. Interest, however, did begin to emerge in the post-war South first in places that had felt the impact of war least and had shifted during those years from being southern border cities to identifying most with the North: Baltimore and St. Louis. During Reconstruction, more southern voices emerged. Rev. Samuel Watson's attempt to create an institutionalized Christian Spiritualism on the Methodist model—and how he came to do so—are the project's capstone.

Historiography of Spiritualism

Emma Hardinge, a well-known medium, published a useful if uncritical early history of the Spiritualist movement in 1870. Frank Podmore published a more carefully considered two-volume history in 1902, concluding that most mediumistic activity that defied explanation under careful scrutiny could probably be attributed to clairvoyance and most poltergeist activity to the pranks of adolescent girls. Joseph McCabe, in *Spiritualism, a Popular History to 1847* (1920) offered a readable if unsparing chronicle of Modern Spiritualism's context and development. Alice Felt Tyler included Spiritualism in her 1944 compendium of nineteenth-century reforms, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History,* treating as serious cultural phenomena a number of movements that had been mocked by scholars for the past half-century.[5] For the next quarter of a century, the subject lay fallow.

[5] Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of Spirits* (New York: 1870; reprinted New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, c. 1970); Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* (London: Methuen Co., 1902); Joseph McCabe, *Spiritualism, a Popular History to 1847* (New York: Dodd, Mead

Since the early 1970s Spiritualism in the North has been the focus of a growing body of scholarship as historians have sought to recover and explain individual experience within the social and cultural matrices of the past. R. Laurence Moore led the way for modern scholars with an article probing the perceived links between Spiritualism, religious discourse and scientific investigation in the 1850s, followed by a book on the history of Spiritualism and research into the paranormal in America. Spiritualists more recently have caught the attention of students of the various reform movements, who noticed that feminists, abolitionists and creators of intentional communities all showed a marked tendency to dabble in contact with "the other side." Ann Braude probed the connection between Spiritualism and feminism in her 1989 book, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-century America,* noting the gendered implications of Spiritualist mediums' passivity and receptivity. In her research in the 1980s, Braude found that of two hundred six Spiritualist newspapers in America, only twelve were published in the South. Bret E. Carroll, R. Laurence Moore's student, argued with mixed success in 1997 that *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* was a serious form of organized religion. Alyson Winter's entertaining and informative 1998 account of the scientific and cultural antecedents of Spiritualism in *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* offered solid scholarship to a popular audience. Kenneth Caneva is a historian of science at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a research interest in feminism and Spiritualism. John Buescher, a researcher in Washington, D. C., has written a biography of John Murray Spear, one of many Universalist ministers who turned to Spiritualism, and another book focused more

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and Company, 1920); Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944).

broadly on Universalist involvement in Spiritualism, 1845–1875. Buescher's web site, spirithistory.com, where he posted primary source transcriptions of Spiritualist documents from the Library of Congress, was for years an invaluable source. Mark Lause at the University of Cincinnati has uncovered Spiritualism in antebellum labor movements. Robert Cox's *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (2003) uses nineteenth-century notions of sympathy as a way to understand Spiritualism's linkage of the earthly and spiritual worlds and a spur to personal and societal improvement, but only delves into the South in a chapter on the Spiritualists of color in New Orleans that re-examines much of what Karen Cossé Bell covered in *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868* (1997). Barbara Weisberg performed a valuable service for historians of Spiritualism by constructing an engaging narrative of the lives of the Fox sisters, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (2004). *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (1999), Ann Taves's study of the mystical and bodily experience and expression of religion, charted debate and influences on whether they were or were not religious in nature. In *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (2007) Catherine L. Albanese synthesizes and contextualizes the history and complexity of influences on and developments in extra-orthodox religious thought in America. Molly McGarry's *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-century America* (2008) emphasizes the connection between the liberating aspects of Spiritualism for some female adherents and regulatory reactions such as the Comstock Act, extending Braude's analysis of the reform implications of

Spiritualism. Russ Castronovo, an English professor at the University of Miami, in his work on antebellum northern abolitionists has also written about voodoo, death, Spiritualism and abolition. His article on "The Antislavery Unconscious" demonstrates a clear, if narrow, linkage between survivals of African spiritism among slaves in the French West Indies and the evolution of Spiritualism in New England. Complementing these works is a smattering of other books and articles. All interesting work, but none of it took seriously the impact of Spiritualism on the South.[6]

Confederate women's journals, Sarah Morgan's and Mary Chesnut's, mentioned Spiritualism; the former was fascinated, the latter disparaging. Apparently, there *were* southerners who took the subject seriously. Elizabeth and Eugene Genovese mentioned prominent South Carolinian Swedenborgians and Spiritualists in *The Mind of the Master Class*. Local archives had a few things catalogued under Spiritualism. Alert to the language of spirit rapping and mediums, reading elite sources soon made it clear many of

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[6] R. Laurence Moore, "Spiritualism and Science: Reflections on the First Decade of the Spirit Rappings," *American Quarterly* 24:4 (October 1972), 474–500, and *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-century America* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1989); Ann Braude, "News from the Spirit World: A Checklist of American Spiritualist Periodicals, 1847–1900," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 99:2 (1990), 399–462; Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); John Benedict Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear, Agitator for the Spirit Land* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); John B. Buescher, *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth-century Religious Experience* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004); Robert Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Karen Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1997); Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004); Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999); Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007); Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Russ Castronovo, "The Antislavery Unconscious: Mesmerism, Vodun, and 'Equality'," *Mississippi Quarterly* 53:1 (Winter 1999–2000), 41–65; Only one article focused specifically on the South: Robert W. Delp, "The Southern Press and the Rise of American Spiritualism, 1847–1860," *Journal of American Culture* 7:3 (Fall 1984) 88–95. Delp outlined the general tone of disapprobation in southern newspapers.

them were talking about Spiritualism, investigating, and traveling to the North to visit mediums. It was Sarah Morgan's anecdote about a slave discussing Sarah's visits to the graveyard to summon the spirits that suggested there were layers of complexity to be teased apart in this story.

CHAPTER ONE

Northeastern Beginnings, Southern Borrowings

"I wonder if the dead can see us?" mused Sarah Morgan in 1863. Two years earlier her brother Harry, "the one I loved best of all," had been killed in a duel. She tried to be resigned to God's will, and feared that jealous God had taken Harry from her because she had so idolized him. Desperate to be near him and finding the cemetery gates locked, Sarah, in bonnet and hoops, once clambered over the fence. Soon three remaining brothers went off to fight for the Confederacy. Before 1861 ended, Sarah's doting father was buried next to Harry in Baton Rouge's Magnolia Cemetery. Sarah tried to accept and make sense of these deaths within the bounds of her Episcopalian faith. Throughout the anxious years of the Civil War, forced by Yankee occupation to flee the Baton Rouge home that held family memories and mementos, her thoughts often returned to her dead father and brother. Clinging to her faith, she prayed that her remaining brothers would be spared; two were not. Sarah spent the 1860s mourning, first for Harry and her father, later for the two brothers who died in Confederate service.[7]

Sarah's journals presented a historical puzzle. After Harry Morgan's death in 1861, the very proper Morgan family did not "go into mourning," putting on the black clothing that custom dictated and most people donned as a matter of course. Nor did they

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[7] Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman,* ed. Charles East (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 455, 6, 180, 584.

do so after Judge Morgan died six months later. They grieved, visited the graves, and had no heart for most of their customary amusements, but they did not wear black. When brothers George and Gibbes died in 1864, they did go into traditional mourning. Sarah never wrote about how the decisions were made, only mentioning to a greater or lesser extent the reactions of people outside the family to their choices. Studies of death and mourning explain the rituals of grief that were set forth in advice manuals and seems to assume that conventional, proper, prosperous people such as the Morgans acted out their losses by the book. The Morgans chose to embrace some of the accepted rituals of mourning but rejected others.[8] In Sarah Morgan's Civil War journals and family papers in the Special Collections Library at Duke University are descriptions of her visits to mediums in New York, London and Rome and recountings of a friend's prophecy and her husband's dream that presaged his violent death. These suggest a lifelong fascination with the possibility of pulling aside the veil that separates the world of the living from the world of spirits, and her yearning for confirmation that those on the other side still loved her. A medium's message reassuring Sarah that her late husband had always been faithful to her[9] is particularly poignant when read with the knowledge that in the wake of his murder it was rumored he had dallied with their governess. In reconstructing the ways Sarah mourned in three different contexts—antebellum, Civil War and Lost Cause Era—it was impossible to ignore her references to clairvoyants, summoning the spirits as an amusement, and serious engagement with fortune tellers and spiritual mediums in a quest

[8] Nancy Gray Schoonmaker, "As Though It Were Unto the Lord: Sarah Morgan Dawson and Nineteenth-century Southern Mourning." Master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002.

[9] Recounting of visit to "unknown 'Seer,' Miss Margaret Gaul, 135, One Hundred & Fourth Street, Iowa Building, bet Amsterdam & Columbus Ave. N.Y," Francis Warrington Dawson Papers, 1559–1963, Box 85, Duke University Special Collections Library (hereafter Duke).

for foreknowledge and for contact with her lost loved ones. It was a desire to understand why Sarah persisted in this search for half a century despite religious proscriptions and her husband's disapproval, all the while adhering unwaveringly to her Episcopalian faith, that led to this study.

Sarah Morgan's older siblings were born in Baton Rouge, and her father had sold the family's home on a bluff above the Mississippi River to furnish the site for the new state capitol. Sarah was born in New Orleans in 1842, while her father was Collector of Customs for the Port. He was active in Whig politics, a member of a Masonic order, and interacted daily with the city's men of commerce. In 1850, when the new capitol was completed, the Morgans returned to Baton Rouge. Sarah's father was a judge and a respected attorney, and they maintained close ties to New Orleans. Sarah's half-brother Philip was a judge in the Crescent City, and it was there Sarah was presented to society in 1860 along with daughters of the city's commercial elite.

Its mingling of Catholic, Protestant, African and Caribbean traditions had made New Orleans a nexus of the possibilities for contacting and harnessing the power of spirits. Sarah Morgan noted with pride that she read the newspapers with her father so there can be no doubt she knew about the emergence of spirit rapping in the North in 1848 and its popularity there. She would have read of the phrenologists, mesmerists and Spiritualist mediums who visited New Orleans, and the advertisements for clairvoyants, seeresses, planet readers and other fortune tellers who plied their trade in the busy port city. Through her social networks, she would have known of the many residents who sat in private séances to summon spirits and of whites who consulted practitioners of *voudon.*

Spiritualism and the paranormal were part of Sarah Morgan's life and times. Her journal mentions the pre-war predictions of a clairvoyant in New Orleans. Her brother Jimmy wrote to her from England about hearing spirits rap, and she tried without success to summon rappings while alone. While entertaining a party of Confederate officers at the Louisiana plantation where the Morgan women sought refuge when they left Baton Rouge, "Some one suggested calling the Spirits, which game I had imagined had 'played out' long ago, and we derived a great deal of amusement from it."[10] Although some people took summoning the spirits very seriously, for others it apparently had been more in the nature of a trendy parlor amusement.

Sarah fretted when one of the family's house servants gossiped about Sarah's visits to the cemetery. The slave Lennice told the servants of another family that she knew there were spirits because Miss Sarah went to the graveyard every morning and evening with a basket of flowers and called the spirits of her dead brother and father to her. According to Lennice, Sarah wrote, their spirits "would all fly to me, and talk and sing with me for hours until I would tell them goodbye and go home, when they would go away too." Sarah attributed the story to Lennice's ignorance, and "some members of the family found it necessary to put an end to it at once." Sarah's acute discomfort over the story, read with a knowledge of her later, life-long enthusiasm for communicating with dead loved ones, suggests the possibility that Lennice and Sarah might merely have been interpreting Sarah's visits to the graves within different cultural or religious frames of reference. Perhaps Sarah was already closer to that enthusiasm than she could admit, aware that those whose opinions she valued would not approve her dabbling in a system

[10] *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman,* 414.

of belief so easily dismissed as slaves' superstitions about ghosts and magic. Nor could they concede to themselves the extent of cross-cultural "spiritual intimacies" that had developed through long years of close physical contact between white children and the African American slaves entrusted with their care.[11]

The precise meaning of Sarah's anecdote about Lennice, the graveyard, and summoning spirits was another puzzle. The explanation had to lie in some combination of the antecedents that formed their belief systems, the Spiritualism mentioned in the writings of many southerners in the nineteenth century, and the culture in which Lennice and Sarah functioned. Spiritualism's promise exerted an attraction that was problematic in the context of southern religion and culture. Why this fascination, why was it a problem, how did devout southerners reconcile or integrate Spiritualist beliefs with their orthodox religious faith and practice, and how did their understanding of invisible worlds color their reality in the nineteenth century?

Nineteenth-century observers agreed that Modern Spiritualism was born on a chilly night in 1848 in a small rented house outside Hydesville, New York. Cracking their toe joints, Kate and Maggie Fox convinced their superstitious and devoutly Methodist mother that the rapping sounds were made by the spirit of a peddler buried in their cellar. Kate and Maggie's mother, Margaret, was born to a long line of people gifted with second sight, and Mrs. Fox had grown up hearing her mother's descriptions of phantom funerals that "always took place, just as she had envisioned them, within the next few

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[11] Ibid. , 278; *Republic of Mind and Spirit,* 113; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 177 (citing Melville Herskovits).

weeks." Margaret Fox's sister Elizabeth also had second sight, or clairvoyance, and predicted her own death.[12]

Figure 1. The Fox Family Cottage, Birthplace of Modern Spiritualism.

Neighbors flocked to observe these mysterious phenomena, and someone came up with a system for asking "yes" and "no" questions of the spirit and then of spelling out messages by reciting the alphabet and noting the letter at which a rap was heard—then doing it over and over until a message was spelled out. The credulity and receptivity of their neighbors was not surprising. The fires of religious revival had repeatedly swept this part of western New York with special intensity, earning the region the name "Burned-over District." The area's semi-frontier liminality allowed experimental communities, individual interpretations of existing ideas and faiths, and the emergence of new cosmologies and systems of religious belief with deep roots in survivals of European folk religion. Spiritualism (some adherents called it "Modern Spiritualism," to differentiate it from the panoply of uses to which the term "spiritualism" had been put in the past) was one of them. Among the Foxes' early supporters were Hicksite Quakers Amy and Isaac

[12] *Talking to the Dead*, 31–32.

Post, also backers of women's rights and other reform movements. Amy Post attended the women's rights convention at nearby Seneca Falls, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass and others in attendance had already heard of the rappings. One source claims raps were heard on the table where Stanton and Lucretia Mott wrote out the convention's Declaration of Sentiments.[13] This early association with northern reform movements was cemented as women's rights and Spiritualism spread through the Posts' network of Quaker abolitionists.

Figure 2. The Fox Sisters: Margaret Fox, Catharine Fox and Leah Fox Fish.

Within two years, despite rumors and outright accusations that their rappings were made by cracking their toe and knee joints, the Fox sisters were ensconced at Barnum's

[13] Mormonism was the most significant of these movements. For survivals of folk belief among settlers in the Burned-over District, see John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), particularly xiii–29; *Radical Spirits*, 58.

Hotel, holding séances for New York's literati and spawning a growth industry of imitators eager to cash in on the market the Foxes had created. Soon there were Spiritualist newspapers, traveling lecturers and spirit mediums, then a flood of books on the subject. The books and newspapers trickled into the South. The appearance of a traveling Spiritualist lecturer or medium in a southern city always created a surge of interest in the community and an inevitable backlash from clergymen who warned that seeking forbidden knowledge was an invitation to Satan to ensnare unwary souls. All of it fed the curiosity of southerners such as Sarah Morgan. The first hints of her interest are in her published and widely read Civil War journal, but more surprising information had been waiting in the archives. Spiritualism in the South had never generated more than a few pages of serious scholarship. Historians agreed that Spiritualism's ties to northern reform movements were enough to impede its appeal in the South amidst the escalating sectional tensions of the 1850s. But Sarah Morgan and others in elite antebellum Louisiana social circles had clearly dabbled in spirit summoning, and she had become a lifelong believer. Other southerners surely had shared her fascination. Finding them, and understanding how they came to believe in communicating with the dead within the religious, social and politically-charged context of the antebellum South, led back to the archives.

Southern manuscript collections are a rich source of material about the lives and thoughts of elite white nineteenth-century southerners. It was they who had the literacy and leisure to write letters and keep diaries, and who thought them important enough to preserve. If you do a topical search for Spiritualism or Spiritualist in some of the South's finest archival collections, you will learn that before the Fox sisters unleashed the popular

movement known as Modern Spiritualism, people thought of *spiritualism* as engagement with the mystical (Christianity) and feared it was being supplanted by *materialism* (Deism and its interpretation of the universe as a mechanism set in motion by God, who then ceased to be involved with it). You will also find Godfrey Barnsley, a British-born cotton broker of New Orleans and Georgia, whose family's papers are scattered among several collections. He corresponded with a network of family and business associates about communicating with spirits, perhaps as early as 1846.[14] Barnsley's children were also interested in Spiritualism, and his two sons who fought in the Civil War took the belief with them when they became part of an expatriate Confederate colony in Brazil.

Sarah Norton Chilton lived in New Orleans and Mississippi; Mrs. Chilton conversed with her dead son in the 1870s, but further research revealed she had probably been interested in Spiritualism as an antebellum resident of New Orleans. Anna Matilda Page King of St. Simons Island, Georgia left a record of her Spiritualist experiences, too. Thomas Butler King married her, sole heiress to plantations producing valuable Sea Island cotton, but found endless reasons to be away from home and did not write often enough to ease his wife's anxiety. Apparently he had visited the Fox sisters in New York and relayed something of the experience to his wife. In 1856, Mrs. King experimented with a tipping table she had purchased specifically for summoning spirits, an activity at which anyone might try his or her mediumistic powers. What Mrs. King did in her parlor raises questions about how women who considered themselves good Christians reconciled their inclination to experiment with the occult with stern admonitions from

[14] Fisher Family Papers, 1758–1896 #00258, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter SHC); Norton, Chilton, and Dameron Family Papers, 1760–1926, 1995 #03264, SHC; George Scarborough Barnsley Papers, 1837–1918 #01521, SHC; Thomas Butler King Papers, 1773–1868, 2003 (bulk 1835-1868) #01251, SHC; Clent Coker, *Barnsley Gardens at Woodlands* (Atlanta, Ga.: The Julia Publishing Company, 2000), 60.

clergymen condemning spirit communication as heterodox and probably Satanic. There was clearly a disjuncture between the prescriptive and Mrs. King's actual behavior. In her case, physical isolation on a Sea Island plantation, the need for reassurance that her husband was safe and well as he traveled extensively on business, and a futile desire to share in his life and interests took what was for some never more than a parlor amusement to a level of potentially greater personal significance. Sarah Morgan's journals and later reminiscences reveal a lifetime fascination with the world of spirits, and a lifelong yearning for reassurance that her lost loved ones not only lived on in the world of spirits but that they still loved her. Sarah Morgan married and lived in Charleston, where she had at least one friend who was a medium. According to her son, Spiritualism was the only thing his parents disagreed about; after her husband was murdered Sarah consulted mediums in New York and Paris seeking messages from him.[15] Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, the daughter of a wealthy Georgian, discovered the writings of Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg in 1857 and later began to investigate Spiritualism. Her marriage was a series of disappointments, and after her idolized father died she visited mediums in New York to contact him.[16] *Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle Orléans* was the outgrowth of a society of mesmerists who became interested in how trance states enabled communication with spirits.[17]

Young America was a restless place. The stories of southerners and their engagement with Spiritualism and its precursors suggest a *mentalité* at mid-century that was groping to create from old and new possibilities an understanding of what lay beyond

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[15] Dawson Papers, Box 73, Duke.

[16] Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Diaries, 1848–1889, Duke.

[17] *Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (1857–1858), Duke.

the mundane. What would cohere within five years as a clearly recognizable and fairly cogent (if always contentious and subject to individual experience and interpretation) Spiritualist movement was in 1850 a swirl of perspectives and beliefs and influences. For southerners, these included democracy, evangelical Christianity's fascination with personal experience of the Spirit, Swedenborgianism, ghost stories, second sight, African traditions of spirit possession, Shaker spirit gifts, strains of European pietism and mysticism, millennialism, Transcendentalism, mesmerism, harmonialism and emerging technologies such as electricity and the magnetic telegraph. Even how people imagined heaven was undergoing a transformation; more and more commonly, most Christians thought of the spirits of the dead as having left their bodies and gone directly to the *spirit world,* which had become in popular parlance synonymous with heaven. The righteous were in eternal bliss, waiting for their friends and families to join them. It was only a small leap to imagine the dead in heaven as angels who could watch over and guide the living, and did so because their love for those who were still in the flesh endured. Each of the people in this study cobbled together a workable personal belief system from their own combinations of these elements. Most of them purposefully created a structure that incorporated, and often enhanced, their understanding of themselves as Christians. Many sought spiritual guidance to clarify the meaning of God's Word. Catherine L. Albanese has characterized American religious beliefs such as these, in which "the material world is organically linked to a spiritual one" as *metaphysical religion.*[18] Metaphysical religions incorporate elements of magic and their adherents are reliant on guidance that comes as

[18] *Republic of Mind and Spirit,* 6.

Inner Light or voices or inspiration or impressions, rather than from ministers. Albanese's insights have been an invaluable source for this project.

The ways in which southerners approached and interpreted the confusing array of possibilities for making sense of faith and mystical experiences were highly individual. Orthodox southern churches did, as Elizabeth and Eugene Genovese write, reject the "doctrinal liberalism that was making steady headway in the North."[19] But "doctrinal Liberalism" was not the only alternative to traditional evangelical ways of being religious. The subjects of this study shared a willingness to step outside orthodoxy—the interpretations of religion delivered by denominations and their ministers—into a private world of religiosity fed by personal experience and their own unique combination of cultural and religious influences. Sarah Morgan's quest for contact with her dead alerts us to the importance of finding and studying the stories of those unknown southerners who asked similar questions about the afterlife before she did, and those who would formulate the questions anew throughout the nineteenth century. These people, products of a Christian culture, managed to embrace what many would have believed was the unorthodox while almost uniformly continuing to define themselves as Christians. Most remained within their traditional communities of faith; some did not. As we begin to read what southerners had to say about their search for knowledge of what lies beyond this world, we find clues to what influenced them in the language they used. All the influential intellectual and religious precursors of Spiritualism originated elsewhere, but their ideas circulated and were reconfigured in the South.

Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910)

[19] *Mind of the Master Class,* 472.

"The human Soul is a miniature God; the human Body is a miniature Universe; the human Desire is the rule of human action." –Andrew Jackson Davis[20]

References to "the harmonial philosophy," "harmonialism" and "harmonial societies" crop up in much of what was written about Spiritualism throughout the nineteenth century. Americans of every region who used these terms may have assumed readers would know they were invoking Andrew Jackson Davis's evolving combination of Swedenborgian revelation, Fourierist social ideals and anticlericalism, for Davis's name was only infrequently mentioned. It seems more likely that the term harmonialism became over time synonymous with Spiritualism for many who had not read extensively enough to tease the two concepts apart. The Fox sisters may have launched Modern Spiritualism as a movement in 1848, but Andrew Jackson Davis was already preaching spirit communication to a growing audience. Stories about his miraculous powers and his messages from spirits could easily have traveled along the Erie Canal from Poughkeepsie to Hydesville, and been overheard by bored and impressionable young girls.

Both timeless folk traditions and newer revelations about the mysteries of the mind and spirit had preconditioned a receptivity to knowing more than the fives senses could tell us, and to communication with spirits. Before either Davis or the Foxes, there was mesmerism. According to Spiritualist Emma Hardinge Britten, Davis and the Foxes developed independently, but, she insisted, it would be impossible to separate "the influence which the prevalence of the magnetic idea exercised upon minds prepared to receive Spiritualism and organisms already imbued with the necessary force to develop mediumship." In Britten's view, animal magnetism (mesmerism) had primed ordinary people to accept Spiritualism and those with the "necessary force," such as Davis and the

[20] *The Spirit Messenger* (August 31, 1850), 35.

Foxes, to develop their mediumistic powers. It was "despised itinerant lecturers on magnetism . . . even the unsophisticated children and rustics who were their subjects" who had been forerunners of A. J. Davis, "the culminating marvel of modern ages."[21]

The Burned-over District of New York that nurtured Davis and the Foxes was home to more than the fires of evangelistic revivalism. Ideas that would later crop up in the South were incubated there. Freemasonry had spread Hermetic thought and Enlightenment values in the Revolutionary era, changing its focus from "mysticism and angel-summoning" to a shared commitment to doing good. There were cunning folk and reputed witches, diviners and self-anointed prophets. Wandering mesmerists put people in a trance state and demonstrated the hidden potential of the human mind. As Catherine L. Albanese observed, "With books, newspapers, and people with metaphysical knowledge readily available, a would-be magus could quickly absorb a varied portfolio in the magical trade." Joseph Smith did just that, and was almost certainly influenced by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg in his "conflation of religion and magic." Albanese points to Smith as an exemplar of the "combinativeness that would be the preeminent feature of American metaphysical religion." In 1827 Smith received the basic tenets of Mormon faith from the angel Moroni. The Shakers, believing the Second Coming had taken place and they were living in the end times, established come-outer settlements and prospered in the region. Theirs too was a faith based on mystical visions, and they honored "spiritual gifts." Beginning in the late 1830s, Shakers had experienced these gifts, including spirit visitations, with increasing frequency and in the presence of outsiders who came to their public meetings to observe Shaker worship. By 1842, the

[21] *Modern American Spiritualism,* 26, 23, 26.

public meetings were halted, but Shaker mediums, including those at two Shaker villages in Kentucky, continued their activities into the 1850s. A pervasive undercurrent of millennial belief had spread from the Puritans to the other British North American colonies during the Great Awakening. Millerism, which predicted the world would end on October 22, 1844, flourished in the Burned-over District. The Millerites suffered a "Great Disappointment" on that day, but in 1845 Miller helped found a new denomination, Adventism. There were also "Perfectionists, New School Presbyterians, Christian Unionists, Anti-mission and Old School Baptists, Christianites and Campbellites"[22] staking out their own versions of religious truth. And of course there were the traditional Protestant denominations. Andrew Jackson Davis's family moved to this part of New York when he was a young boy.

Recalling his childhood, Davis said his mother was gifted with second sight and that he had heard voices which he associated with "a tendency to spontaneous somnambulism." His cosmology consisted of an "unconquerable dread" of death and "a vague, apprehensive faith in the Bible doctrine of eternal misery." A Poughkeepsie mesmerist found Davis, a young shoemaker's apprentice, to be an ideal subject, able in a trance state to read letters on a newspaper through his forehead and describe the physical ailments of those around him. People came to see these phenomena, seeking "tests and wonders."[23] As Davis described the effects of the mesmerist, or animal magnetist, or magnetizer, or operator—the terms were somewhat interchangeable—his "mental

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[22] *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 133. 145. 136, 147, 149; Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 142–143; Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 13; David L. Rowe, "A New Perspective on the Burned-over District: The Millerites in Upstate New York," *Church History* 47:4 (December 1978), 412, 409.

[23] *Magic Staff,* 202–203, 213–214.

sphere" blended with that of the subject in a partial, or *psychological* state, or more deeply in a complete, or *somnambulic* state. In the early 1840s, heralded as the "Poughkeepsie Seer," Davis became a successful clairvoyant for paying customers and displayed a knack for diagnosing illnesses.

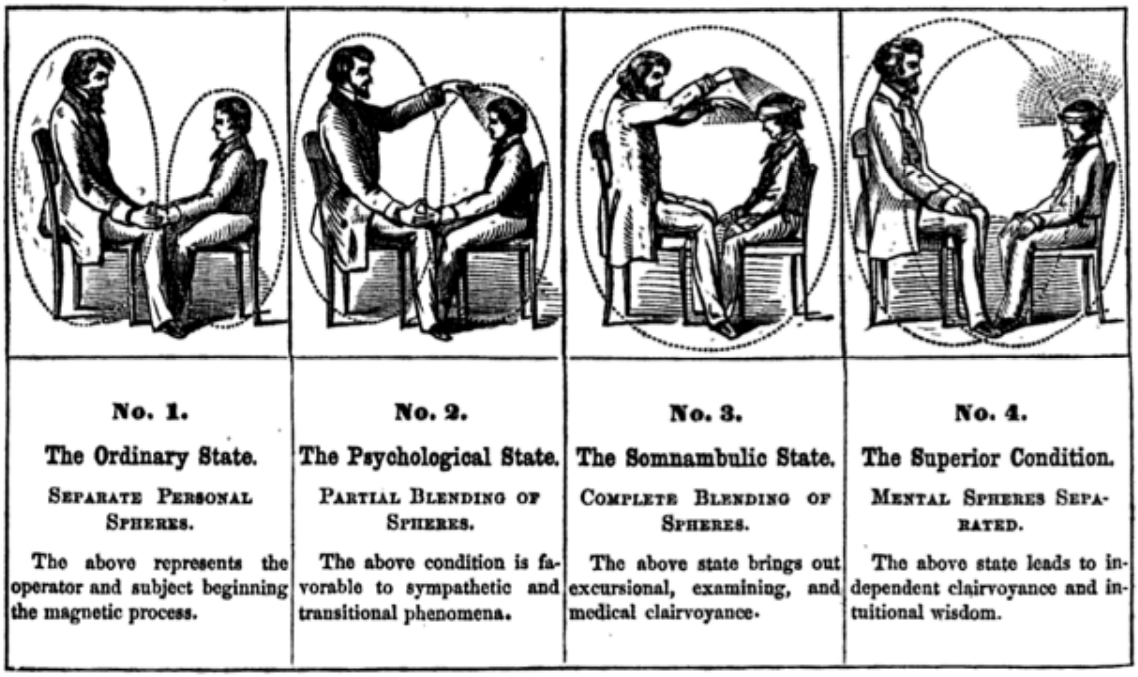

Figure 3. Four States from *The Magic Staff* (1857).

Davis recorded the milestones in his clairvoyant development, and his writings would awaken a small readership to the potential to tap knowledge beyond the mundane. Davis's books would also be the first source for people who wanted to read more about contemporary spiritual phenomena when word of the Fox sisters began to spread. He wrote that he awakened during the night of March 6, 1844. A voice instructed him to *"Arise! dress—thyself—and—follow—me!"* He fell into a trance and wandered into the mountains around Poughkeepsie, where he found himself standing alone, "unseen by any save the Eye of the Eternal Being, and unheard by any except the Ear that hears the silent echoing of all human thoughts!" At the time, he claimed, "I had no belief in the existence

of individual spirits," but that was about to change. Rambling down to the frozen Hudson River and back up into the mountains, "I was under psychologic influence, and saw common things in a new light."[24] In time, someone approached. "He appeared advanced in years, and was attired in a style corresponding nearly to that of the Friends. His hair was of a silvery white, floating in shadowy locks over his brow, and hanging gracefully about his neck and shoulders. His face was full and expressive. His moral and intellectual developments were prominent. He was a spiritual being." No words were spoken, but Davis knew this to be the spirit of a reformer.

Peering back through time to 1844, we should pause to look closely at the images Davis is invoking. "The Eye of the Eternal Being" echoes the transparent eye-ball in Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson's influential *Nature* (1836). "Psychologic influence" would have meant to Davis that an external force was acting on his mind. The Friends, or Quakers, were known for their silent, solemn worship and their plain manner of dress. Their pacifism and denunciation of chattel slavery, guided by each Quaker's Inner Light, placed them in the faith-based vanguard of moral reform. The spirit visitor's "visage was full and expressive," signifying the transparency or sincerity so highly valued in the Early Republic,[25] and his "moral and intellectual developments were prominent." Among the new "sciences" to which Davis alluded at various points in his narrative were physiognomy and phrenology, which explained how the shape of the

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[24] Ibid., 227–235.

[25] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature: Addresses and Lectures* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903), 10: "I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God."; 50: "If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them. The best moments of life are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers, and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God." On the importance of sincerity to the emerging antebellum middle class, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982), 33–55.

countenance and prominence of various bumps on the skull, respectively, allowed one to determine the nature and character of an individual.

As the frigid night continued, Davis dozed and wandered until he experienced a sensation "upon the front and side of my head, in the region of the organ of ideality" emanating from "a man of ordinary stature but of spiritual appearance," who gave Davis a magic staff containing the names of every disease and a palliative or cure for each and charged him to spend his life using it for the good of mankind. Davis later identified this spirit as the Greek healer Galen. A feeling of warmth from the other side induced Davis to turn, and he saw a man whose "head particularly attracted my attention, for I had never beheld such a harmonious combination of moral and intellectual developments. The cerebrum indicated a most vigorous and gigantic intellect—as also an exalted power of conception, great ease of expression—and a high degree of spirituality." This was the spirit of Emanuel Swedenborg, who told Davis, "Thy mission hath been shown thee. Great is the Universe wherein thou shalt labor and do whatsoever thy most *interior* understanding shall conceive to be good, and true, and profitable." Swedenborg's spirit promised to hover nearby to guide Davis, then used language which to an evangelical would have signified Davis was to bring about a new millennial dispensation: "By thee will a new light appear; it shall be new because it will brighten and purify that already in being, and reflect intellectually upon that heretofore conceived; and it will establish that which has been, and still is supposed to be the wildest hallucination, viz., The law and 'kingdom of heaven' on earth—Peace on earth and good will to men." Entirely absent, however, was any mention of God or Christ or the Holy Spirit. As Davis set off to return to Poughkeepsie, he climbed over a fence and his coat snagged on a rail. Angry and

embarrassed, he asked the spirits for assistance and handed the staff to the healing spirit so he could use both hands to free himself. The spirit did not return the magic staff, but left Davis feeling assured that "the beautiful and comprehensive Staff would ultimately be mine, and that, too, because I should be worthy of its possession."[26]

The next evening he told his magnetizer it was time to make some changes. First, Davis would spend no more time gratifying the "wonder-seekers" who nightly paid for his clairvoyant analyses of what they had eaten for supper or readings of the time indicated by the watches concealed in their pockets. Next, his powers were to be used exclusively for diagnosing and healing the sick. Third, the length of his trances would be limited to just two-and-a-half hours at each sitting. Finally, their time would be compensated by "the charge of a moderate fee to those only who were in easy circumstances."[27]

The highest and deepest mesmeric state Davis called "the superior condition." He claimed to have first *permanently* entered the superior condition on November 28, 1845. A few people had been invited to "Lectures by A. J. Davis, the Clairvoyant." Davis asked readers of his autobiography to imagine a small, sparsely appointed room on the island of Manhattan. Davis, a "pale-faced and thin-bodied youth," sat near his new mesmeric operator, Dr. Lyon. At a table sat Rev. William Fishbough, a Universalist minister from New Haven, Connecticut, whose task it was to transcribe what Davis would say while entranced. There were also "three men half-fascinated with the ever-charming process of magnetization." Dr. Lyon blindfolded Davis, and "the inner folds of

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[26] *Magic Staff,* 236–249.

[27] Ibid., 250.

his intellectual organ begin to tremble and expand like opening flowers. They emit a soft atmospheric ether, which rapidly saturates the air of the room, and ascends, like the water-spout at sea, toward the heavens," a "radiant shaft of spiral light reaching all the way from the sleeping youth's head to a Focus of Thought beyond the stars." Drawing his readers into the experience, Davis wrote, "There! do you see that? An answering shaft Descends! His benumbed hands do quiver with a new sensation, and the muscles of his face do vibrate and tremble with the inflowing power." The witnesses were "still as pall-bearers" and a "grim-visaged" Dr. Lyon asked what was happening. "This night" Davis replied, "I reach my superior condition." Davis then invited his reader to review the magnetic diagrams that illustrated this part of his tale.[28]

Davis claimed that in the superior condition, "My intuitions ascend like a light column of ether toward the upper realm, and I come in contact with an atmosphere of Thought!" Any question, "scientific, ethical, psychical, poetical, prophetic, literary, &c." with which he came "into intuitional *rapport"* was "subjectable to my voluntary examination."[29]

As Davis began to recount this experience he might almost have been describing an individual undergoing a religious conversion, and about to receive something of great value. But the process was definitely unlike that reported by evangelicals, who began their spiritual pilgrimage with a sense of overwhelming sin, and dread of the just condemnation from which Christ Jesus would save them. Davis was using a different vocabulary to conceptualize and convey how he came to the superior state. He did not repent of sin and pray for forgiveness through the grace of God. It was not spiritual

[28] Ibid., 302–305.

[29] Ibid., 310, 311

oneness with Christ that Davis sought and found, but rather the ability for his mind to employ the newer concept of the ether. He was imagining the mysterious fluid that flowed from mesmerizer to subject, sometimes called odic fluid or thought to be electricity, as another way to reach a cosmically heightened state of clairvoyance that allowed him to connect with all knowledge, to see chemical structures, to read the record of the ages, to know everything. It is not surprising that on the verge of receiving such great powers he should have experienced the trembling and disorientation characteristic of some ecstatic conversion experiences.

Davis was influenced by, and attracted to his inner circle, Universalist ministers. Davis's early exposure to religion had left him with a dread of death and an uneasiness about the afterlife that made Universalism's promise of salvation for all by a loving creator comforting. His visions, explained historian John B. Buescher, "took on a Universalist tone. He saw the sanctified glory in which all beings already partake through an indwelling of the spirit and by which they will, in the future, be brought into salvation." Universalist minister Samuel B. Brittan, while pastor of a congregation in Albany, New York, had spent twelve days in a "state of profound trance" in conjunction with an illness. After awakening, he described a spiritual visitor, majestic and benevolent, who had often stood near him during his long trance. Brittan was a changed man, and found himself drawn to the teachings of Andrew Jackson Davis. Leaving the ministry, Brittan helped find funding to publish Davis's first book, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind.* It appeared in late summer, 1847. The principles set forth in Davis's book urged a revolution in the way people understood this world and the next. According to the historian Robert W. Delp, "Within a short time the

obscure Davis became the 'prophet' of a 'Harmonial' dispensation which he continued to propagate in books, articles, and public addresses." Davis had a theoretical structure in place when the Fox sisters started rapping, and his Harmonial philosophy "provided the foundation" for many believers in the Spiritualist movement as it began its rapid spread.[30]

Davis was part of the group that in late 1847 started what, though it predated the activities of the Fox sisters, is considered the first Spiritualist newspaper. The *Univercoelum* took its name from the spiritual sun at the center of the six spiritual spheres that were revealed to Davis (and echoed the spiritual spheres described in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg). Samuel B. Brittan became the editor. During its brief existence, the *Univercoelum* "extolled Fourierist socialism and millennialist rhetoric of a

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[30] *Other Side of Salvation*, 21; *Modern American Spiritualism*, 61–62; *Other Side of Salvation,* 38; Robert W. Delp, "A Spiritualist in Connecticut: Andrew Jackson Davis, the Hartford Years, 1850–1854," *The New England Quarterly* 53:3 (September 1980), 345. A summation of the Harmonial philosophy appeared in an early number of *The Spirit Messenger* (August 31, 1850), 29: "The Law of Harmony." Superior to all other laws established in creation, and existing as the legitimate result of their action, is the great law of Harmony. This law applies not only to the outward universe, but also to Deity himself, as it constitutes one of the essential and inherent principles of His nature. It is in fact the *end* attained by the innumerable parts of creation—the *effect*, produced by the natural operation of the grand WHOLE.

The final purpose of God being resolved into a unity, all things tend harmoniously towards one end Though occupying different spheres, and existing in different stages of development, the varied forms of nature have no conflicting aims, but combine to work out the great and beautiful result, intended by the Divine Mind. Each part in the mechanism of creation, bears a relation to all other parts; each is essential to form the whole, and each performs its appropriate office, while all unite, and act in unison and harmony, to accomplish the proposed design. . . .

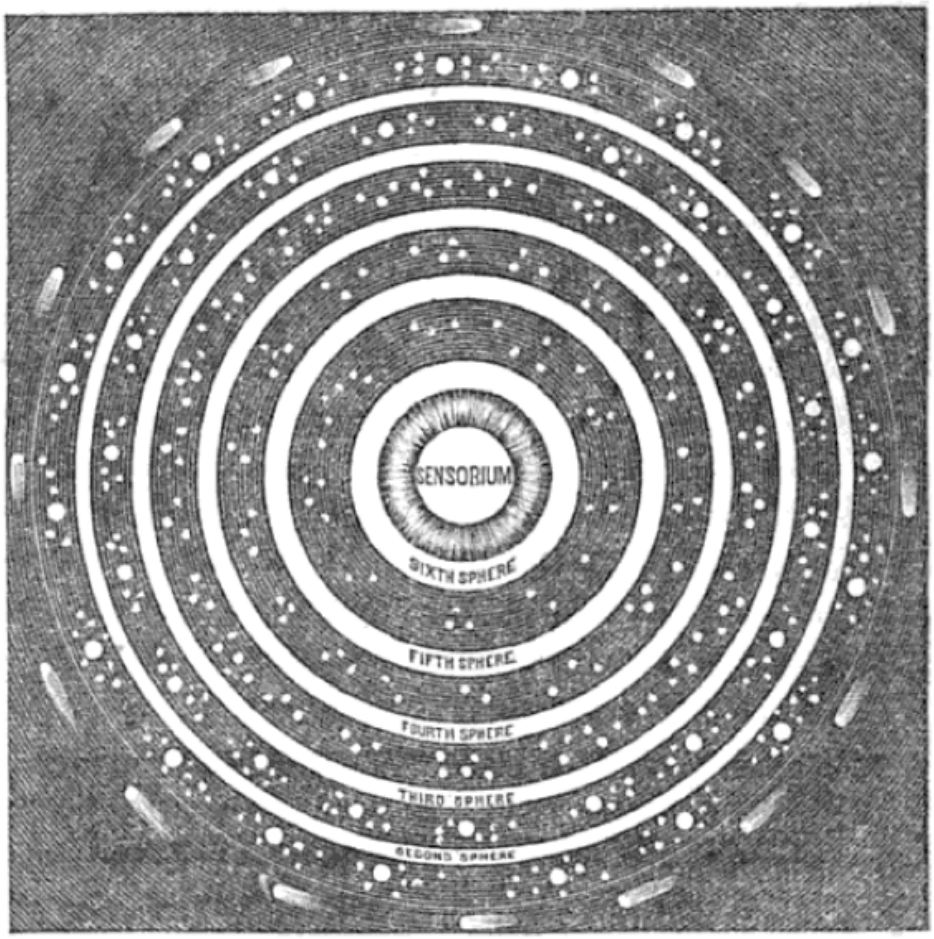

Figure 4: Celestial spheres from *The Magic Staff* (1857).

new age dawning " and championed "mesmerism, phrenomagnetism, and Swedenborgianism" as well as health reform. Like most of the Spiritualist publications that would come and go over the next decades, Spiritualist Emma Hardinge Britten (who was not, as is commonly but erroneously believed, Mrs. Samuel B. Brittan) reflected, it did not last long because the principals were "richer in mental than material endowments." But the names of many of those associated with it—Andrew Jackson Davis, Samuel B. Brittan, Thomas Lake Harris, Thomas Holley Chivers—reappear in this study.[31]

[31] *Magic Staff,* 340; *A Republic of Mind and Spirit,* 215; *Modern American Spiritualism*, 26.

Thomas Holley Chivers also contributed poetry to *The Spirit Messenger*, which commenced publication August 10, 1850 in Springfield, Massachusetts to fill the void left by the demise of the *Univercoelum* and created a new vehicle for contributions from A. J. Davis when in the "superior condition." The paper's stated intention was "engaging in an earnest search for *Truth,* and unfolding in our humble way, the Religion of Nature and the Philosophy of Reason." The contents of this first issue give a snapshot of the state of Spiritualist development and focus in 1850, filtered through the Harmonial influence of Andrew Jackson Davis. The lengthy lead item, written by Davis, was followed by one on "Spiritual Clairvoyance," which promised "occasional communications emanating from minds which have been illuminated and impressed with truths of the highest importance to the human race, through the agency of what may be termed Spiritual Clairvoyance, a condition corresponding almost precisely with that of *physical death.*" Spiritual Clairvoyance was another name for the superior condition, which the writer explained had on many occasions been attained by Emanuel Swedenborg, whose philosophical writings "have been the admiration of the world," and were the result of experiences in this condition. Swedenborg had called his awakening "the opening of his spiritual sight." Through the writings of A. J. Davis in the *superior condition,* it had been revealed that man has both a *natural* body that is impermanent and a *spiritual* body that is eternal. Thus "death is stripped of its imaginary horrors, and the desire for proofs of immortality and ultimate beatification, which is felt by every human being whom God has created, is at once gratified." A discussion of "Guardian Spirits" assured readers, "We are never alone. In our silent meditations, our solitary rambles, and even our hours of profoundest slumber, when no eye of the corporeal body rests upon us, we are not

unseen. Beautiful spirits of our departed friends, with forms of angelic loveliness, are commissioned by the Supreme Spirit of the universe, to watch over us and our inmost thoughts." The next article, "Spiritual Communication," announced that "A point has been reached in the progress of the race, at which the spiritual world is seen to sustain an intimate relation to the physical, and the presence and power of departed spirits are abundantly demonstrated. . . . Let us not shrink from the duty of investigation, but candidly search the evidences which are here given of a higher existence, that hope and truth may be cherished, and humanity blessed." This was followed by a discussion of "The Manifestations of the Deity," explaining that "It is true that we cannot look upon God with the outward eye, but the mind receives a just appreciation of His presence in the manifestations of external nature." The paper also noted that the Fox sisters had returned to their residence in Rochester after an absence of almost four months during which they were visited by "thousands of intelligent people, eager to investigate the causes of the phenomena, none of whom have been able to discover any attempts at fraud or deception on the part of the ladies." By 1850, the Fox sisters were professional mediums. In June they had taken a suite of rooms at Barnum's Hotel and held three public sessions each day for up to thirty people around a large table in one of the hotel's parlors, besides private meetings between these public séances. Horace Greeley's New York *Tribune* described a séance in the chambers of Rufus W. Griswold on Broadway to which a party of gentlemen had been invited that included James Fenimore Cooper, the historian George Bancroft, eminent Episcopal divine the Rev. Dr. Hawks and William Cullen Bryant.[32] Among the "thousands of intelligent people" who visited the Foxes in

[32] "To the Patrons of the Univercoelum," *Spirit Messenger* (August 10, 1850), 6; *Spirit Messenger* (August 10, 1850), 2; Henry James, "Swedenborg's Ontology," *The North American Review* 105:216 (July

New York it is possible that some were from the South, or wrote to friends and family in the South about their encounter with the spirits.

The Spirit Messenger would continue to follow the activities of the Fox sisters; the eldest sister, Leah Fox Fish ("afterwards successively Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Underhill"), had quickly joined her sisters in their spirit rapping and sent frequent updates on their activities. Young Maggie Fox stayed with the families of the editors for a time and gave them private demonstrations of spirit communication. The network of active Spiritualists was still relatively small in 1850 but already reached into the South. The fourth issue of *The Spirit Messenger* contained a letter from T. H. C. (Thomas Holley Chivers) in Washington, Georgia. He was delighted by the new paper, "reminding me as it does of the so-much-beloved '*Univercoelum*,' whose discontinuance has caused so much regret throughout the Union." "My soul," he effused, "delights to wander over the flower-enameled field of your Elysium, where the souls of the great departed have wandered" for it is only in that field "that our enraptured souls can hold blissful converse with those beautiful angels who were once the idols of our hearts here on earth." In September, Chivers's "To My Mother in Heaven" appeared, averring he knew her spirit was "now hovering o'er me in that immortal shape that cannot die!" The following month, his "Song of Dependence on God" pondered the Deity's omnipresence, concluding that God had "fixed an instinct in his soul for Heaven" and that not to gain Heaven would be to deny "that power from Thee!"[33]

1867), 106; *Spirit Messenger* (August 10, 1850), 3; *Spirit Messenger* (August 10, 1850), 8; *Talking to the Dead,* 106, 109; *Modern American Spiritualism*, 63.

[33] Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism,* 179; *Spirit Messenger* (August 31, 1850), 31; *Spirit Messenger* (September 21, 1850), 55. The poem was misattributed to "J. H. Chivres, M. D."; *Spirit Messenger* (October 5, 1850), 71. This was attributed to "T. H. Chivres, M. D."

Chivers, a southerner, was a part of these conversations and an early believer in spirit communication, but he is best known as a friend of Edgar Allen Poe, with whom he shared literary interests and a fascination with the metaphysical. They read and commented on each other's work, but their friendship soured "when each began to regard the other's artistic borrowings as plagiarism." Chivers was born in Georgia in 1809, son of a cotton planter and mill owner. He was raised in a Baptist home and exposed to frontier revivals. After graduating from Transylvania University in 1830 with a medical degree, Chivers briefly set up a practice in Georgia. He had inherited money, and preferred to travel, live in the Northeast, write, and publish his own books. Chivers married a woman from Massachusetts in 1837, and lived in New York and Connecticut from 1838 to 1842. His sister died, then his mother in 1838. Between 1842 and 1844 four of his children died.[34] Chivers moved back and forth between Georgia and the Northeast. He returned to Georgia in 1845, and again lived in New York and Connecticut between 1850 and 1852 and in Boston in 1853. He was back in Georgia by 1855 and continued to write and publish until he died in Decatur, Georgia in 1858.

At some point Chivers had become a believer in the revelations of Emanuel Swedenborg, who appeared in spirit to Andrew Jackson Davis. Elizabeth Fox Genovese and Eugene Genovese claimed Spiritualism's "modest impact in the South" was largely

[34] "Thomas Holley Chivers (1809–1858)," *The New Georgia Encyclopedia* http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-513 (accessed after 7/11/2002); Larry T. McGehee, "Thomas Holley Chivers-Imitator or Imitated?" *Southern Seen* http://www.wofford.edu/southernSeen/content.aspx?id=13104# (accessed October 17, 2005): "Like many Americans of this era, Chivers became enamored with Swedenborgianism, a mysticism that saw a correlation between things worldly and things other-worldly, between the natural world and the spiritual world. The two worlds co-exist during a person's natural life span, but the spiritual remains once the material body is gone. The mystic often feels he is living more and more on the spiritual side as he matures and passes easily back and forth between the two. Poetry thus becomes a way of using worldly words to tell about the next world."; Mark Canada, "Thomas Holley Chivers (1809–1858)," in *Southern Writers: A New Biographical Dictionary,* ed. Joseph M. Flora, Amber Vogel, Bryan Albin Giemza (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 71–72.

influenced by Swedenborg, "whose ideas crossed the Atlantic along with mesmerism in the eighteenth century and were promoted in the nineteenth century by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry James, Sr., and, more directly, by Andrew Jackson Davis." Among the elite white males named by the Genoveses this could well have been the case. Chivers might have come to Swedenborg through his friendship with fellow southerner Edgar Allen Poe, but his many years among northeasterners are a more likely source of exposure to the writings of the Swedish seer. Eugene Genovese asserted that Chivers was a respected poet in both the South and New England, while his poetry expressed "specifically southern sensibilities" and his prose contributions to Georgia newspapers "staunchly upheld southern rights and slavery." Chivers good naturedly wrote in 1855 to a friend in New York that not "all men born in the South become offended at every fanatical turpitude perpetrated by crack-brained Northerners."[35] He clearly did not place the search for higher spiritual truth undertaken by *The Univercoelum* and *The Spirit Messenger* in that light. He, like many other southerners, had no problem adopting ideas from the North that suited him and rejecting those that did not. Connected to Andrew Jackson Davis and his close associates, Chivers was a romantic, a Swedenborgian, a poet, inclined to the mystical and grieving the loss of several close family members. He was ripe for the early promises of spirit communication.

The Spirit Messenger made only a few mentions of the South, and those were more reflective of the familiar paranormal—foreknowledge of events and stress

[35] McGehee; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 599; Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820–1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 67; *Mind of the Master Class,* 91.

apparitions (the appearance of a dying person to a distant loved one)—than of structured spirit communication. An item in 1851 related, without comment or explanation, a curious story from Norfolk, Virginia. "A Mr. C. H. Gherkin, well known at that place as a Professor of Music, went to an undertaker, during the forenoon, and, though apparently in excellent health, ordered his coffin, stating that he felt an unmistakable presentiment that he would die in the afternoon. The undertaker, regarding it as a jest, took no further notice of the matter, and in a short time forgot about the affair. Mr. Gherkin, after leaving the establishment, went home, was shortly afterwards taken sick, and at an early hour in the evening, was a corpse. The matter is altogether inexplicable, as Mr. G. appeared in excellent health, and was not subject to aberrations of the intellect." C. H. Gerkin was a German-born music teacher. His wife Fanny, a Virginian, was a few years older than her husband. They appear on the 1850 Norfolk census, and a city directory published in 1851 listed him as a professor of music, living at 59 S. Church Street. He was a young man, around thirty years old, when he died. The editors of *The Spirit Messenger* found Gerkin's story compelling, and thought their readers would find it so as well, not because it necessarily involved communicating with spirits but rather because Gerkin's foreknowledge of his death was suggestive of second sight or revelation in the superior state. The fascination with all things paranormal would remain a characteristic of the Spiritualist press, and presumably of its readership, and over time these inexplicable occurrences would be more likely to be attributed to the agency of spirits. The issue of November 15, 1851 recounted the story of a stress apparition experienced by a man in New Orleans. Asleep in a locked bedroom, he awoke to find his son—who was in Jamaica "engaged in some mercantile transactions"—standing at his bedside. "Father, I

am dying!" said the son before he faded away. The father recorded the precise time of this event. Subsequently news arrived that the son had died at the exact moment he had appeared to his father, and his last words were, "Father, I am dying!"[36]

These stories share more than a focus on the paranormal. They involve individuals who lived in port towns, in an age when travel and commerce relied on the speed and relative comfort of transportation by water. Water—oceans and rivers and canals—was the great vector. Steam was the power that enabled vessels to carry people, goods, and ideas both with and against the currents in the 1850s. Most of the southerners who were mentioned in, or wrote to or subscribed to, early Spiritualist newspapers lived in or near seaport towns on the Atlantic or the Gulf of Mexico, or along the Mississippi River and its navigable tributaries. The most important Spiritualist newspapers were in New York and Boston. For southerners, participating in the growing national community of those who wanted to know more about spiritual phenomena continued to require looking to the North for information and affirmation.

After *The Spirit Messenger* ceased publication, Samuel B. Brittan launched his own vehicle for Davis's harmonial philosophy, *The Shekinah.* Brittan then joined forces with wealthy New York businessman Charles Partridge, another former Universalist, to found the *Spiritual Telegraph* in 1852. Partridge & Brittan also offered a lengthy catalogue of Spiritualist books by the mid-1850s, and some southerners were reading

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[36] *The Spirit Messenger and Harmonial Guide* (October 4, 1851), 4; Wm. S. Forrest, *The Norfolk Directory, For 1851–1852: Containing the Names, Professions, Places of Business, and Residences of the Merchants, Traders, Manufacturers, Mechanics, Heads of Families, &c., Together with A List of the Public Buildings, the names and Situation of the Streets, Lanes, and Wharves; and a Register of the Public Officers, Companies, and Associations, in the City of Norfolk. Also, Information Relative to Portsmouth: with A Variety of other Useful, Statistical and Miscellaneous Information* (Norfolk: 1851), 57; *Spirit Messenger* (November 15, 1851), 173.

them. Others seeking new ways of understanding human potential were already exploring the offerings of Fowler & Wells, whose focus was phrenology but who also printed guides to alternative cures and to mesmerism and clairvoyance, social reform and eventually spiritual intercourse.[37]

By 1852 the number of private circles and mediums for hire had burgeoned, particularly in the Northeast. Spiritualist newspapers served as a focal point and discussion forum for the far-flung "community" of Spiritualists and others who believed that *something* was happening though *what* was not exactly clear. Was it spirits or, as ministers darkly warned, demons who were making raps and turning and tipping and even levitating heavy tables? Mediums were developing new ways of receiving communications, the most efficient of which were spirit-controlled writing and speaking. Were the phenomena caused by magnetism, electricity, the odic force or something else entirely? Most readers and correspondents were convinced it was the dear departed.

Correspondents from the South were a novelty, especially in the earliest years of Spiritualism. A long letter written in July 1851 by Methodist minister John B. Wolff of Wheeling, Virginia ran in the second number of the *Spiritual Telegraph,* and several followed over the next few years under titles such as "A Voice from the South," "Letter from the South," and "Spiritual Things in Virginia." Wolff claimed he had no idea how his letter found its way into the pages of the *Spiritual Telegraph.* Rapping and circles had begun in Wheeling when he developed an interest in the subject in 1850. In Wheeling, "where the cause stands without foreign aid, the generic principles of this method were

[37] *Other Side of Salvation,* 71; Orson Squire Fowler, *Hereditary Descent: Its Laws and Facts Applied to Human Improvement* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1847), 291–300; O. S. and L. N. Fowler, *The Illustrated Self-instructor in Phrenology and Physiology, with One Hundred Engravings and a Chart of the Character* (New York: Fowler and Wells, Publishers, 1857), 135–138;

known before any of us had read Davis on the 'Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse.' First we proved the fact; the next question was, how is it done?" Both *The Spirit Messenger* and *The Shekinah* ran long articles by Davis, excerpted his published writings, and advertised his work for sale. The greeting on Wolff's letter is "Gentlemen," suggesting he might have written to the editors of the *Spirit Messenger* or the *Shekinah*; this would explain how his letter came to be in Brittan's possession and available to the *Spiritual Telegraph.* Wolff began his letter by claiming local leadership of the movement, having been "identified with the rappings from their incipiency, in Wheeling." "[A]n esteemed colleague in Connecticut" (Davis? Fishbough?) told Brittan of having seen Wolff's first letter in the *Telegraph* and written to him, feeling "a desire to know if he still entertained the same views regarding the spiritual phenomena that he did ten months since." The gentleman in Connecticut forwarded Wolff's reply to this query to the *Spiritual Telegraph,* which promptly printed it as "A Voice from the South."[38]

News of Spiritualism probably did not reach Wolff at the end of a lengthy voyage down the Atlantic, across the Gulf of Mexico, and up a succession of rivers. The Erie Canal had transformed the economy and settlement of New York state, moving goods and people efficiently from New York City up the Hudson River to Albany and then by canal all the way to Lake Erie. Ohio hurried to construct canals to link Cleveland, on Lake Erie, with Cincinnati and the Ohio River. Wheeling is on the Ohio River. By 1841, travelers and information could move from New York to Wheeling in five to ten days.[39] The Upper South—Wheeling, Louisville, Baltimore and even St. Louis—though not built

[38] "Spiritual Manifestations in Wheeling, Va.," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 15, 1852), 3.

[39] Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 218, 224.

on plantation agriculture was in 1850 most definitely part of the South. People there could and did own slaves, even if many of their neighbors and much of what they read came from the North.

Before steam power created a flood of affordable printed material, books and periodicals were often imported from Europe. Volumes of Emanuel Swedenborg's recounting of his visits to heaven and communications with angels and spirits were in the libraries of wealthy Virginians by the mid-1700s, and there were scattered New Churchmen in Virginia before 1800. The most important and thus the best known is Robert Carter, but there were many others whose stories have not been recovered by historians. Carter was a Deist who withdrew from an active role in public life on the eve of the Revolution. In 1776 he gave up his position as an Anglican parish vestryman and began to rename some of his plantations after signs of the zodiac. His spiritual journey included "a most gracious illumination" in 1777, during which "the Lord . . . wrought a mighty work" on his soul. He read religious books and took part in prayer meetings, but his soul found no real peace. Carter attended a Baptist Association conference in the spring of 1778, and on that trip "believed he was visited by Jesus Christ in the flesh" and he was baptized that autumn by Reverend Lewis Lunsford of the Baptist Church. By the mid-1780s there were fissures and discontentment in his relations with the Baptists, and as early as 1786 Carter is known to have shown some interest in the occult and spirit communication. A copy of Swedenborg's *Treatise on Influx,* lent by a neighbor, prompted Carter to begin a correspondence with members of a New Church society founded in Baltimore in 1791. It is not clear whether it was his Baptist or Swedenborgian beliefs that led Carter to gradually manumit four hundred fifty-five slaves shortly

thereafter, for he seems to have maintained a connection to both churches. Eventually Carter moved to Baltimore and devoted himself to advancing the Church of the New Jerusalem, but there was "a great deal of disharmony" in the Baltimore society—particularly over animal magnetism. Carter believed "animal electricity and magnetism is of the devil," while others saw in animal magnetism the potential to do good for humanity. The Baltimore Society splintered, some of the members remaining with Carter, and the rest following other leaders.[40] Carter died in 1804.

The interest in mesmerism persisted in the New Church. Members who had been magnetized found an explanation of their experiences in Swedenborg's visionary states. "Altogether there is little doubt that mesmerism contributed greatly to the growth of the New Church at that time," asserted one twentieth-century scholar. An 1833 *New Jerusalem Magazine* article, "Somnambulism and Animal Magnetism," acknowledged the subjects were of particular interest to followers of Swedenborg but denied "any connection between these practices and the doctrines and truths of the New Church."[41]

Most early receivers of Swedenborg's doctrines in the South were among the planter class, so they tended to read and pray and construct their understanding of New Church belief and practice in relative isolation. Small societies formed in Abingdon, Virginia, and the southern river towns of "St. Charles, Mo., Knoxville, Tenn., and Louisville, Ky." in 1822. The New Church took to evangelizing, and a minister traveled through western Pennsylvania, western Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky in 1831. The

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[40] Shomer S. Zwelling, "Robert Carter's Journey: From Colonial Patriarch to New Nation Mystic," *American Quarterly* 38:4 (Autumn 1986), 622–624, 626–629; The followers of Swedenborg organized the Church of the New Jerusalem, also called the New Church; Marguerite Beck Block, *The New Church in the New World: A Study of Swedenborgianism in America* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1932), 85; "Robert Carter," 631; *New Church in the New World,* 88–89.

[41] *New Church in the New World,* 88–89, 131.

competition for converts in these areas led New Church missionaries to adopt the proven techniques of evangelicals, including the camp meeting, and gave the New Church in these areas a "wholly new emotional and evangelistic aspect." The New Church published an annual convention report that included the names and locations of societies and receivers. In the 1830s and 1840s there were individual receivers scattered throughout Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia as well as the North and what is now thought of as the Midwest. By 1844 there were small circles of receivers in Frankfort and Louisville, Nashville and Knoxville, Natchez, Charleston and Savannah.[42]

These scattered outposts of the Church of the New Jerusalem were just one manifestation of the restless seeking of Christians who had not found adequate food for their souls in traditional denominational religion. Swedenborgians were hardly alone in their quest for a deeper, more satisfying connection with the mysteries of faith. The South was home not only to evangelical Christians. Many groups more commonly associated with New England or Pennsylvania began to call the South their home even before waves of Scots-Irish immigrants. Since Europeans first came to the region, there have been believers who saw in the vast rural spaces an opportunity to build lives and worship according to their own interpretation of God's Word and will. Quakers arrived in Virginia in the 1600s and were early settlers of the Carolinas and Georgia. Mennonites were among the first to whites to build homes in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Moravians planted a settlement in Georgia in the 1730s and later established an enduring

[42] Ibid., 86–87, 115; *Annals of the New Church with a Chronological Account of the Life of Emanuel Swedenborg,* Vol. I., 1688–1850, ed. Carl Theophilus Ohdner (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: Academy of the New Church, 1904), 395.

presence in North Carolina. Members of the Church of the Brethren (Dunkers) had moved into Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, Tennessee and Kentucky by 1800.[43] Shakers reaped a harvest of souls in Kentucky in the wake of the Great Revival. While the numbers for all these groups were larger in the North, southern members maintained networks of communication with distant brethren who had chosen the same path to salvation.

New sects emerged, and it is among some of these "other Christians," evolving their own ways to worship, that we find continuing evidence of the desire to discover a more direct link to heaven and its inhabitants. In an 1844 episode that presaged Andrew Jackson Davis and Spiritualism and is evocative of the Shakers, the Mormons, the Millerites and Swedenborg himself, many members of the New Church in New York City were drawn into a movement led by Silas Jones, "who claimed to have gained open intercourse with heaven by the aid of an astrologer and sorcerer in Brooklyn." Jones and his followers demonstrate the same "conflation of religion and magic" that Albanese observed in Joseph Smith, suggesting it was not uncommon. This renegade New Church congregation met "privately for worship, for the administration of the Sacraments, 'in a new and better way,' and for the reception of immediate revelations from spirits and angels." The New Church officially disapproved, since Swedenborg himself had warned that it was dangerous for ordinary people to open themselves to communication with spirits. Swedenborg knew from personal experience, he said, that some spirits are evil, and "regard man with deadly hatred; and desire nothing more than to destroy him, both

[43] Stephen Beauregard Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery: A Study in Institutional History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1896), 1; Harry Anthony Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia,* Volume 1 (Harrisonburg, Va.: McClure Printing Co., 1959), 9; John Lewis Gillin, *The Dunkers in America: A Sociological Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University, 1906), 145–146.

soul and body." The *New Jerusalem Magazine* ran a series of articles on the dangers of "Open Intercourse with the Spiritual World." Many New Church members did believe in the reality of the spiritual manifestations that began with the Fox sisters, but that does not mean that they personally sought communication with the spirit world. The Church officially disapproved, but public perception blurred the nice distinction they tried to draw between belief and participation. One outsider in 1859 predicted that "Spiritualism, now fast calling to its aid the greatest men of our nation, and Swedenborgianism, will, by their strong and natural affinity coalesce. . . ."[44]

Swedenborg saw himself as a visionary, and spent years writing about the Bible as seen through the light of his heavenly revelations. For many New Church members, these writings were the core canon of their faith; the possibilities of spirit communion did not outweigh its dangers. For other Swedenborgians, and for many outside the New Church, Swedenborg's tales of communicating with angels and spirits suggested the possibility that they too might do so within a matrix of Christian belief. And to some, like Andrew Jackson Davis, Swedenborg helped lead to circumventing Christ as intercessor to reach into the deepest secrets of spirit and matter. Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1836 had pronounced the followers of Swedenborg "deeply interesting as a sect, which, I think, must contribute more than all other sects to the new faith which must arise out of all." It was the Rev. George Bush, a distinguished New York Swedenborgian and professor of Hebrew, whose endorsement of Davis's *Revelations* helped to ensure its

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[44] *Annals,* 500; Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven: Being the Substance of the Official Report of a Credible Eye-witness,* ed. Benjamin Fiske Barrett (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1870), 151; *New Church in the New World,* 133; Christopher Columbus Graham, *Man from His Cradle to His Grave* (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1859), 257–258.

positive reception by the reading public. Bush's own book, *Mesmer and Swedenborg,* also was published in 1847. The book's premise was that "the most important facts disclosed in the mesmeric state are of a spiritual nature, and can only receive an adequate solution by being viewed in connection with the state of disembodied spirits and the laws of their intercourse with each other."[45]

Interesting things were happening in the North by 1850, and knowing about them helps to make sense of how they affected spiritual seekers in the South. Our concern is how and when the body of contemporary thought that gave birth to a belief in supramundane communication appeared among and influenced southerners. Thomas Holley Chivers was the first elite southerner with ties to the people around Andrew Jackson Davis. But he was not the only person in the South before 1850 to embrace the possibility of accessing the secrets of the mind and even the spirits of the dead. There were Shakers in Kentucky by 1805, converts from the local population. There were Swedenborgians scattered throughout the South. There were local cunning folk among the white population and conjurers among the black. Fortune tellers plied their trade, especially in New Orleans. mesmerists and phrenologists visited the port cities. One can even find the occasional homegrown prophet or proto-Spiritualist.

Mesmerism is just one of the developments crucial to understanding the growth and development of Spiritualist beliefs. Before there was widespread interest in mesmerism as a way to unlock the mysteries of the human mind and spirit, there was

[45] Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, 159; George Bush, *Mesmer and Swedenborg: Or, The Relation of the Developments of Mesmerism to the Doctrines and Discourses of Swedenborg* (New York: John Allen, 1847), iii.

phrenology, which attempted to tie human characteristics to specific areas of the brain, and the strength of traits to the size of bumps on the skull over these "organs" that governed character and personality. The Fowler brothers of New York were the enthusiastic popularizers of this "science." Their first premise was that phrenology proved what was at the time only a theory: "*The brain is the organ of the mind,* or that corporeal instrument which the mind employs in the exercise of thought and feeling."[46]

There is clear evidence of interest in phrenology in the South. Orson Squire Fowler lectured and did phrenological analyses at Baltimore in 1835, describing for individuals and large audiences the character traits of persons by feeling the bumps on their heads, even performing this feat blindfolded. Fowler also appeared in Portsmouth, Virginia, where his public examinations "seemed very much to astonish the citizens on account of their accuracy, and to convince them of the truth of phrenology," did phrenological analyses in Petersburg, and examined patients at the lunatic asylum in Williamsburg with professors and students from the college there. His brother, Lorenzo Niles Fowler, made an eighteen-month tour of the South and West, "during which time he was almost constantly employed in examining heads."[47]

Like intellectuals and physicians and scientists elsewhere, those in Charleston, South Carolina were interested in phrenology's "biological explanation of mental phenomena based on anatomical observation." Study and debate were lively during much of the 1830s on the subject. By the 1830s phrenology "had blossomed into a widespread

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[46] O. S. & L. N. Fowler, *Phrenology Proved, Illustrated, and Applied, Accompanied by A Chart; Embracing an Analysis of the Primary, Mental Powers in Their Various Degrees of Development, the Phenomena Produced by Their Combined Activity, and the Location of the Phrenological Organs in the Head: Together with a View of the Moral and Theological Bearing of the Science* (New York, Printed for the Authors, by W. H. Colyer, 1837), 7.

[47] Ibid., 304, 311, 383, 368.

cultural movement" and the Fowler brothers recognized its commercial potential and found ways to "bring the science to a mass audience." They understood the American desire for useful knowledge, and provided an interpretation that emphasized phrenology's "self-improvement, educational, and entertainment value." Charleston supported a number of "phrenological entrepreneurs" in the late 1830s and early 1840s. It was phrenology's popularization that diminished its "claims to scientific respectability" in Charleston as elsewhere.[48]

Interest in phrenology among intellectuals waned as it waxed among the masses, but mesmerism offered new possibilities. The idea that an invisible force or fluid moving between the mind of the mesmerizer and his subject had the potential to unlock heretofore unimagined powers in the subject's mind—and that anyone might try it—seemed to democratize scientific investigation and sold books and periodicals. Mesmerists crisscrossed the Northeast, and Andrew Jackson Davis's encounter with animal magnetism launched his career as a visionary and communicator with spirits. Though not as widespread, mesmerism had devotees in the South as well. Dr. Josiah Clark Nott of Mobile, remembered most for his conviction that blacks and whites were different species, did research and wrote extensively on mesmerism.[49] Kentucky native Joseph Rodes Buchanan combined mesmerism and phrenology into "phrenomagnetism," and demonstrated that manipulating the cerebral organs of an individual who was mesmerized could induce a display of the characteristics associated with discrete organs. The public happily paid for demonstrations of these new "sciences" and their potential.

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[48] Peter McCandless, "Mesmerism and Phrenology in Antebellum Charleston: 'Enough of the Marvellous'," *The Journal of Southern History* 58:2 (May 1992), 205, 210.

[49] *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms,* Volume 3, col. and ed. Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell and T. C. Duncan Eaves (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1945), 45, ff. 145.

Sally Cantey Elmore of South Carolina encountered mesmerism while her father, States Rights Democrat Franklin Harper Elmore, served in Congress from 1835 until March 1839. The family lived in Washington City, where they pooled their domestic resources with a "large colony of Southerners" and established a "mess," or shared dining arrangements. As an old woman, she recalled the visit of a mesmerist. "Mesmer was much talked of. At one time a professional mesmerist was entertained in the parlour. The exhibition was in some ways weird, and some nervous ones were frightened out of their wits." Waddy Thompson, another South Carolina congressman, did not acquit himself in a manly fashion. Southern conventions of good breeding and honor demanded self-control, particularly in public and in mixed company. "The ladies spoke pityingly of one member of the 'mess' who underwent examination of his maladies, and was very much overcome by revelations. Gen. Waddy Thompson eventually became a *real spiritualist* and heavenly communicator–of a sort!"[50]

An early supporter of mesmerism in Charleston was writer William Gilmore Simms, who read everything he could find on the subject in 1842 and 1843, and claimed that at that time "in Charleston, every third man is a mesmerist" and that some of the city's "ablest medical professors" were convinced of the science's merits. Richard Yeadon, editor of the *Courier,* announced in 1843 that he had become a believer. The Charleston *Mercury* printed the views of opponents and skeptics. In the ongoing squabbles, proponents advocated scientific investigation and critics dished out mockery. Charleston historian Peter McCandless said that many scientific and medical men seem to

[50] "Elmore, Franklin Harper (1799–1850," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774–Present,* http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=E000158 (accessed February 9, 2010); Franklin Harper Elmore Papers, 1833–1936 #00814, Series 3, Folder 5, SHC. My thanks to Bruce Baker for sharing this source.

have shied away from public statements in support of mesmerism because they feared the ridicule of colleagues. Others were uncomfortable because it smacked of the occult. Lurking beneath all the other objections was the fear that the mesmeric subject's surrender of control (particularly if it were a woman) would make a subject the willing participant in immoral or even criminal acts at the hands of an unscrupulous operator. The argument over mesmerism fed another, begun by Yeadon's enthusiastic claims for the authenticity of P. T. Barnum's "Feejee mermaid" when it was exhibited in Charleston. The disagreement in the pages of the *Courier* and the *Mercury* turned to the mermaid, and "personal animosities linked the mermaid and mesmerist controversies." McCandless pointed out that public credulity sparked a growing concern among the elite, not just over mesmerism and the mermaid. Their fears of "unbridled democracy" were "simultaneously fed by Millerism, practical phrenology, and other contemporary follies."[51]

Evidence suggests that the appearance of a mesmerist to give lectures and demonstrations rekindled public interest, but enthusiasm was not sustained without the presence of a professional practitioner. Charleston merchant Charles Schirmer noted in his diary in February 1846: "*Mesmerism. All alive at present on the subject*—Professor Debonville is lecturing in Hibernian Hall, and performing apparently some wonderful acts Took all to see him on the evg of 16th." Schirmer remarked at the end of March, "Mesmerism slacking off."[52]

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[51] "Mesmerism and Phrenology in Antebellum Charleston," 213, 215, 217, 218, 222, 229.

[52] Jacob Frederic Schirmer,"The Schirmer Diary (Continued),"*The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 76:4 (October 1975), 251, 252.

Mesmerism was at its height in Missouri during the 1844 and 1845 session of the state legislature. Willis L. Williams was handsome, well dressed and "in conversation he was brilliant and entertaining." Born in North Carolina, he was a graduate of Amherst College and had studied law in Washington City and then practiced in Tennessee. In 1842 he had come to St. Louis, and by 1844 was elected to the legislature. An acquaintance remembered an evening when the choice of amusement had fallen to Williams. Placing a chair in the center of the room, Williams "invited anyone who wished to be mesmerized to take the seat." After several people had been magnetized, a most attractive and "very modest young lady" said, "You can't put me to sleep, Mr. Williams," so of course he graciously asked if he might make the attempt. After a few passes of his hand, her eyelids closed. It is difficult to explain what happened next, as there were about "twenty ladies and half the number of gentlemen" in the room, and it would seem to prove the potential for young women to be taken advantage of by unscrupulous mesmerizers. Williams announced that the young lady would remember nothing when awakened and reminded the assemblage that if she knew what was happening she would "not let me, a married man, kiss her" and proceeded to do so, loudly. She sat as still as "chiseled marble." He then invited the governor and other gentlemen to "taste of the nectar" and sampled it once more himself before using a reverse motion of his hand to awaken her. Williams asked the awakened subject if she knew what had just taken place. "*Of course* she did not." We are left to wonder why the matrons in the group permitted his behavior, or how modest and virtuous the young lady really was. "After leaving the house in company with Mr. Williams," his friend reminisced, "the first thing he said was, '*Is not mesmerism a delicious humbug?*'"

Williams made light of it, but there is no question that he was a seeker and "naturally a religious man." He was swept up in a revival soon after, and as a speaker "was doubtless the cause of many conversions. No one doubted his sincerity, for there was not a deceitful hair on his head."[53]

By the late 1840s, both phrenology and mesmerism were out of vogue among most intellectuals, if not among the rest of the people. Popular interest spread most efficiently along Young America's waterways. Thomas Cripps had recently immigrated from England to New Orleans when he attended a lecture on mesmerism in June 1843. Cripps was intrigued by this "science of the soul." That same month, a "magnetic boarding house" advertised inexpensive room and board for those willing to be the subjects of mesmeric experiments. In 1844 Cripps experimented on twenty subjects; he recorded his findings in a journal and consulted other mesmerists about his subjects. Up the Mississippi River in Natchez, resident William Johnson noted that local doctor Daniel Benbrook was delivering a series of lectures on mesmerism at the courthouse. Joseph Barthet organized a society of mesmerists, the *Société du Magnétisme de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, in 1845. By 1848 there were seventy-one members; their experiments led Barthet and others in the Society (it is not known if Cripps was among them) to become Spiritualists by 1852.[54]

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[53] William Van Ness Bay, *Reminiscences of the Bench and Bar of Missouri, with an Appendix, Containing Biographical Sketches of Nearly All of the Judges and Lawyers Who Have Passed Away, Together with Many Interesting and Valuable Letters Never Before Published of Washington, Jefferson, Burr, Granger, Clinton, and Others, Some of Which Throw Additional Light upon the Famous Burr Conspiracy* (St. Louis: F. H. Thomas and Company, 1878), 263–266.

[54] *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro,* ed. William Ransom Hogan and Edwin Adams Davis, new intro. William L. Andrews (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1979), 478; Mark Cave, "Thomas Cripps and the Science of the Soul," *The Historic New Orleans Quarterly* XVII:4 (Fall 1999), 6–7.

Some southerners who explored the possibilities of mesmerism and phrenology came from backgrounds that predisposed them to make their Christian faith the centerpiece of their thought. Jesse Ferguson and Nicholas R. Righter were two such individuals whose faith was undiminished by their explorations of these new "sciences." Both would in time become Spiritualists.

Nashville Church of Christ minister Jesse Babcock Ferguson was intrigued by the potential of mesmerism. In 1842 Jesse Ferguson and his family were conducting their own experiments in animal magnetism on a plantation in Todd County, Kentucky. Within his trusted family circle, Ferguson's experiments led him to two conclusions about what he called the "laws of mind." The first, simply put, was clairvoyance: one person's mind could perceive the thoughts and sensations in the mind of another person. Ferguson claimed all who participated had observed evidence "of a nature and amount that did not admit of a question." He and his wife Lucinda were alone in accepting a second and more startling conclusion. They believed that Lucinda, while in a trance state, had demonstrated that the human mind, "acting apart from its own and all external senses" could hold communion with *disembodied* mind.[55] Lucinda had received communications from the dead.

As a minister of the Gospel, Ferguson should have been satisfied by the New Testament's assurance of eternal life, but he saw in mesmerism—and later in Spiritualism—a way to move beyond faith and hope to empirical verification of the afterlife. Ferguson and his family regarded the results of their mesmeric investigations as

[55] J. B. Ferguson, *Spiritual Communion: A Record of Communications from the Spirit-Spheres with Incontestible Evidence of Personal Identity, Presented to the Public, with Explanatory Observations* (Nashville: Union and American Steam Press, 1854), 10–11.

"promises of future unfoldings, such as we could not definitely describe."[56] Unsure of what to make of it all, and probably of how people would react, Ferguson shared these experiments and his more unorthodox private musings only with family and friends. Publicly, he was eloquent, devout, an engaging and inspiring speaker. He and Lucinda had begun their journey toward Spiritualism.

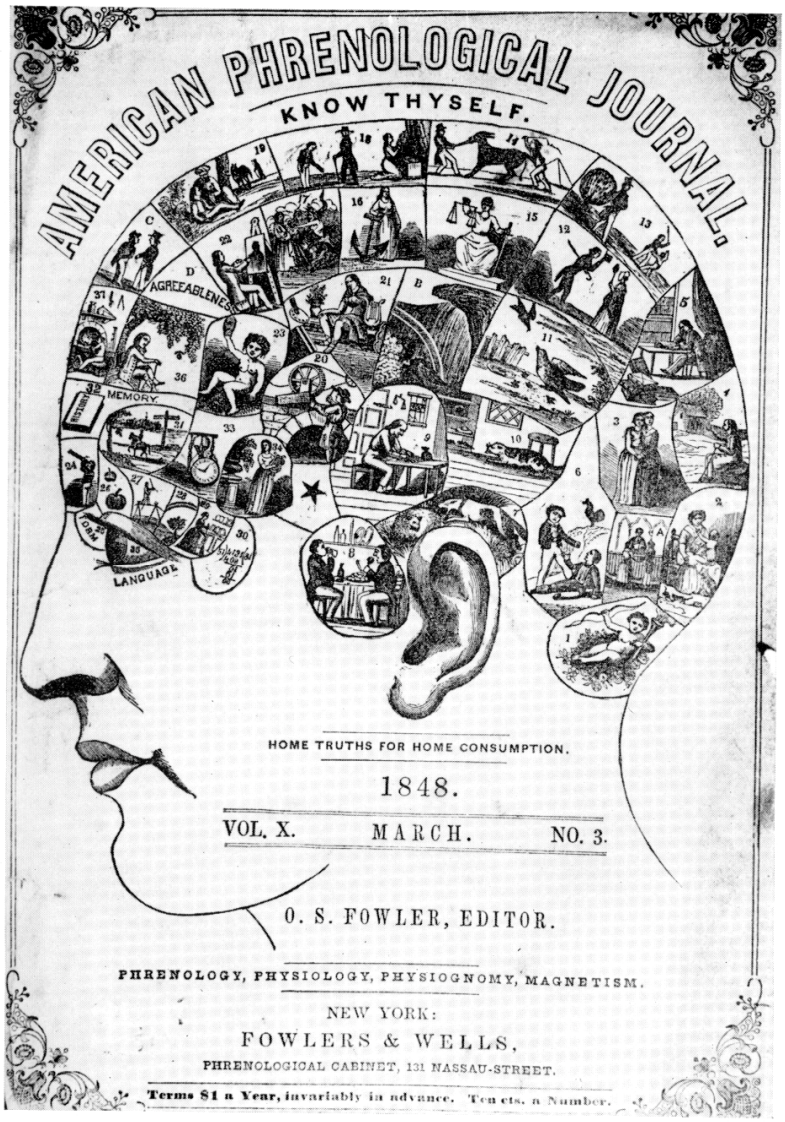

Figure 5. *American Phrenological Journal* (March 1848).

[56] Ibid., 11.

Phrenology too continued to find adherents in the South. The *American Phrenological Journal* enthused in 1848 that they received "cheering accounts from all parts of the extreme South, in relation to the progress of Phrenology." A letter from Wm. R. Rightor of Arkansas assured the journal that "The cause of Phrenology meets with many zealous supporters here. . . . A deep interest in this matter is beginning to manifest itself among our intelligent and literary men, and doubtless will create a new demand for many of your works upon this great study, which should be paramount with every rational man." Rightor was a son of Nicholas Rightor, who had surveyed and helped found the town of Helena, Arkansas on the Mississippi River. Nicholas Rightor had met Stephen F. Austin in New Orleans and accompanied him in late 1821 to the Colorado, then headed off to map the region between the Brazos and Lavaca Rivers for Austin in 1822. Nicholas Righter returned to Natchez in late 1822 to marry; Jefferson Davis was best man at the wedding. The Rightors raised their family in Helena. They attended the Protestant Episcopal Church organized in 1839 and Nicholas Rightor wrote essays on religion, so his son William grew up in a home where faith held a central position. Helena's economy relied on cotton and land speculation in the steamboat era; the community's wealth was in land and slaves. William Russell Rightor, an enthusiastic young phrenologist in 1848, would become a trader, steamboatman and inventor. With a partner from Kentucky and financing from Cincinnati, he would be awarded a contract in 1856 under his father's old friend, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, to construct a straight ship channel from Pass de l'Outre, Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico.[57] Rightor

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[57] *The American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany,* Vol. X (New York: Fowler and Wells, Publishers, 1848), 350–351; *The Handbook of Texas Online,* s. v. "Rightor, Nicholas (1792–1841)," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/fri43.html (accessed February 7, 2010);

would also eventually become a Spiritualist. In common with many others who were open to its possibilities, Rightor had influential connections and was part of the network of southern men engaged in extending the western border of the South and projects for facilitating transportation. His spiritual story shows how one man in the South picked and chose and combined to arrive at a workable faith. It also suggests that accepting any of the ways of explaining the workings of the mind and heart outside orthodox science and religion might eventually lead to consideration of the possibilities of Spiritualism.

"Everyday Pioneer Life in Texas 1822–1830, Leading Up to the Alamo," http://the-alamo-san-antonio.com/html/colonial-life-in-texas.htm (accessed February 7, 2010); Ted R. Worley, "Helena on the Mississippi," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 13:1 (Spring 1954), 7, 14; *Executive Documents, Printed by Order of the House of Representatives, During the Second Session of the Thirty-sixth Congress, 1860–'61* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1861), 22–29.

CHAPTER TWO

Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker

Most early religious innovation or direct personal communion with heaven took place in Europe or the North, and news of them trickled into the South. This was not always the case. The relationship between mesmerism, the Bible, evangelical Christianity and two deeply religious southern men who probably never called themselves Spiritualists shows that spiritual initiative was not confined to the North. To those who later described the interplay of new ideas and religious imagination in the interaction between Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker, and the fruits it bore, Spiritualism and animal magnetism were the best labels available.

Abijah Alley spent several weeks in heaven conversing with angels in the early 1800s. Back home in Appalachian Virginia, he wrote a book about it. This book may have found its way into the hands of one Moseley Baker of Houston, Texas not long after Baker, a hero of the Texas struggle for independence from Mexico, found the Lord. Baker became a Methodist preacher, and by 1847 caused a schism in the fledgling Houston congregation when he and others became fascinated with the possibility of communication between this world and the next. Baker started what later observers labeled the first Spiritualist newspaper in the South, the *Texas True Evangelist,* to disseminate the good news of spirit communion and animal magnetism. In this paper, he printed the observations of Abijah Alley. This appears to be a simple story, destined to

remain so because no trace of Abijah Alley's book survives save two brief references to it in other publications.[58] Nor are there any known copies of Moseley Baker's *Texas True Evangelist*, and only a few secondary sources mention it. But new sources of information become available to historians every day, and what can now be pieced together reveals a great deal about the way antebellum southerners Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker approached matters of faith, the Spirit and spirits. We can also understand more clearly how others, who did not share or fully understand the elements of visionary Christianity, animal magnetism and millenarianism that defined Alley's and Baker's beliefs, came to label them Spiritualists.

This is a project about, mostly, Christians in the American South who believed in communication with the spirits of those who no longer lived on earth and the cultural and religious context that made this seem plausible to them. They came to this idea in different ways, combining folk and Christian traditions about "all things visible and invisible" with the evidence of their own reason and senses. Christian Spiritualists[59] had more in common with evangelical Christians of the Early National Period than the some of the latter would have been comfortable acknowledging. Most came from a long tradition of people who took their faith in Christ as the Son of God and Redeemer of mankind seriously and wanted more than anything to worship God as He would have

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[58] Homer S. Thrall, *History of Methodism in Texas* (Houston: E. H. Cushing, Publisher, 1872), 95; Because there is so little information about Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker and their publications, it is impossible to establish a reliable chronology of influences on Baker or the events between his visit to Kentucky in 1846 and his death in Houston of yellow fever on November 4, 1848. What *is* possible is to assess the clues available and construct the narrative that makes the most sense.

[59] The term came into use in the 1850s as the title of the publication (*The Christian Spiritualist* [1854–1857]) of the New York-based Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge. The term reached and resonated with a wide readership in the early 1870s under the influence of the Rev. Samuel Watson of Memphis.

them. They yearned for the immediacy and purity of faith as experienced in the "primitive" church of Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Their goal: finding favor in God's eyes and securing a place in Heaven. In the century after Gutenberg unleashed the printed word, Bibles began to appear everywhere. By the American Revolution, anyone who could read could study the sacred word of God that had once been closely guarded and meted out by the clergy. People could map for themselves God's plan for their lives and salvation.

The distinction between Christian Spiritualists and evangelical Christians can be murky, but chronology is helpful in clarifying the similarities and differences. Christian Spiritualists did not appear as a self-defined category until the early 1850s. They believed it was possible in the here and now for the faithful to receive visions and revelations from spirits of the dead. Some also believed that they were capable of the sort of miraculous feats performed by Christ and the Apostles, especially healing.[60] *Christian Spiritualists*, for purposes of this discussion, were those who embraced communion with the departed as in some way part of God's plan and interpreted Scripture as supporting their views. A smattering of southern Catholics and Jews were also Spiritualists. Some of the subjects of this study were lifelong believers in communication with spirits and angels, some only briefly so, and some merely curious. That most truly believed they might communicate with spirits invites explanation.

By the early nineteenth century, everyone in the American South would have known of one or more groups positing the reality of contact with spirits and/or angels: animal magnetists, Shakers, Swedenborgians, practitioners of *voudon,* and relatives or

[60] John 14:12: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

servants who passed on folk beliefs or supernatural lore. Methodists probably knew that John Wesley had believed it still happened. Though they increasingly wished to distance themselves from it, ministers were well aware that many of the pioneers of evangelical religion had believed in the prophetic power of dreams and the activity of ministering spirits. Many early evangelicals were what Ronald Knox called "ultrasupernaturalists," people who shared "a cluster of beliefs and practice that place great stock in dreams, visions, supernatural impressions, miraculous healings, speaking in tongues, and gatherings at which people fall in a swoon and are left lying in a trance, sometimes for hours or days." Evangelical Christians in the first decades of the nineteenth century fell along a continuum that ran from acceptance of those precepts to a strict denial (reinforced by clergy) that such things have had divine approval since the close of the Apostolic "Age of Miracles." Christine Leigh Heyrman has remarked on the "frequency with which . . . spirits took corporeal shape and accosted southern whites. Some were spirits of the unquiet dead" while "[o]ther spectral presences remained more mysterious. . . ." These spirit visits were sometimes interpreted by evangelicals as divinely inspired, sometimes as manifestations of Satan's trickery.[61] The evangelical conversion experience itself was the assurance of salvation through a profound sense of the mystical presence of the Holy Spirit. As evangelical denominations in the South won more prosperous and educated converts, they tended to move away from demonstrative religious expression and distance themselves from the dreams, visions and supernatural experiences that had been a part of

[61] John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110. See also Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1950), 2, 3, 11, 152; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: A. A. Knopf: 1997), 57–58.

early evangelicalism. Counter to this evangelical trend, Shakers from the late 1830s into the 1850s experienced an Era of Manifestations in which visions and communications from (and possession by) spirits were widespread and until 1842 were performed in meetings open to the public. Millenarian sects—most notably the Millerites who abandoned their worldly goods and assembled on a hilltop for the second coming that failed to take place in the 1840s, twice—helped make religious outsider groups a pitiful laughingstock. By the time Christian Spiritualists appeared, they like most mid-nineteenth-century Christians eschewed the more dramatic manifestations of religious ecstasy but did believe messages from those in heaven could help to guide them in their spiritual journey on earth. Evangelical ministers were vehement in their proscriptions against communing with the spirits of the dead. Those communications formed a sacral centerpiece of Christian Spiritualism.

Evangelical Christians, animal magnetists, Shakers, Swedenborgians, practitioners of *voudon,* relatives or servants who passed on folk beliefs or supernatural lore: One or more of these is a part of the story of each of the people in this book. What made some people so susceptible to the message of the Shakers, the Swedenborgians and the many other millennialist Christian sects that coalesced in the Early National Period? What attracted them to animal magnetism or magical promises with roots in Africa? What made them so inclined to accept as divinely inspired the many different keys to the Kingdom of Heaven these prophets held out to them, or to believe themselves prophets? Understanding that they were part of a predominantly Anglo-American culture emerging from a world where natural phenomena were interpreted as signs of God's favor or displeasure and the most popular books were the Bible and almanacs is the foundation of

our answer to those questions.[62] Reconstructing what we can of the lost stories of spiritual seekers such as Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker helps us to tease out the cultural and spiritual streams that carried them along in their journeys of faith to belief in communication with the unseen world. The stories of these two Virginians take us to a Shaker village in Ohio and the Texas revolution, to the neighboring river cities of Cincinnati and Paducah, to Europe and the Holy Land, to a Methodist congregation in Houston, Texas and an Appalachian replica of King Solomon's temple.

The earnest seekers found before 1850 reveal an openness to the possibility that their faith could be authenticated by direct contact between this life and something hidden or transcendent, be that God, the "superior state," or the mysterious workings of the organs directing human thought and action. Both Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker came from a South suffused with an evangelical Christianity that opened people to innovation in religious interpretation and practice and to the experience of a direct and personal connection with the divine. Through their "new birth" in Christ, evangelicals were given the chance to have a "new" life on earth and then life everlasting. This was a personal gift to each man, woman or child who experienced the presence of God within, *proof* that His eye was on even the least of his creatures. God knew the contents of each person's heart and mind. To understand Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker, the first two people we know were identified with Spiritualism in the South by their contemporaries, they must be viewed as part of a continuum of religious mystics who experienced the authentication of their innovations in faith in their minds, their hearts and their bodies.

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[62] David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1989), 122; Marion Barber Stowell, *Early American Almanacs: The Colonial Weekday Bible* (New York: B. Franklin, 1977), x, 281.

The important religious precursors of Spiritualism were Europeans: the French Prophets, German Pietists, Emanuel Swedenborg and the Shakers. In retrospect, Christian Spiritualists would invoke John Wesley and his family's experiences with unquiet spirits. It was evangelical awakenings that laid the groundwork for the openness to innovation that made Spiritualism possible, and that enabled the Shakers to establish a presence in the South and become the first to incorporate communion with the dead into their religious practice. It was in the wake of mass evangelical conversions that the Shakers established their presence and made converts among southerners.

In the South, Protestants of all stripes had throughout the 1790s bemoaned the fact that people had lost interest in religion. Even regular churchgoers felt their faith had grown cold. They prayed fervently for a religious awakening. Here and there, as in the North, sporadic and apparently spontaneous revivals erupted. Barton W. Stone, Presbyterian minister at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, had heard about some revival activity to the south in the Cumberland region; in 1801 he traveled to Logan County for a mass religious convocation. Stone was startled by the things he saw. People under conviction of their sinfulness fell in agony, writhing on the ground. When they experienced God's grace and forgiveness—and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts—they leapt and shouted praises to the Lord. Inspired, Stone spread the word for over a month that he would be holding a protracted meeting at Cane Ridge in early August.

Thousands came. Eighteen Presbyterian ministers shared in the preaching, as did a handful of Methodists and one freethinking Baptist. The combined shouting of preachers, howling of sinners, and ecstatic praise of the saved was, one source said, "like the roar of Niagara." And it was in this mass of overwrought humanity that a variety of

"attendant exercises which came to distinguish particularly the Kentucky phase of the revival" appeared. These included falling, rolling, the "jerks," singing, dancing and laughing uncontrollably. What at first seemed miraculous gifts from God, according to revival historian John B. Boles, attracted a great deal of attention but were limited to a relative few and "Only in some splinter groups that developed in Kentucky did they become ultimately respectable."[63] One of those groups was the Shakers.

The organized camp meeting revivals that were spawned by Cane Ridge spread throughout the Cumberland region and into southern Ohio, North Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee. They followed the Clinch River into Scott County, Virginia, home of young Abijah Alley and his large extended family. News of the revivals was transmitted in letters, newspapers and travelers' stories. By the end of 1804 all of America knew that whatever was happening in Kentucky, "When grace broke the chains of sin, the new born son or daughter, commenced to shout the anthem of redemption, and danced, turned, or shook with uncommon violence." From the Shakers' northeastern perspective, these converts in Kentucky were experiencing in the throes of religious ecstasy the same "twisting, turning, jumping, rolling, falling, stamping, and the gift of visions, they professed to have."[64] New England was not a fertile field for Shaker converts in 1804, but Kentucky held promise.

One who would accept the Shakers' path to salvation was Abijah Alley, who spent several weeks in heaven conversing with angels in the early 1800s. What is not

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[63] Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 208; John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787–1805* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 65, 68.

[64] *Great Revival*, 70, 121, 120.

known is whether he began doing so before he became a Shaker, while he was one, or after he had left Shaker life—either during his years in the Covington, Kentucky/Cincinnati, Ohio area, or after he returned to the area of his birth, Scott County, Virginia. If his mystical experiences began before he became a Shaker, he might have been part of the visionary evangelical tradition. He might well have also known of Swedish seer Emanuel Swedenborg's writings about visiting heaven and conversing with angels. Abijah Alley could have taken both of those traditions with him when he became a Shaker, or begun to communicate with heavenly entities as a Shaker. A third possibility is that he had been exposed to all those spiritual traditions, but contact with Swedenborgians or others led him to his visionary experiences in Cincinnati, in Covington, Kentucky, or back where he was born in Appalachian Virginia. Abijah Alley could conceivably have believed he conversed with angels at any and all of those times, but the information we are left with claims it was a period of several weeks.[65] It seems likely that Abijah's visit to heaven was a part of his post-Shaker life, the years in which he prophesied and founded and led a millennialist sect of his own.

The keys to understanding Abijah Alley's story are the backcountry revivals and why some people—like Abijah—were susceptible to the Shakers' message in the wake of profound conversion experiences.

The Shakers and the Kentucky Revivals

The first organized groups of Euro-Americans to incorporate contact with the spirit world into their lives and worship were the Shakers, or Shaking Quakers. In

[65] *History of Methodism in Texas,* 95.

England, the earliest Shakers were influenced by reports of the mystical powers of the French Prophets, the remnants of an uprising of pietistic Huguenots in the years after the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685 making Protestantism once again illegal in France. The French Prophets migrated to London in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Claiming apostolic gifts, they attracted a good deal of both interest and opposition. One or two among their converts were eminently respectable men who reported a miraculous facility with foreign languages formerly unknown to them. And like many prophetic sects, they revealed that the end of the world was near. They reminded people of Quakers. A British clergyman's denunciation of the French Prophets printed in 1708 began with a sermon delivered thirty years earlier excoriating the Quakers and concluded with a section giving this account of the Prophets' religious exercises:

> The Shakings of their Heads, Crawling on the Knees, Quakings and Tremblings; their Whistlings, Drummings, Trumpettings; their Thundrings, their Snuffling; Blowing as with a Horn; Panting, and Difficulty of Breathing; Sighing and Groaning; Hissing; Smiling; Laughing; Pointing with the Finger; Shaking the Hand; Striking; Threshing; as likewise their perpetual Hesitations; Childish Repetitions; unintelligible Stuff; gross Contradictions; manifold Lies; Conjectures turn'd into Predictions; their Howling in their Assemblies like a Dog, and being in all manner of Disorder.

These strange manifestations, the Prophets' vaunted power to cure illness and raise the dead, and their ragged, unworldly appearance fascinated many, but their following dissipated after the promised resurrection of a deceased member failed.[66] The "religious exercises," however, had been seen before and would be seen again and again.

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[66] Clarke Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers: From the Old World to the New World* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 58, 141, 15–19. Hardcover edition published in 1987 as *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers;* 141: "One of the French Prophets' bases of operations had been Manchester, and it must have been through some nameless Prophets in the Lancashire region that the spark of divine possession was passed to the little body of seekers that came to be called Shakers."

The French Prophets' influence on English popular religion would continue. In 1739, they appeared among new Moravian and Methodist societies. Thirty years later, sixty years after the heyday of the French Prophets, a small sect in Manchester was dubbed Shaking Quakers by a newspaper noting the sect's "uncommon mode of religious worship." These Shaking Quakers had brushes with the law for disturbing the peace by preaching in public and disrupting Anglican worship services. Within a few years they sought a quieter and more secluded religious life in America. They ended up by 1779 at Niskeyuna in Albany County, New York, in what would later come to be known as the Burned-over District because of the intensity of religious revivals there.[67]

How Ann Lee, an illiterate ideologue from Manchester, came to be thought of by Shakers as the Second Coming of Christ, without whose intercession no man or woman could find salvation, may never be fully understood. Historian Stephen J. Stein, in his definitive recounting of the Shaker experience, pointed out that when the last of the three founders of the Believers in America died in 1787 "their religious ideas were unsystematized, their social relations unorganized, their worship unstructured, and their activities together rather informal." Stein suggested that Shaker doctrine was probably not what attracted early converts, but instead "certain symbolic acts that forged a strong sense of community within the society" such as sharing of food and lodging, a unique way of speaking, distinctive close-cropped hair that "set them apart from outsiders," and their camaraderie. Shared persecution for giving public testimony, Stein observed, contributed to their bonds of common striving and experience. Their performance of piety and the certainty of their faith bore powerful witness to seekers. Outsiders were also

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[67] *Enthusiasm,* 3, 8.

attracted to the "charismatic power and apostolic signs perceived to be in abundance among the Shaking Quakers." Shakers' ecstatic ritual activities were, reported a contemporary, "according to the dictates of the spirit that governs them," and they believed this to be a new "spiritual dispensation." These spirit-directed actions made no sense to outside observers, but "provided some converts with a sense of assurance."[68] While not yet actively conversing with spirits of the dead, their respect for visions and their embrace of direction by "the spirit" predisposed them to welcome such communications by the 1830s.

The Shakers were clearly different from the other folks around Niskeyuna. In a time of revolutionary fervor, they were pacifists. Shaker lore has it that Ann Lee was locked up and left to starve for failing to support the American Revolution, but managed to survive for two weeks on milk poured thorough a pipe by fellow Believers. Nothing galvanizes an outsider group like martyrdom. Like the French Prophets and Quakers, they cultivated a distinctiveness in their appearance and behavior that expressed to themselves and outsiders an unwavering commitment to their version of revealed religion. The Shakers' first success in winning new members in America came after a 1779 New Light Baptist revival in their neighborhood. Converts who wanted something more than they had found at the revival sought out the Shakers, and some remained with them. By 1780 "Mother Ann" had assumed the stature of prophet within the Society; seekers and the curious were drawn to the Shaker settlement at Niskeyuna. One old believer later

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[68] *Shaker Experience in America,* 38, 17–18

reminisced that it was a time when "Signs and operations, prophecies, and visions and revelations of God greatly abounded."[69] The word began to spread.

During 1781, 1782 and 1783 Ann Lee, her brother William, and James Whitaker—the "Founders" who had brought their new religion from Britain to America—took their message on the road, traveling throughout New England. Stephen Stein observed that what is most remarkable about the journey is the number of people the travelers encountered who were already converted to Shakerism and how far afield they were dispersed, perhaps a result of the mobility of the revolutionary era. The activities of the peripatetic Founders tended to reinforce the faith of people inclined to embrace their beliefs, and incur the hostility of those who were not. Suffering for their faith steeled the resolve of true Believers. Personal contact also allowed Ann Lee and the other leaders, as the society was beginning to grow, to "establish their authority and control over the widely scattered members" and "exert spiritual influence through their charismatic powers," leaving behind the seedlings that would grow into local societies of Believers.[70]

After the last of the three Founders departed this life for the spirit world, leadership passed to a steadfast American-born Believer, James Meacham, and at his death in 1796 to Lucy Wright. Her leadership was not uncontested, but she prevailed.[71]

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[69] *Enthusiasm*, 559; *Freedom's Ferment*, 161, offers a variant: "At one time she was kept locked in a cell for fourteen days in the hope that starvation might rid the town of this woman who would not be silenced, but a faithful disciple fed her fed her by pouring milk through the stem of a pipe inserted through the keyhole, and the designs of her enemies were thwarted."; *Shaker Experience in America*, 19.

[70] *Shaker Experience in America*, 19, 25

[71] Women's leadership in religious, as in other, matters was not welcomed in early British North America. Anne Hutchinson was banished from Boston, in part for preaching to a promiscuous (male and female) group and in part for claiming divine revelation.

Wright selected a group of missionaries to share the special revelations of their faith with newly awakened religionists in the wake of local revival activity, and by 1800 the Shakers had gathered in enough converts to populate several communities in New England. The organization was hierarchical, and each settlement was run by elders appointed by the central authority at New Lebanon, New York.

Little was written at the time by Shakers about their beliefs, but the earliest apostate to defect from the organization in America and publish his reasons for doing so, Valentine Rathbun, left interesting clues in his 1781 denunciation, *An Account of the Matter, Form, and Manner of a New and Strange Religion, Taught and Propagated by a Number of Europeans, Living in a Place Called Nisqueunia, in the State of New-York.* Rathbun claimed that only after being dazzled by the "apostolic gifts" of the elders and much indoctrination were new converts deemed ready to learn that they had to make public confession and that marriage was a sin and celibacy was God's true intent for his chosen ones. What bothered him most, though, was Mother Ann's veneration as "the mother of the elect" and the assertion by some that "no blessing can come to any person, but only by and through her," and that she was "the queen of heaven, Christ's wife."[72]

Other contemporary accounts also leave the impression that by the time of her death in 1784, Ann Lee had become a great deal more than just a charismatic prophet to the Shakers. Exactly what she had become, and how, is harder to say. Nothing substantive was published by the Shakers themselves until 1808, and after some internal wrangling a version more to the liking of the ruling elders at New Lebanon appeared two years later. Mother Ann's divinity was affirmed in the official 1810 history:

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[72] *Shaker Experience in America*, 16.

> Therefore the truth is, that the prophecy has had its complete fulfillment, in such a manner as entirely to exclude every other comment or application; being first of all fulfilled in *Christ Jesus,* the *Father,* and secondly in *Ann Lee,* the *Mother* of our redemption, and the followers of her example, who were begotten and brought forth by the word of life as her spiritual children, and constitute the Church of Christ in this day of his second appearing.

If Christ was the Redeemer, Mother Ann was His Co-redemptrix. She was the spiritual mother of the Shakers, and only through the intercession of her spirit *in addition to* that of Christ could anyone achieve salvation. One must confess to the elders, live out of the world in a community of Believers, give up carnal lusts and work obediently under the direction of the Shaker leadership to achieve spiritual perfection while still in the flesh.[73]

Mother Ann claimed authority based on visions. As Jon Butler has reminded us, "The Shaker emphasis on dreams and visions was commonplace, not unique" among revolutionary and post-revolutionary revivalists. Dreams and visions had far-reaching influence if their revelations came to a charismatic leader. In one it was revealed to Mother Ann that Eve's bite of the apple was not the original sin. "She said that she saw, in vision, Adam and Eve in the very act of sexual coition, and that it then was made known to her, by revelation, that this was the forbidden fruit and the cause of their fall."[74]

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[73] B. S. Youngs and Seth Y. Wells. *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing; Containing a General Statement of All Things Pertaining to the Faith and Practice in the Church of God in this Latter Day.* Published by Order of the Ministry, in Union with the Church. Second edition, corrected and improved (Albany, 1810), 457–458. The 1808 edition was compiled by Seth Youngs with the help of others at South Union, Kentucky, and incurred the displeasure of the leadership in the East for some its views. "Two years later, to regain control of this theological turf, the eastern Shakers reissued the Testimony, edited by Wells and Green, two of the foremost eastern theologians." Eugene V. Gallagher and W. Michael Ashcraft, *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 14; Stein, *Shaker Experience in America*, 8, says their first official history, written in 1808, "bears the characteristic marks of sacred story or myth and provides a foundation for the society's later claims regarding origins and foundations."

[74] Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 222; William J. Haskett, *Shakerism Unmasked: Or, This History of the Shakers* (Pittsfield, Mass.: Haskett, 1828), 232.

As part of their utopian quest for perfection, celibacy was required in Shaker communities, with men and women living and working apart and strict guidelines governing every aspect of their well-ordered lives. That Shakers willingly obeyed reveals their confidence in the truth of Mother Ann's revelations and their belief that living by new rules imparted by Heaven directly to their prophetess was essential to their eternal salvation.

John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman assert that Shaker "rituals such as individual trances and group dances" served to "spiritualize physical desire" and although men and women were never permitted to touch, these structured physical activities "may have served as an acceptable form of release, experienced by the individual but in the presence of the community and in the name of the spirit."[75] Evidence suggests this was not always the case, and was one of several flaws in the Shaker system that led to dissatisfaction.

Valentine Rathbun's son, Reuben, remained a Shaker and became a respected elder but he too grew increasingly discontented. In July of 1799, he left the Shaker settlement at Hancock, in the Berkshire foothills of Massachusetts, and published his reasons for separating from the sect in a book, *Reasons for Leaving the Shakers.* Among his complaints: being a Believer did not cause sexual desires to end as promised, many Shakers did not live up to their shared ideals, children were not being educated properly,

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[75] John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988, 1997), 116–117. The authors note on 112 that many of the "utopian communities that sprang up from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries embodied both an older American quest for perfection and a more recent longing to recreate small-scale, homogeneous communities at a time of rapid urban and commercial growth. Many of these groups, including free lovers, Shakers, Mormons, and Oneidans, experimented with alternative sexual systems. Their sexual views varied widely, but they shared a central concern about the proper way to regulate sexual impulses."

and those who chose to leave the group were treated unfairly. That this book hit the mark and "rather retarded the progress of the Shakers" is evidenced by the fact that in the years 1803 and 1804 they were able to recruit "few if any members."[76]

Shaker leaders at New Lebanon pondered the reports from Kentucky that came to them in letters and periodicals, aware that their own greatest successes in saving souls had been among those newly awakened by revivals. Lucy Wright sent three carefully chosen missionaries, John Meacham, Issachar Bates and Benjamin Young, to the "west" in 1805. They set out in January and arrived at Paint Lick, Kentucky, in March. Pastor Matthew Houston—who had been one of the preachers at Barton Stone's Cane Ridge revival—invited them to address his Paint Lick Presbyterian congregation.[77] There the Shakers found what they had come for.

Meacham, Bates and Young next traveled to Cane Ridge, the pastorate of Barton Stone. Stone wrote about the visit to fellow Presbyterian minister John Dunlavy in Ohio, admitting that he "was never so completely swallowed up with any man as with Issachar Bates, while he opened his testimony." The Shakers, Stone reported, were "grave and unassuming, very intelligent and very ready in the Scriptures" and had "a great boldness in their faith." But when Bates got to the part of his testimony about marriage, Stone balked. Bates noted in his journal that Satan had possessed Stone, "who set more store by his Eliza than by all the salvation God had prepared for the fallen race."[78]

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[76] Gerald Lee Gutek and Patricia Gutek, *Visiting Utopian Communities: A Guide to the Shakers, Moravians, and Others* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 50; Haskett, *Shakerism Unmasked*, 119–120.

[77] *Shaker Experience in America*, 58.

[78] Julia Neal, *The Kentucky Shakers* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1977), 5.

The missionaries continued their travels, seeking out the leaders of the revivals. In Ohio they gave their testimony to John Thompson, a former Presbyterian who in 1804 had decided that the best way to praise God was by dancing, and to John Dunlavy and Richard McNemar. Houston, Dunlavy and McNemar all became Shakers, leading many of their followers with them. Thompson eventually returned to the Presbyterian Church, and Barton Stone founded the Disciples of Christ.[79]

Among the first crop of souls ripened by the revivals and harvested by Shaker missionaries Meacham, Bates and Young was John Woods of Matthew Houston's congregation. Woods wrote at length about his experience of conversion and his subsequent embrace of Shaker beliefs—and his eventual break with the Shakers. His perspective and perceptions give an insight into what fellow southerner Abijah Alley might have thought and felt in his own encounter with the Shakers a decade later.

Woods's father and his wife's father had been among the founders of Paint Lick Presbyterian Church in 1784, and that congregation was the religious and social center of John Woods's world as he grew from toddler to man. In his own words, the revivals that swept the region had been preceded by "a very great concern among professors of religion" who "greatly lamented their lukewarmness, and past inattention to the duties of religion." They prayed for a revival of God's work among them. For his part, Woods had decided that as a newly married man it was time for him to turn to serious devotion to religious duty. Steeped in a lifetime of Calvinist teachings on original sin and predestination, he feared his "wretched, depraved heart" might be an indication that God had foreordained him to "eternal woe with devils and wicked men." Christine Heyrman

[79] Ibid., 3–4; *Great Revival*, 157.

had noted that early evangelicals regarded Satan as a "tireless and endlessly resourceful enemy." Woods wrestled with "bondage, darkness and death" for eighteen months in what sounds like a fairly conventional if protracted Calvinist conversion experience, at the end of which he was "happily relieved by the Saviour of sinners" and "experienced the peace and joy of God's people." His conversion coincided with the "spirit of revival then prevailing." Woods described people tearful, convulsed and joyful, and said that these religious experiences came equally to "the learned and unlearned, the rich and the poor, the bond and the free." For a time he enjoyed the feeling of universal brotherhood in faith engendered by this shared experience of grace.[80]

Among the revival's most frequently invoked Gospel passages were, "Ask and ye shall receive" and "All things are possible to him that believeth." But what the ministers were preaching—repentance and salvation based on free will—was not Calvinist orthodoxy. Baptists and Presbyterians are Calvinistic, which implies acceptance of the notion that all are depraved as a result of Adam and Eve's original sin. God has only chosen some, the Elect, for salvation. Christ died to redeem them. An individual could live a moral life and pray for a conversion experience that would provide some confidence that he or she was marked for salvation, but in the end one would die without assurance of a place in heaven. "Poor creatures," wrote orthodox Cane Ridge Presbyterian David Purviance, "they cannot help it if they are not of the elect, . . . they

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[80] John Woods, *Shakerism Unmasked, Or, A Narrative, Shewing the Entrance of the Shakers Into the Western Country, Their Stratagems and Devices, Discipline and Economy: Together with what May Seem Necessary to Exhibit the True State of that People* (Paris, Ky.: John Woods, 1826) reprinted as "Shakers, or Shaking Quakers," in Burton W. Carr, *Gleanings of Religion, or a Compilation Containing the Natural History of Man—A True Account of the Different Sects in the Religious World; Together with Much Useful and Instructive Information on Various Subjects* (Lexington, Ky.: Burton W. Carr, 1829), 213; Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865–1920* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 54, 212.

must perish and that without remedy—it is hard." It was all in God's hands, and nothing one could do made any difference. Therein lay the joy and relief of the revivals' promise of free grace and assurance of salvation: one could *choose* to be saved, and the choice was confirmed—proven—by experiencing the influx of he Holy Spirit. But the revivals also left many, as Ohio minister John Dunlavy explained after Cane Ridge, with the notion that "the day of the Lord, or Millennium, was at hand, and that revival would never cease until that day should commence." David Purviance's son Levi said that in Kentucky, "Many were fully persuaded that the glorious Millennial Day had commenced."[81]

The Kentucky revivals were early in what is known as the Second Great Awakening, a period of revival activity that waxed and waned for years all over the western world, spreading the evangelical message of free will and salvation. The beginnings of the First Great Awakening have often been traced back to a series of fire-and-brimstone sermons in Northampton, Massachusetts in the 1730s by Jonathan Edwards, a pioneer in the techniques used by evangelical preachers. Their method consisted of dramatic appeals to the imaginations of sinners and descriptions of the eternal torments of Hell that awaited the impure and unrepentant, designed to evoke remorse (conviction of sin) and repentance. But unlike Calvinist Jonathan Edwards, who could make no promises about God's plan for any individual, these Second Awakening revival preachers offered a "New Light," salvation given freely by God to any who

[81] *Citizens of Zion*, 216–217; Richard T. Hughes, "The Apocalyptic Origins of Churches of Christ and the Triumph of Modernism," *Religion and American Culture* 2:2 (Summer 1992), 189–190; *Great Revival*, 104.

acknowledged Jesus Christ as their savior. People knew they were saved when they experienced the Holy Spirit within themselves.

These ministers, like the Methodist preachers who preceded and surrounded them, were discarding the notion of the Elect, and using scripture to support their assertions. The orthodox were appalled. In 1803 several New Light Presbyterian ministers—John Woods listed Richard McNemar, Robert Marshall, John Dunlavy, Barton W. Stone and John Thompson—were censured by their denominational brethren for teaching "free and full salvation through faith in the son of God, and humble obedience to the gospel" and rejecting all creeds and confessions of faith not found in the Bible. The revivalists also rejected the doctrine that Christ's death atoned for all the sins of mankind, since if that were the case there would be no free grace left for God to bestow in forgiveness of sin. Rather, Christ had died to affect the mind of man, to turn his thoughts to reconciliation with God. Atonement meant "to be *at one,* to be reconciled." Woods pointed out that the New Testament did say Christ "rose from the dead the third day, and ever liveth to make intercession for us."[82]

Ultimately, the revival preachers broke with the Kentucky Synod and established the short-lived Springfield Presbytery. Matthew Houston, John Woods's minister at Paint Lick, joined the breakaway presbytery. Many of the faithful who had experienced conversion in the revivals followed their pastors. For John Woods, this meant a cleavage in the Presbyterian community of faith at Paint Lick, the spiritual and social locus for his extended family. Democratization of belief was fracturing the faithful. As Woods explained, "This division among the preachers, and their diversity and opposition of

[82] Woods, *Shakerism Unmasked*, 213–216.

sentiments and preaching, caused many to read the scriptures for themselves. By this means they became settled in their opinions. Among professors in general, there was a great deal of religious debate and hard feelings toward each other, and that love and fellowship which formerly abounded, now was fast declining."[83]

Jon Butler has observed that "evangelical moral codes and ritual practices estranged their converts from the community of their peers, neighborhood networks of yeoman and tenant farming families." Woods and the other innovators, secure in the conviction that theirs was the true way to salvation, met in fledgling ad hoc congregations. Called by some New Lights or Schismatics, they assumed the name Christian in 1804. In addition to a sincere belief in the importance of shared worship and expressions of belief, evangelicals needed to reinforce their shared choice to reject the tenets of their former faith, still the faith of their wives, husbands, parents and children who had not been converted. Woods felt called to share his knowledge with others so that they might "find the favor of God or be undone forever." He began to preach in 1805, around the time the Shaker missionaries arrived at Paint Lick.[84]

John B. Boles described the post-revival situation of New Light Presbyterians such as John Woods when the Shakers missionaries arrived as "groping for understanding of the Scriptures, zeal for perfectionism, purity and security of one's salvation, and—at

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[83] *Great Revival*, 151; *Southern Cross*, 33: Evangelical conversion's "unsparing emphasis on mankind's sinfulness, hell's torments, and Satan's wiles" plunged people "into fathomless inner darkness. From that fall there could be no easy recovery, for . . . self-alienation snuffed out social identity and ruptured communal bonds." Southerners had seen "friends, neighbors, and family members alarmingly transformed, rendered almost unrecognizable by their engagement with evangelicalism."; Woods, *Shakerism Unmasked,* 216.

[84] *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 18; *Southern Cross*, 40–41: Committed evangelicals "drew strength from the sense of participating in a cosmic spiritual drama, an ongoing struggle between God and the devil, which was sweetened for them by the certainty that they had cast their lot among the winners."; J. P. MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio: Fugitive Papers Concerning the Shakers of Ohio, With Unpublished Manuscripts* (Columbus, Ohio: The F. J. Heer Printing Co., 1907), 32; Woods, *Shakerism Unmasked,* 216.

least in the case of McNemar and several others—strong millennial hopes." The Shakers told them, Barton Stone wrote, "that they had heard of us in the East, and greatly rejoiced in the work of God amongst us; and that so far as we had gone we were right, but we had not gone far enough. . . ." The Shakers averred that they had been sent to "teach the ways of God more perfectly, by obedience to which we should be led into perfect holiness."[85]

The novelty of the Second Great Awakening had about run its course, but Meacham, Bates and Young offered something new. These Shakers appeared to be men of "a sober, orderly deportment," and their plain, old-fashioned clothing reminded the people of Quakers. Based solely on their demeanor and dress, "the attention of the religious part of the people was pretty generally arrested, wherever they went," particularly since they went on foot. As was probably their intent, Meacham, Bates and Young, to the more enthusiastic among the local religious, "looked so much like Christ or the old apostles, they must be good men." And they were firmly insistent that *theirs* was the true and only way to salvation.[86]

The Shakers traveled about, meeting and talking to the people, always respectful, quiet, pious, but not shy about their claim that "they had something more and better" than what Woods and the others had found through the revivals. The Shakers prayed on their knees, silently, quite a novelty after the noisy religious experiences fresh in the Kentuckians' memories (and, unbeknownst to them, so characteristic of organized Shaker worship). One family was so deeply impressed by the Shakers' habit of praying this way

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[85] *Great Revival*, 157.

[86] Woods, *Shakerism Unmasked,* 217.

before and after each meal that husband, wife, and most of their twelve children became Believers.[87]

Soon the Shakers were winning converts from among those caught up in the waves of revival, including John Woods and the revival preachers John Dunlavy, Richard McNemar and Matthew Houston. The Shaker missionaries' appeal seems to have been their appearance of great piety and that unwavering assurance that they indeed "had something more and better." Their success lay in these things combined with patience and persistence, and the strenuous effort they put into converting men of spiritual influence who were likely to lead others with them. But there was one pivotal question on which their success turned.

Underlying the power of the revival preachers' message of belief and salvation was the people's belief in a day of judgment. "This was the momentous event which warranted the tremendous concern about salvation; the assurance of divine judgment underwrote evangelical Christianity. This emphasis was old as pietistic religion." Christians had never been in agreement on just how or when Christ would come again. Some, whom scholars would later call premillennialists, were certain that Christ would return to earth and reign for a thousand years before the end of the world. Those later defined as postmillennialists, however, were equally certain that the second coming was contingent on mankind's diligent efforts to defeat the forces of Satan and make the world worthy of Christ's return. Others embraced the belief that no one knew just when or how the Lord would come again; they thought such speculation to be unscriptural. No one could take the kingdom of God by storm and no one knew when the Lord would come.

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[87] *Kentucky Shakers*, 7.

Believers had to be prepared for His imminent return each day heedless of thought of a thousand years (amillennialism). Each position had scriptural backing in the Revelation of St. John. Who knew with certainty which was right? The Shakers claimed they did, and they offered the radical insight that the Lord had *already* come again. Some revival leaders and converts had experienced trances, dreams and prophetic visions, and begun to expect that something very great would "take place in the summer of 1805." Their ripened expectation made them easy picking for the Shakers.[88]

Barton Stone had admired the Shaker missionaries' ability to cite scripture to good effect. Their invocation of the inherent sinfulness of mankind resonated with these refugees from Calvinism, but their explanation that original sin was in fact the physical act of love was a new twist. The Shakers told John Woods that "none ever went to heaven, or could have the full favour of God, until they could cease from that" and follow the example of Christ who had no wife. It was imperative that all "who ever expected to be saved" join the Shakers immediately and begin to "find a new relation to the church of

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[88] *Great Revival*, 101; Matthew 24:42 "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."; Revelation 3:3: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."; Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1957), 147–151: "There are three general types of eschatological interpretation current in the present thought of the church: the postmillennial, the amillennial, and the premillennial. All three take their names and their point of departure from Revelation 20:1-8, in which is mentioned the reign of Christ for a thousand years, generally known as the millennium. . . . The postmillennial school interprets the passage as figurative, and asserts that a return of Christ to judge the earth and o set up the eternal kingdom comes at the end of the millennium. . . . The postmillennial school had its roots historically in the teaching of Augustine, bishop of Hippo, who in the fifth century sought a new philosophy of history with which to meet the puzzling crises of his own day. . . . He taught that the "city of God" was identical with the church, and that as the latter grew in power and influence it would gradually bring all men under its sway and would introduce the reign of righteousness. This doctrine became the basis for he temporal claims of the Roman church. . . . The form of postmillennialism which is more familiar today began in the eighteenth century with Daniel Whitby, a Unitarian commentator. . . . The millennium is yet to come. . . . [which] became very popular and prevailed in American Protestantism throughout most of the nineteenth century. . . . The amillennial interpretation holds that the passage in Revelation 20:1-8 does not refer to a period to come *after* the conquest of the world by the gospel, but that it is either a description of the current period before the return of the Lord, or else that it has no particular significance. . . ."; *Great Revival,* 107, 157.

God."[89] Their insistence that Christ had already returned to earth lent urgency to their appeal.

Woods was a man of property, with a loving young wife and small son. Having so recently found the assurance of God's love and His true plan for their lives, Woods was deeply distressed by these pronouncements. His wife was more distressed; by the time he left to join the Shakers she had given birth to another child.

The Shakers must have been very persuasive, for Woods was just one of hundreds in Kentucky and southern Ohio—with some from Virginia, Tennessee, and other southern states—who ultimately took them at their word and believed their claim that "this was the sound of the last trumpet, the last dispensation of God's grace that ever would be made known to the lost race of Adam; that this was the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men; and that Christ was in them judging the world."[90]

For Woods, the very meaning of Christ's sacrifice had been redefined during the revivals. Atonement had been reformulated as a process by which Christ's death was intended not to induce God to forgive original sin through the sacrifice of his Son, but to affect the minds of sinners and turn their thoughts to God, to make them "at one." Once destabilized from within, the definition of core theological concepts was no longer an impregnable bastion. But nowhere did Woods tell readers that the missionaries introduced the name of Mother Ann or the concept of a female spiritual completion of Christ in their new theology; like previous apostates Valentine and Reuben Rathbun, he

[89] Woods, *Shakerism Unmasked,* 216.

[90] Ibid., 219.

claimed this was not revealed until they had been living with the Shakers for a few years.[91]

The first Shaker colony in the West was founded in 1805 at what would be called Union Village in Ohio. By 1818, when twenty-seven-year-old Abijah Alley was accepted as a member, it claimed a population of six hundred thirty-four.[92] Alley must have written to his family of his contentment as a Shaker; three more Alleys—a sister, sister-in-law and nephew—would eventually join Abijah there.[93] Shaker missionaries from Union Village had quickly established two Kentucky settlements, at Pleasant Hill and South Union. While some Believers like John Woods and Abijah Alley left their families behind to save their souls, others become Shakers with loved ones. Many members of the extended Runyon family, married and with large families of their own, were early Kentucky converts to Shakerism.

Becoming a Shaker meant embracing the belief they were living in the end times. Shakers offered the opportunity to become part of "a divine order akin to the primitive church of Jerusalem," and all who became Shakers were expected to emulate the Bible's description of Christ's life on earth. When married couples chose the Shaker life they brought their children into the communities with them. In the years between 1813 and 1834 there were three generations of Runyons living at the Pleasant Hill community.

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[91] Ibid., 215; *Shaker Experience in America*, 68–69: "Prior to the summer of 1806 the public testimony of Shaker ministers apparently did not feature Ann Lee. . . . the silence of the sources before 1806 was not accidental. . . ."

[92] "Union Village and the Shakers of Warren County, Ohio: Some Dates When Union Village Historical Things Happened," Warren County Ohio GenWeb, http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohwarren/Shaker/dates.htm (accessed December 13, 2009).

[93] An Abijah Alley, who gave his date of birth as March 28, 1791, entered the Shaker community at Union Village, Ohio in 1817. Three other Alleys came to the community later, and all left between 1828 and 1830.

Records for members who died in the faith include Name, Birth, Belief, Decease, Nativity. The records of those who did not have three dates after their names: Birth, Believed, Departed.[94]

Lawson Runyon "believed" before his fifth birthday and was twenty-two when he departed in 1829. Lawson's uncle, Joseph Runyon, was the first of the extended clan to believe, and the first to move to Pleasant Hill. Joseph and his wife Jane came in 1810, bringing ten children. Lawson's parents moved to Pleasant Hill in 1812 with their three young children. Lawson's father later explained his choice to become part of the Shaker experiment in perfectionism: "I freely and voluntarily lay down my carnal life with all its alluring flatteries, yea I gave up and forsook them all while in my youthful days that I might at the close of life be received in the heavens with the pure and holy."[95] It was all about perfecting Christian faith and purity as an assurance of getting to heaven, and the final judgment was imminent.

In 1810, the year Joseph Runyon brought his family to Pleasant Hill, new converts sometimes fell into "exercises" after confessing their sins, rolling in the mud or pounding on the furniture. Lawson Runyon would have observed many "extraordinary spiritual manifestations" and been taught to approach them with reverence as he grew up at Pleasant Hill. His cousin William was in 1819 several times overwhelmed by the impression that he must go to the meetinghouse. There he would begin "to beat an alarm . . . beating it with his feet in the most complicated manner." While it is not clear exactly

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[94] Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: The Search for the Perfect Society* (Toronto: General Publishing Company, 1953), 21; Nancy Runyon Reddy, *Our Shaker Heritage: Created for descendants of the Runyon family members of Pleasant Hill, Kentucky*, Part II: The Runyon Family at Pleasant Hill - 1809 to 1913 (June 2001; Updated February 2002) http://reddys.homestead.com/shakerii.html (accessed September 10, 2006).

[95] *Our Shaker Heritage*.

which heavenly entity they believed was doing the impressing, that they were witnessing a spiritual gift was unquestioned. As one elder remarked, "We would say in truth it is the most solemn sight we ever did see."[96]

Another young brother was taken "under very compelling power" to empty the shoe cupboards, shine all the shoes, sweep the dirt out of the cupboards, and lick up the dirt and spit it into the fireplace "before he was released."[97]

Soon enough, a few Shakers began to experience reassuring contact with the spirits of the dead. In 1821, Lucy Smith was one of many at Pleasant Hill to receive visions and supernatural messages. She saw two departed Shaker sisters next to her bed, with a light "like a beautiful double rose." On a number of occasions her visions of Ann Lee's death brought comfort to residents at Pleasant Hill.[98]

Since the earliest days, Shakers had thought of trances, visions and supernatural messages as spiritual "gifts." At first, these manifested as charismatic experience by the founders that triggered "ecstatic activity." Later, gifts came in dreams. Many of these gifts were acted out in behaviors indistinguishable from those interpreted as manifestations of the Holy Spirit during revival conversions. For Shakers, they were all sacred but much less likely to be thought of as infusions of the masculine Holy Spirit of the Trinity. They might also come from the spirit of Mother Ann, or the spirits of

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[96] *Shaker Experience in America*, 166; *Kentucky Shakers*, 54.

[97] Ibid. This episode was echoed at Union Village during the Era of Manifestations, where "Believers were required to 'stoop down and eat simplicity off the floor,' an action which many acknowledged defied common sense." *Shaker Experience in America*, 173.

[98] *Shaker Experience in America*, 167, 108.

‘departed Believers, or from angels. “Conversations with notable spirit figures,” Stein observed, “were part of the Shaker tradition.”[99]

An onslaught of “spiritual gifts” to Shakers in the 1830s that included widespread communication with spirits excited the public imagination. But by then Lawson Runyon, John Woods, Abijah Alley and many others had left the Shakers. John Woods was silent on the subject, but Lawson Runyon and Abijah Alley believed in communication with angels and spirits throughout their lives. Christ himself had said, “All things are possible to him that believeth.”[100]

Abijah Alley had come to Union Village as an adult. John Woods’s story suggests how Alley might have reached his decision. Both were devout young adult men, converted and called to preach, who wanted “something more and better” and for a time thought they had found it with the Shakers.

All was not bliss in the earthly lives of Shakers. John Woods spent most of his years as a Shaker at Union Village, Ohio, trying to get the elders to reassign him to Pleasant Hill so he could be near friends and family in Kentucky; finally the Ministry sent him to Pleasant Hill when they thought he was terminally ill. Woods recovered, but remained frustrated by the failure of the Society’s lived experience to approximate its lofty ideals of egalitarian life and selfless love. He abhorred the leadership’s choice to live apart and allow themselves luxuries when others had inadequate food and clothing, and could not abide the mistreatment of the son he had eventually brought to the Shakers. Woods had left and by 1826 published a pamphlet about the problems and failings of Shaker life .

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[99] Ibid., 116, 167.

[100] Mark 9:23.

In 1827 a divisive power struggle at Pleasant Hill split the community and spawned a "major defection of members." William Byrd, who had arrived in 1826, described 1827 as "a time of great confusion in the Society." Abijah Alley figured prominently in a similar struggle at Union Village:

> The first schism at Union Village broke out in 1828, which was projected by Abijah Alley. Having become unreconciled to the condition of things as administered, he openly opposed the existing authority. He was borne with, and attempts made to reconcile him, but all efforts failing, he was suspended. He persisted in his efforts and persuaded quite a large number to take sides with him. With some of his followers he withdrew and attempted to found a similar institution with broader views. Not having the means nor the capacity for such an undertaking his enterprise collapsed."[101]

John Woods and Abijah Alley had chosen to come, spent years in the attempt to reconcile its stated ideals to the realities of Shaker life, and finally chose to leave.

Pleasant Hill records indicate that most of those who left the Kentucky settlement were, like Lawson Runyon, young men born within a year or two of each other and roughly at the age of majority. The Society's strategy for retention was to tell members they were assured of eternal damnation if they left, but other imperatives pushed or pulled them away. Years passed, the expected day of judgment had not arrived,[102] and the discontents born of a restricted life and an undemocratic hierarchical structure took their toll. Young men who were brought as children had not chosen that life of chastity,

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[101] Stephen J. Stein, "Community, Commitment, and Practice: Union and Order at Pleasant Hill in 1834," *Journal of the Early Republic* 8:1 (Spring, 1998), 50; *Letters from a Young Shaker: William S. Byrd at Pleasant Hill,* Ed. Stephen J. Stein. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 75; J. P. MacLean, "The Shaker Community of Warren County, Ohio. Its Origin, Rise, Progress and Decline," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* X:2 (October 1901), 263. Papers concerning Abijah Alley at Union Village are in the Shaker Collection at the Library of Congress

[102] Lawson Runyon was born October 10, 1807. He believed Aug. 1812, and departed August 24, 1828. See *Our Shaker Heritage*, Gallery, http://reddys.homestead.com/gallery.html; Stein, *Shaker Experience in America*, 118, describes the 1820s as the end of the Formative Period, in which "The Shakers evolved from an apocalyptic sect into a millennial church" and their institutionalization "confirmed their commitment, even indirectly, to the present world."

obedience and poverty for themselves. That many of their sisters remained is not surprising; they knew a woman alone could not make her way in the world.

Abijah Alley (1791–1866)

Francis Alley, the second son of an Anglican vicar, was the first Alley to settle in colonial Virginia. Under the laws of primogeniture, the first son fell heir to his father's estate and younger sons found other occupations, such as the church or the army. Britain's colonial empire opened the more desirable possibility of owning landed estates to such young men. By 1642 Francis Alley had brought his wife and children to the Jamestown area. Francis's descendents, like many colonials, relocated every generation or two in search of new land and opportunity. Around 1776, Abijah Alley's grandfather and siblings moved their families from Henrico County to land along the Clinch River in the mountains of southwestern Virginia, in what is now Scott County.[103]

There were conflicts between white settlers and the Indians whose hunting grounds they occupied and "improved," so the Alleys put down roots near the protection of Fort Blackmore. Abijah's grandmother witnessed the slaughter and scalping of her daughter and five grandchildren, taken by surprise by Indians near the fort in 1777. Polly Alley, another relative, was captured by Indians.[104]

Most of the surviving evidence is remembrances and family stories—which are subject to distortion—so it is a challenge to reconstruct the facts and events of Abijah Alley's life. His father, Thomas Alley, was said by one of his grandsons to have been

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[103] "Alley & Christian Genealogy," http://www.hullhome.com/Alley.gen.htm (accessed August 26, 2009).

[104] Robert M. Addington. *History of Scott County, Virginia* (Kingsport, Tenn.: Kingsport Press, 1932), 85, 93.

"very wealthy" and "owned a big farm and lots of stock and niggers," although no slaves are listed in Thomas Alley's estate inventory.[105]

The Alleys came from generations of solid Anglican forebears, and were church members while they lived in Henrico County. Once Virginians moved beyond the reach of settled Anglican parishes and their rectors and vestrymen, they had little to sustain their faith but their own encounters with their Bibles and the ministrations of whatever wandering preachers came along.

Squire Boone was the first Baptist preacher in that part of southwestern Virginia. He spent the winter of 1773–1774 with his brother Daniel, who lived in the area and commanded the string of forts—including Fort Blackmore—constructed to protect settlers from the indigenous population during Lord Dunmore's War. Stony Creek Primitive Baptist, the congregation that received Abijah Alley's father Thomas in 1802, was organized a little north of Blackmore in the late 1700s. Bishop Francis Asbury established a Methodist circuit in southwestern Virginia in 1788 and visited Fort Blackmore two years later, but in Abijah Alley's neck of the woods the Baptists had planted the first churches and remained the dominant faith.[106]

The *Minute Books* of the Stony Creek Baptist Church, bound in covers of homespun cloth, record that Thomas Alley was received by experience and baptized on

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[105] "WPA Interview with Joseph H. Alley, Lebanon, Oregon, aged 100 years and 4 months." Transcribed by Patricia Dunn. http://lgsoregon.org/resources/wpa/alleyjos.htm (accessed July 28, 2008). Census records do not bear out this claim; Rita K. Sutton. *Early Osbornes and Alleys, with Notes on Allied Families* (Norton, Va.: Norton Press, 1978), 9.

[106] On Asbury's visit to Fort Blackmore, see *History of Scott County, Virginia*, 90; on dominance of Baptists in Abijah Alley's neighborhood, see "A Remarkable Virginian; Abijah Alley, Backwoods Preacher, Prophet, Author, Artist, and Globe Trotter," *New York Times,* November 7, 1897. *New York Times* Archives Online, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9F0CE5DA123CE433A25754C0A9679D94669ED7CF (accessed January 5, 2009).

April 24, 1802. Almost from the start, Thomas Alley's relationship with church authorities was uneasy. By July 1804, he had twice run afoul of church discipline, and two months later was "excluded from membership with this church for denying the name of a Baptist and the final perseverance of the saints in grave."[107]

The Alleys were serious about their faith. One claimed the Alley family had "more preachers than any race of people I know of," and that one of Abijah's uncles was a Methodist preacher and another—along with Abijah's father Thomas—belonged to "the New Light Faith but later took the name of Christian."[108]

Born in the backcountry during George Washington's first term as president, Abijah Alley had little education. Literacy in "Long Holler" came chiefly from reading the Bible, and it is evident that Abijah did so thoroughly. Between 1804 and 1810 two things happened: Abijah's mother died and he became a preacher. He was a preacher all his life though never a member of any church.[109] Most of their neighbors remained Primitive Baptists but Thomas is the only Alley who appears in the church records. Abijah Alley as a young man, while his brothers married and farmed, traveled to Union

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[107] *Stony Creek Baptist Church Minute Books, 1801–1811,* http://files.usgwarchives.net/va/scott/church/stonycrk.txt (accessed August 14, 2009). There is no way of knowing with absolute certainty whether this Thomas Alley is Abijah's father, Thomas, Senior, b. ca. 1750, or Abijah's older brother, Thomas, Junior, b. ca. 1778, but evidence suggests it was Thomas, Senior. The "perseverance of saints" is a tenet of Calvinist belief: Once a sinner has accepted Christ as his Savior, that person is ever after in a state of grace and can expect to spend eternity in Heaven. Perhaps Thomas Alley had been influenced by Methodists, who believed that faith required eternal vigilance against backsliding into sin and losing eternal salvation.

[108] *Biography of Peter H. Alley* (written between 1895 and 1901), http://www.angelfire.com/tn/thewilliamsons/ALLEY.html (accessed October 6, 2009). The other New Light who later became a Christian was the biographer's grandfather, Peter Alley. This suggests that it was Abijah's father who was disfellowshiped by the local Primitive Baptist congregation.

[109] "A Remarkable Virginian."

Village and became a Shaker before 1820. He was followed several years later by three family members.

Abijah Alley's early years remain a mystery. His path in and out of the Shaker life left few traces. He arrived at Union Village in 1817, became a Shaker in 1818, and departed April 1, 1829, a few days after this thirty-eighth birthday. Abijah's younger sister Fannie, a spinster at thirty-one, came to Union Village in 1827; she became a member in 1829 and left soon after. Catherine Alley, wife of Abijah's older brother James and mother of Daniel, did not arrive until 1828, and in 1830 was the last of the Alleys to leave. Daniel's arrival was not recorded; he was a young man when he and Abijah left in 1829.[110]

Abijah first appears in public records on the 1830 census in Campbell County, Kentucky; his brothers James and Peter were there as well. The Covington Cotton Manufacturing Company was formed in 1828 and the bustling city of Cincinnati was on the opposite bank of the Ohio River, so Abijah and his brothers may have followed longstanding family patterns and gone in search of new opportunities in the growing river town. The census shows Abijah as the head of a large household, but it is not known who shared his home. Catherine and Daniel were apparently living with James and the children she had left behind. Spinster Fannie married there in 1830.

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[110] For the information about the Alleys at Union Village, I am indebted to Katherine Lollar Rowland of Otterbein, Ohio. Union Village was located about twenty miles from Cincinnati. Abijah Alley patented a beehive in 1831 in Cincinnati.

The Alleys at Union Village were Abijah, b. 28 March 1791; Catharine b. 2 May 1789; Daniel b. 4 July 1800; Fannie b. 15 Dec. 1796. Genealogies, based in part on census information, list Abijah as born around 1794 and his sister Fannie as born in 1797. She married in 1830 in Campbell County, Ky.. Their brother James married in 1809 to Catherine Nelson, and their son Daniel was actually born 4 July 1810. Thus Daniel was old enough to have chosen the Shaker life.

Covington and Cincinnati were connected by ferry service. In 1831 a Cincinnati newspaper claimed Abijah Alley as a resident of that city in its notice about the exhibit of a model of Alley's design for a bee house, based on utopian socialist Robert Owen's "system of communities in parallelograms. Abijah was reading more than his Bible, and Cincinnati offered him interesting new perspectives on religion.[111]

It was probably Abijah's father's death in 1834 that brought him home to Long Hollow, for although he was the youngest son it was Abijah who was executor of his father's estate.[112]

At some point, Abijah Alley began to have experiences in which he—much like Emanuel Swedenborg—visited heaven and conversed with angels.

He amassed substantial acreage on which he farmed, had three orchards and grazed the sizable herds of horses and cattle that provided a comfortable annual income for his large family. In his time he was the exemplar of a virtuous citizen of the Republic, beholden to no man for his livelihood.

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[111] "Beehives," *Western Tiller,* reprint in May 14, 1831 *Genesee Farmer.* It is tempting to speculate that it might have been Abijah Alley to whom John Woods referred in this remembrance of the absurdity of some of the "gifts" Shakers claimed: "These gifts remind me of an event in Union Village. A young man had the charge of the Bees there. He had taken great care of them, but they did not prosper, nor afford much honey. While eldress Tinsey was sick, and was expected to die in a few days, one of the ministry, he said, told him, that as soon as he should hear of eldress Tinsey's death, he should go and knock with his knuckles on the bee gum, and say, Eldress Tinsey is dead. Then his bees would prosper." Woods, 263; In the wake of his split with the Shakers and in the context of his openness to unorthodox social and religious influences, Abijah Alley would almost certainly have been drawn—particularly as clergymen were offered free admission—to the Infernal Regions exhibit at Cincinnati's Western Museum. Opened in 1828, it featured what to visitors was evocative lighting, sound effects, and mechanized figures, all separated from viewers by electrified iron bars. Creator Hiram Powers became a lifelong Swedenborgian, and his brother and roommate were both members of Cincinnati's Swedenborgian First New Jerusalem Society. As an inventor himself, as well as what historian David Abzug would call a "religious virtuoso," it is likely Alley would have sought out Powers. See David J. Voelker, "Cincinnati's Infernal Regions Exhibit and the Waning of Calvinist Authority," *American Nineteenth Century History* 9:3 (September 2008), 231, 219, 229.

[112] *Early Osbornes and Alleys,* 33.

For his home, Abijah Alley had a log residence built on the plan of Solomon's temple.[113] According to the Biblical account, the stones for Solomon's temple were prepared in the quarry, so there was "neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building." Alley's house was constructed of logs, "cut and hewn in the woods and notched and fitted there, so that when they were being put together there was 'no sound of hammer or any iron tool.'"[114] Solomon's temple was more than just another Bible story for many people. It formed the core of Masonic ritual and symbolism, and a 1762 London book that revealed the secrets of the Masonic order enjoyed frequent reprinting on both sides of the Atlantic through the 1820s. These widely circulated explanations of the mystical significance of Solomon's temple would have supplemented the Biblical accounts. The Bible says that the temple built by Solomon—the first temple—was destroyed by the Babylonians. After the Babylonian captivity the Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. This second temple was enlarged by Herod, and left in ruins by the Romans. Some have interpreted Biblical prophecy as requiring the building of a third temple as the onset of the second coming of Christ. Given Abijah Alley's long sojourn with the Shakers, whose theological system was built on the assertion that Christ had already come back to earth, his later founding of a religious sect, and his prophesying, it is entirely possible that Abijah Alley's rebuilding of the temple in the mountains of Virginia was intended to welcome the end times.

Abijah was financially secure and curious about the world outside Long Hollow. As the story goes, one day on the way to have his corn ground, it came to him that he

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[113] "A Remarkable Virginian"; For the Biblical description of Solomon's temple that Abijah Alley would have used as his inspiration, see 1 Kings, chapters 6–8.

[114] 1 Kings, 6:7; "A Remarkable Virginian."

wanted to see the president of the United States. He dropped off his corn and asked the miller to grind it and deliver it to his family with a message: He would return "by and by." After two months, he did return, but soon took a notion to see every ruler of Europe and visit the Holy Land. The family heard nothing from him for almost three years; he reappeared one day and claimed to have seen every crowned head of Europe and spent a year in Palestine during which he collected seeds to replicate the flora of the Holy Land around his rustic Solomon's temple. Alley was deeply attached to his home, but never lost his wanderlust and yen to know about life outside southeastern Virginia. The tales of people and places he brought back to Long Hollow and its environs must have seemed marvelous to his family and neighbors. According to another of his sons, Abijah in his old age "could say that he had personally known every president of the United States from Washington to Lincoln. He always went up to the capital to attend every inauguration of a new president, and they would recognize him when they saw him, and greet him as a friend. It was very easy for them to know him for he wore a very long, very white beard."[115]

Abijah Alley resembled a Biblical prophet. He made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and gathered the seeds of every plant he could. Solomon's temple was built on Jerusalem's Temple Mount and surrounded by terraced gardens, and Alley planted a terraced garden on the hillsides around his home with the "vines and olives, flowers and shrubs, whose seeds had ripened on the hills of Jerusalem."[116]

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[115] Ibid. Abijah Alley, born in 1791, probably could not have personally known all the presidents. George Washington died in 1797, John Adams in 1801, and Thomas Jefferson in 1809.

[116] Ibid.

Alley also began painting scenes from Scripture on the interior walls. The *New York Times* reporter who visited what was left of the house in 1897 described the only image that remained, "representing the Garden of Eden before the Fall," and opined that it showed "much natural talent" in its clarity, composition, and use of color.[117]

And Abijah Alley wrote his book. He told of his weeks in heaven and his conversations with angels. He explained his interpretation of theology. He prophesied. His neighbors thought his predictions of secession, civil war, emancipation and Union victory suggestive of an unsound mind, but all came to pass twenty years later. This in itself is hardly more than others foresaw; its importance is that it pinpoints Alley's book as written by the early 1840s.

When his book was finished, Alley gave copies away. Because none has been located, only fragments of his belief system can be pieced together. In his travels he probably came across the works of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg or talked to people who had. Alley could easily have known or met people who had encountered John Chapman in his peregrinations through what is now Ohio, Illinois and Indiana to distribute apple seeds and Swedenborgian tracts. Swedenborg was read and discussed widely by the 1830s, and it is tempting to imagine that his stories inspired Alley's own conversations with angels. At the time Abijah and his brothers were in Covington, there was at least one active follower of Swedenborg there: Pliny Bliss, who operated the horse ferry to Cincinnati where there was a congregation of Swedenborg's followers.[118]

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Charles Theodore Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati and Representative Citizens,* Volume 1 (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, 1904), 504: "As early as 1815 the subject of a bridge across the Ohio was mooted by the enthusiasts and the want of a steam ferry boat commented upon. At this time and for some years later a Mr. Bliss conducted a horse ferry boat whose qualities of 'safety, comfort, dispatch and capacity for heavy burthen' commended themselves to the public."; Bliss appears on

Swedenborg was a devout Christian, a believer in Heaven and Hell who cautioned that only a visionary such as he could or should have such communications, and that to attempt them was dangerous for most mortals.[119] Abijah Alley was assuredly a close and careful reader of the Bible, and formulated his own interpretation of its meaning and God's will. He believed that he too had visited Heaven and conversed with angels. He was a preacher with a dedicated following who drew large congregations to hear him when he spoke. His life and the home he built are evidence of his intensive engagement with Scripture, and especially with prophecy. Beyond his rejection of creeds and sectarian religion, though, the written record of his life in Long Hollow says little more than that he believed in the brotherhood of mankind and apparently did not choose to own slaves.[120]

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the 1820 and 1830 Campbell County census as a resident of Covington, and is listed as a Receiver in Covington in the *Journal of Proceedings of the Sixteenth General Convention of Receivers of the Doctrines of the New Jerusalem in the United States: Held at the Temple of the Second Society of the New Jerusalem in Philadelphia. June 5, 6, and 7, 1834–78* (Boston: Otis Clapp, 1834), 115.

[119] Cyriel Odhner Singsted, *The Swedenborgian Epic: The Life and Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Record Press, 1952), 222. Swedenborg experienced the "danger of communication with the dead, of intercourse with a world of spirits packed with legions of demons, waiting to rush in upon him and destroy him body and soul. Swedenborg realized this danger. While he was asleep in his bed they plotted, he says, to strangle him. They surrounded him with nightmares and visions so horrible as nearly to destroy his reason. They inspired him with an almost uncontrollable desire to commit suicide. They tried to make him drink something that would deprive him of understanding. They inflicted excruciating pains upon various parts of his body, causing nausea, swooning, or fever.

'I doubt whether others could have endured it on account of the pain,' he says, 'but having become accustomed to it I at last bore it often without pain.' Once a spirit seemed to come up to him stealthily from behind and plunge a dagger into him. 'I felt as it were a stroke through the heart,' he says, 'and immediately another in the brain such as easily would have killed a man. But being protected by the Lord, I feared nothing . . . Unless the Lord defended man every moment . . . he would instantly perish, in consequence of the indescribably intense and mortal hatred which prevails in the world of spirits against the things of love and faith towards the Lord. [But] the devil can do no harm to those whom the Lord protects, as it has been granted me to know from much astonishing experience, so that at last I have no fear even of the worst of the infernal crew.'"

[120] Abijah Alley had one male slave under age ten in 1840, and does not appear on the 1850 or 1860 slave census for Scott County. His brother Thomas owned one slave in 1860, and she was listed as a fugitive from the state.

In 1840, Abijah was earning his living as a farmer. By then his older brother James had moved with his wife Catherine and son Daniel from Kentucky to Indiana and then to Texas. Thomas Alley, father of Abijah and James, had built a mill on the Clinch River by 1820. James found a likely stream and built a similar mill by 1838, and Alley's Mills quickly became an East Texas trading center. Both James and Daniel were listed in the 1846 Republic of Texas poll lists.[121] It may have been to visit them that the peripatetic Abijah made his way to Texas around 1848; this visit will be part of the discussion of Moseley Baker later in the chapter.

The 1850 Scott County census lists Abijah's occupation as C. C. Clergyman, another enigmatic clue to his religious views. This could be Christian Church, Church of Christ, or Christian Connection. All three sought to restore worship to the purity of the apostolic church founded by Jesus Christ. When James O'Kelley split off from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1792 because he objected to the undemocratic idea of bishops, he called his new faith Republican Methodism and later simply the Christian Church. He and those who followed him away from the Methodist hierarchy believed Jesus Christ was the only Head of the Church, the name Christian was nonsectarian, the Bible was "a sufficient rule of faith and practice," Christian piety and character should be the only tests of church membership, and "The right of private judgment, and the liberty of conscience, the privilege and duty of all." This freedom of individual interpretation in a community of shared faith attracted many adherents. The movement's locus was Virginia and North Carolina, and O'Kelley's views were compatible with those adopted by Abijah Alley. By the time Alley took to preaching, O'Kelley's movement had merged

[121] Marion Day Mullins, *Republic of Texas: Poll Lists for 1846* (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1974), 3.

with one founded in New England on similar principles, and became known as the Christian Connection. Presbyterian minister Barton Warren Stone's 1801 revival at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, another early eruption of the backwoods quest for the true religion of Christ and the church He founded, resulted in the formation of another group that also chose to call itself simply Christians. They democratically renounced the rite of ordination and affirmed the Bible as the sole authority on matters of faith. In time the followers of Barton Stone took to calling their congregations the Christian Church in some places and the Church of Christ in others. From what we know of Abijah Alley, he would have agreed with the Bible-based simplicity of all their interpretations and their focus on independent congregations. Shaker records show that Abijah Alley led others away from Union Village and unsuccessfully attempted to establish "a similar institution with broader views." "Minister C C" might also refer to the religious sect Abijah Alley founded. Known as "the little band," it still had a few adherents in Scott County on the eve of World War II. Almost nothing is recorded of its activities, save that Abijah Alley was the main contributor to construction of a church in Long Hollow, that he "frequently began his services several hours before dawn; and large congregations did attend these services."[122]

[122] There were a number of evangelical sects that called themselves "the Christians" in the late eighteenth century. For a concise explanation of how the names Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Christian Connection, and Churches of Christ were applied, see David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Quest for a Christian America: The Disciples of Christ and American Society to 1866* (Nashville: The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), 4–9. John Woods and the post-Cane Ridge schismatics adopted the name Christians by 1804; Earl Irvin West. *The Search for the Ancient Order: A History of the Restoration Movement 1849–1906* (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Company, 1974), 6–10; Richard T. Hughes. *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of the Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 115; *Quest for a Christian America*, 5–6; J. P. MacLean, "The Shaker Community of Warren County, Ohio," 263; *Early Obsornes and Alleys*, 33–34.

By 1860, Alley is listed in the census not as a minister but a miller, having acquired a mill where he employed several of his sons.[123] Whether or not he had been loosely allied with the Church of Christ, he was almost surely aware of the drama that, as we shall see in another chapter, unfolded in the Nashville Church of Christ in the 1850s. Alley would certainly have sympathized with Jesse Babcock Ferguson, the Nashville minister who was vilified by Church of Christ traditionalists for proclaiming publicly his belief that men could communicate with angels and spirits.

Moseley Baker (1802–1848)

How Moseley Baker came to have a copy of Abijah Alley's book remains a mystery. He might have obtained it on a visit to the East in 1846 or found it in Texas. An old friend who was a Presbyterian minister remembered Baker as "a many-sided man, one of my most generous friends. He subscribed one thousand dollars to build the first church in Houston. His wife was a Presbyterian. He was then far from being a religious man. But in 1846 I met him in Kentucky. He was then a Methodist preacher and seemed a truly devout man."[124]

Moseley Baker did not know then that he was nearing the end of his eventful life. He was born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1802. Ten years later his mother died; his father moved the family to North Carolina and soon remarried. Many of the Bakers—including

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[123] "WPA Interview with Joseph H. Alley."

[124] Four Alley brothers came to Texas from Missouri and were involved with the Austin colony, but I cannot determine that there is any connection with the family of Abijah Alley. Alley's brother James was in East Texas by 1838, along with his wife Catherine and son Daniel who had been Shakers with Abijah; it is probable that they would have received a copy of Abijah's book. Their home at Alley's Mills was a center of commercial traffic in the Cass County area in the 1840s; Reverend W. Y. Allen, "Allen's Reminiscences of Texas, 1838–1842," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 18:3 (January 1915), 287.

Moseley and his father and brother—moved west to Montgomery, Alabama. The Baker men were planters. Moseley Baker was admitted to the bar, was founder and editor of the Montgomery *Advertiser,* and in 1828 married Eliza Ward Pickett, the daughter of an Alabama planter and politician. Elected to the Alabama House of Representatives in 1829, Baker served as Speaker of the House. His father died in Montgomery in 1831. In early 1832, accused of forging a check, Moseley Baker fled to Texas.[125] His brother Hance soon followed, bringing Moseley's wife and infant daughter.

In Texas, Baker became a successful land speculator and an early and vocal advocate of independence from Mexico. By 1835, he was active in meetings to discuss grievances against Mexico and possible Texan autonomy, and it was in one such meeting that Sam Houston announced he would "rather be a slave, and grovel in the dust all my life, than be a convicted felon!" That was the public beginning of a lifelong feud. A year later, commanding the largest company in Houston's army during the revolution, Baker refused to abandon San Felipe when Houston retreated. Baker's action was a success militarily, and allowed him to fulminate in later years on Houston's cowardly retreat. Baker led his company at the Battle of San Jacinto, where he was slightly wounded.[126]

Baker the speculator was instrumental in laying plans for development and internal improvements in the new Republic of Texas, and after his death the possibility of spirit communication he had introduced to Texas would influence many of the powerful men who had known him. One of these was Michel Branamour Menard, who founded the city of Galveston in 1836 and organized the Galveston City Company to help develop

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[125] *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Moseley Baker," http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/BB/fba37.html (accessed August 27, 2006).

[126] Ibid.

and promote it. Moseley Baker was one of the eight men who joined Menard in this enterprise. Elected to the First Congress of the Republic of Texas 1836, Baker helped secure the charter for a railroad and canal company. The company collapsed in the Panic of 1837. Baker also used his first term to draw up impeachment charges against Sam Houston; this too was a failure. Baker was elected to the Third Congress from Galveston, and in 1839 established a plantation in Harris County and was appointed brigadier general for a campaign against Indians on the Brazos. That year also saw Menard and Baker, along with city of Houston founder Augustus Chapman Allen and a handful of others, elected directors of the Houston and Brazos Rail Road Company. "I was at the first railroad meeting ever held in Texas," recalled an elderly Presbyterian minister, "and opened the meeting with prayer. Moseley Baker made the speech and dug a hole, and the Masons planted a post, as a beginning of a railroad; that was in 1840."[127]

Sometime soon thereafter, Baker began to take more interest in religion. Another Presbyterian minister recounted an 1840 visit to Houston. He found the town "not handsome, and the streets very muddy." He stayed about ten days, preaching in the old capitol. "The people turned out extremely well, and I think some five or six persons professed conversion. Amongst those much wrought upon, was General Mosely Baker, whose residence was on the bay, but was on a visit to Houston. He did not at that time profess conversion, but did some time after, and became a preacher in the Methodist connection. . . ."[128]

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[127] *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Texas Railroad, Navigation, and Banking Company," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/TT/dft1.html (accessed December 6, 2009); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Baker, Moseley"; Andrew Forest Muir, "Railroad Enterprise in Texas, 1836–1841," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 74:4 (April 1944), 352; "Allen's Reminiscences of Texas," 295.

[128] William M. Baker, *The Life and Labours of Daniel Baker, D.D., Pastor and Evangelist. Prepared by His Son, Rev. William M. Baker, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Austin Texas*

Moseley Baker is listed as one of the earliest members of the Methodist Church established in Houston in 1841 and of the Cedar Bayou Methodist Church organized in 1844 at the home of his brother, Hance Baker. Moseley Baker's plantation, Evergreen, was nearby on Galveston Bay. He and his wife were among the nine charter members, and in 1845 Moseley became a preacher.[129]

We do not know why Baker traveled to Kentucky in 1846, or if that was his final destination. The journey would have taken him by ship from Galveston to New Orleans, by steamboat with stops at Natchez, Vicksburg, Memphis and other Mississippi River towns, and then up the Ohio River to Kentucky. That would make the timing right for Baker, who had recently taken up preaching, to have acquired, read, and pondered Abijah Alley's book. Assisted by his son-in-law, Baker started the *Texas True Evangelist* in Houston in 1847 to promote his reformulated version of the true faith, including Alley's pronouncements. Other than Alley, one can only make informed guesses about sources that influenced Baker. He surely would have known of Swedenborg; the claims of Anton Mesmer and the animal magnetists to extra-corporeal knowledge and communication in the magnetized trance state were equally or better known. He might well have read of the public trance lectures Andrew Jackson Davis had been giving since 1845 under the influence of animal magnetism, and about Davis's claims he had received communications from the spirits of Emanuel Swedenborg and the ancient Greek physician Galen; these had been collected and published in 1847. This book, *The*

(Philadelphia: William & Alfred Martien, 1859 [Third Edition]), 238; *Mind of the Master Class*, 600: "In Texas the Reverend William Baker, son of the great evangelist Daniel Baker, joined some prominent citizens in a small spiritualist circle."

[129] Macum Phelan, *A History of Early Methodism in Texas, 1817–1866* (Nashville: Lamar & Barton, 1924), 310; "About Cedar Bayou: A Condensed History," Cedar Bayou Methodist Church, http://visualperception.us/cedarbayou/about/index.htm (accessed December 6, 2009).

Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind, is likely to have influenced both Baker and Alley. Contemporaries claimed Baker was enmeshed in animal magnetism and spiritualism. "Davis's mesmeric visions of the afterlife," noted historian Robert S. Cox, "dovetailed so neatly into the early Spiritualism that most commentators saw only continuity."[130] The Fox sisters and their spirit rappings did not attract interest outside their own neighborhood (and start the modern Spiritualist movement) until 1848, but their national reputation and influence led later Methodist chroniclers to characterize Baker and those who shared his enthusiasm for the message of the *Texas True Evangelist* as enmeshed in Spiritualism. Indeed, after the Fox sisters opened the possibility of talking to the dead almost anything involving the paranormal or contact with spirits, angels or other noncorporeal entities was likely to be linked to Spiritualism by the general public.

Combining the mysteries of the human mind and the possibilities of healing, clairvoyance and perhaps even communication with disembodied spirits, mesmerism had found a ready audience in America. Whatever factors led him to belief in the powers of animal magnetism and spirit communication, Moseley Baker's activities made the Methodist establishment uncomfortable. His *Texas True Evangelist* made "railing accusations" against the Methodist Church, and for a time carried on a war of words with the local Methodist press. The readers of Baker's paper were dubbed "Bakerites."[131]

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[130] Marilyn McAdams Sibley, *Lone Stars and State Gazettes: Texas Newspapers before the Civil War* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1983), 223; On Andrew Jackson Davis, see *In Search of White Crows*, 10–11. The book was *Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind. By and Through Andrew Jackson Davis, the "Poughkeepsie Seer" and "Clairvoyant"* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1847); *Body and Soul,* 75.

[131] *History of Early Methodism in Texas*, 311.

By the spring of 1848 he had left the church, taking several influential members of the congregation with him. The sole contemporary source of information on the particulars of Alley's beliefs and his influence on Baker is a letter of May 4, 1848 written by Methodist minister Oscar Murray Addison, who was a houseguest of Moseley Baker in Houston at the same time as an "old man" named Alley. Addison noted that Baker had withdrawn from the Methodist Church.

> This has not much surprised me, as I knew he was not altogether satisfied in our church. . . . I am now at Gen. Baker's, who is my host during this visit to Houston. There is an old man here named Alley, who has (or professes to have) received great spiritual light. He has been sanctified, and enjoys a state of holiness higher than this blessing. He contends the Millenium commenced from the year "40," and that Christ has now come the second time. From scripture he says that there was to be a night of darkness or a dark age previous to the Millenium, in which we were not to be able to enjoy much spiritual light; but now Christ has come the second time, there is a state of glory to be enjoyed by the church she has never before known. All sectarian feelings are to be done away with and the followers of Christ are to be united. This he is commanded to preach, &c &c. Now bro. Baker professes to have received great spiritual light, and receives the preaching of Mr. Alley as from God. This may have had some influence in his withdrawal from the church. He says he is happy, and would not join again for the world.

Baker's doctrines seem to have combined mesmerism, spirit communication and Abijah Alley's brand of millenarian perfection. The Methodist history that quotes Reverend Addison's letter refers to Abijah Alley, a seventh-generation Virginian, as "a shrewd yankee from the North."[132]

The connection between Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker is significant. It demonstrates the mobility of people, ideas and movements in America's antebellum hinterland. Linking their stories sheds light on the early spread in the American South of

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[132] Isabella Margaret Elizabeth Blandin, *History of Shearn Church, 1837–1907* (Houston, Texas: Published for the benefit of Shearn Auxiliary of Women's Home Mission Society, 1908), 39; *History of Early Methodism in Texas*, 311.

claims that channels of contact with heaven might exist, and that revelation was an ongoing process. When Moseley Baker sparked schism in the Methodist congregation in Houston with his assertions that one could both be a Christian and communicate with angels or spirits people remembered only that Baker was captivated by the revelations of "shrewd yankee" mystic Abijah Alley.[133] Such revelations, surely, could not have had their genesis in the South.

The roots of the Spiritualist movement that swept America in the 1850s may have been in New England and the "Burned-over District," but there was a southern version emerging at the same time. The publicity surrounding the Fox sisters launched Spiritualism as a mass movement. That movement attracted charlatans, creeds and dogmas, and followers who were publicly allied with abolition, free love and other causes not popular in the South. But there were Spiritualist Christians in the South, and they like restorationist Christians were engaged in a project that focused—if from a different point of view—on the purity and promise of the primitive Christian faith.

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[133] There was a great deal of confusion and would in ensuing decades be a great deal of debate about whether angels and spirits were in fact the same thing; *History of Methodism in Texas*, 94.

CHAPTER THREE

Early Years in the South, 1850–1854

To identify spirits, is to prove their continued existence. This I have done.
—John B. Wolff

There is little record of the sorts of activity in the South in the early 1850s that would be labeled "Spiritualist." Especially in these early years, it was the yearning for a deeper understanding of the mysteries of the life everlasting than traditional Christian denominations offered that drew southerners to Spiritualism. Among the individuals who have surfaced in the research for this project, the majority were either Protestant clergymen, received messages of a distinctly religious nature, or had investigated spiritual phenomena with someone answering at least one of those descriptions. A few were directly influenced by Swedenborg's writings. Several had read the works of Andrew Jackson Davis, many read Spiritualist newspapers and many were Christians seeking solace in the face of loss.

One notable exception is the 1851 experience of William Calvin Oates of Pike County, Alabama. Neither religious seeking nor personal loss appear to have been behind his curiosity about the séance. Oates was born just two weeks after "the stars fell," a spectacular 1833 meteor shower that was a temporal landmark for a generation. "Many blacks would later mark their own birth dates specifically as having occurred either

before or after the meteor storm. The event in some places sparked religious revivals among both black and white Christians, especially in the South." He was raised in on a hardscrabble Alabama farm in beliefs that were a not-uncommon blending of "superstition" and Christianity. Oates was influenced by his mother's Baptist piety, but also referred to her as "a prophetess," believing she had the power of second sight and "could see things that others could not, could feel forces that others could not sense, and could experience the supernatural in ways that mystified her family and her neighbors." Oates also gambled and got into fights. In 1851—surprisingly early in the course of Spiritualism for a young girl in rural Mississippi to be imitating the Fox sisters—Oates attended a séance at the cabin of a neighbor whose daughter said she was a medium. Accusing her of fraud, he fought with her father and left him for dead. Although Oates fled in fear for his life, the man survived and Oates would go on to become a successful lawyer, newspaper editor, Confederate officer, legislator and governor of Alabama.[134]

Like Oates, Thomas Holley Chivers of Georgia grew up on the agricultural frontier, though on a plantation. Chivers was raised a Baptist but became a Swedenborgian mystic. He was linked to Andrew Jackson Davis and in 1850 contributed poems to *The Spirit Messenger,* which occasionally printed news of the Fox family's comings and goings.

Thomas Holley Chivers was not the only Georgian of a poetic nature to be drawn to the mysteries of the spirit world. Cuyler W. Young of Halcyondale was dubbed the "Bird Medium" by the *Spiritual Telegraph* after he wrote that since 1842 "a bird has

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[134] Glenn W. LaFantasie, *Gettysburg Requiem: The Life and Lost Causes of Confederate Colonel William C. Oates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2–7, 132; Thomas McAdory Owen, "Oates, William Calvin," *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography,* Volume IV (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921), 1292–1293.

acted as a medium of communication between myself and absent or deceased friends. I have asked it questions, and it replies by notes that I fully comprehend—its language is plain to me. . . .” Young was an attorney with a wife and children, living with his father, a wealthy cotton planter. Writing in 1853, he professed himself “educated and trained as a doubting and inquisitive lawyer, and I am not easily deceived by unreal things” but had been entirely won over by the “evidences of this Spiritual religion so strong before me.” He continued to place a bird at the center of his mystical experiences, in one case describing “the Spirit of the Lord” speaking to him in the wilderness, instructing him to follow “yonder bird of prey, flying toward the west!” His recounting of this quest was somewhat incoherent but mercifully brief. In the end, he raised a window “and the bird of prey that had guided me flapped his wings upon the glass of the window; and I knew that the Lord was near me,” and he thanked God for the “wondrous miracles and revelations, and for the bliss thou givest me.”[135] Young’s language would be perfectly appropriate to an evangelical in the throes of religious experience except for the part about the bird, which tends to nudge him toward categorization as eccentric. It is not known what his family and neighbors thought.

Spiritualism in the early 1850s appears to have spread mostly through families and friends, and within the South’s commercial and political networks. There are snippets in the written record pointing to Spiritualist activity in many places throughout the South, but most of the people whose thoughts have been preserved because they appeared in Spiritualist newspapers were in the busy port cities of St. Louis and New Orleans, in or

[135] “From the Bird Medium,” *The Telegraph Papers* III (November, 1853–January, 1854), (New York: Partridge & Brittan, Publishers, 1854), 260; “The Spirits and the Birds,” Ibid., 355.

near centers of commerce in Tennessee and Texas, or somewhere else along the region's watercourses. This is also true of those whose records are in archival collections.

Emma Balfour and several other residents of Vicksburg experimented with Spiritualism in 1852. She and her first husband, "like so many other Virginians," had been "lured to the great Southwest by reports of financial rewards associated with the famed 'flush times' of the great cotton boom." Their two-year-old daughter died suddenly, and in 1844 her husband succumbed to yellow fever. Leaving her property in the care of a fellow Virginian who had studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania with her brother Thomas, Emma went to Alabama to stay with Thomas and his family at their plantation. By 1850, Thomas would own one hundred twenty of Marengo County's more than twenty thousand slaves. Emma formed a lifelong bond with his wife Louisa. Both were devout Episcopalians. In 1847, Emma married her brother's friend Dr. William Balfour and returned to Vicksburg. He purchased a fine home and she created beautiful gardens around it. Emma's brother and husband were both active in church affairs. Emma learned from her minister that a woman "of high respectability" who was a communicant of their church had become a medium and spoken with him about it. She also heard about it from her physician spouse; he had been consulted by the medium's husband, who feared the excitement would be bad for her weak heart. Emma persuaded the woman to demonstrate. "She sat down to a table and laid her hand *lightly* upon it" and asked if there was a spirit present, and if so would it make itself known by tipping the table. Defying Faraday's "unconscious muscle movement" theory, the table *rose.* Being asked, the spirit desired to converse, and Emma found it all quite strange. She considered the possibilities. Could it have been the woman's mind, or some sort of

invisible fluid passing through her that caused the table to move? The medium offered to call any spirit Emma wished, and she asked for her father. As a test, the table rapped out the number of years since his death. Emma Balfour went away puzzled. Perhaps it was "spiritual mesmerism," for she could not imagine that spirits "from the other world are sentenced to come here at our bidding." The minister persuaded the medium to allow several prominent citizens to witness her experiments in spirit communication, and Emma noted in her diary that it soon ceased to seem odd, since "what seen at a distance seems strange and awful when brought near us and made by use a familiar thing begins to be looked upon as a matter of course a very common place affair after all." They continued to meet, and Emma was convinced that "some unseen agency is at work–what it is remains to be proven." Two months later she leaned toward electricity or mental telepathy as the answer. "I have raised a small table several times myself. Lay your hand lightly upon the table and try to concentrate your mind upon the one desire that the table should rise and will it strongly with all your power to rise," she wrote. "It will be necessary to keep your hands on and your thoughts fixed perhaps five minutes and the first indication of it moving is you feel a peculiar tingling in your hands and arms and when it begins to come up a tingling down the spine–For me it rose in jerks and at each jerk I felt as if I had received a slight electric shock." Certain she was not a medium, and in conversation with her minister and other intelligent people, she came to a conclusion that explained the phenomena satisfactorily and apparently that was the end of it.[136]

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[136] John Sykes, "Gardening with Mrs. Balfour: An Antebellum Vicksburg Gardener," *The Magnolia* XVII:3 (Spring 2002), 1, 3–9; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Alabama, Held in the City of Montgomery, on Saturday, May 6, 1838* (Mobile: Morning Chronicle Print, 1838), 7; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the United States of America, Assembled in a General Convention, Held in the City of New York, From October 6 to October 27, Inclusive, In the Year of*

Texas and its earliest settlers left an especially rich record of receptivity to the idea of spirit communication. Moseley Baker and his circle of Methodist renegades were the first. Columbus R. Patton and his family would have known Moseley Baker. All were early settlers of Texas, engaged in plantation agriculture, vigorously supported independence from Mexico and actively promoted the sort of internal improvements that would facilitate commerce and settlement in their adopted home. By his death in late 1848, Baker's embrace of what would retrospectively be labeled Spiritualism had created quite a sensation in Houston. Baker's interest in the world of spirits and visionary revelation was a direct outgrowth of a process of Christian spiritual seeking. He occupied a social stratum that had access to all the ideas that swirled through mid-nineteenth-century America, but the record indicates that his turn from Methodism to Christian mysticism was most strongly influenced by Abijah Alley. Columbus Patton's Spiritualism, though we have no evidence for its genesis, looked to the revelations of Andrew Jackson Davis for theoretical structure. The Baptist traditions the Patton family brought from Kentucky appear to have had little or nothing to do with his quest. Patton's is a tale of the frontier South with Faulknerian overtones of greed, contested power and insanity, and a cast of characters that included a powerful planter and his slaves, scheming relatives, self-serving lawyers and politicians, brave soldiers in the Texas revolution, and a charismatic and enigmatic mulatto concubine. Notable in their absence are clergymen.

Like many who moved west, the Pattons of Christian County, Kentucky came to Texas as a family. Columbus Patton, the oldest son, wrote to empresario Stephen F.

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our Lord 1880 (Boston: Franklin Press, 1881), 56, 411; Gordon A. Cotton, *From the Letters of Emma Balfour, 1847–1857* (Vicksburg, Miss.: Gordon A. Cotton, 2006), 152–158.

Austin in 1831 stating his intention to move to Texas from Hopkinsville, Kentucky with "a stock of goods and some negroes," and requesting information. Austin's colony was part of Mexico, where slavery was illegal and all who settled were required to convert to Catholicism. These strictures were generally observed in the breach by the ambitious and independent American colonists, most of whom came from the slave-holding South. The Pattons established a prosperous sugar plantation on land they purchased in Brazoria County in 1834 from one of Austin's "Old Three Hundred" original colonists. Patton men were active in politics. Columbus and two of his brothers fought against Mexico during the Texas revolution, his brother William serving as an aide to General Sam Houston.[137]

While carving a plantation out of swampy wilderness up the Brazos River from the Gulf of Mexico, Columbus began a relationship in 1833 with one of his slaves, an "intelligent and rather haughty" mulatto named Rachel. They could not legally marry, but lived together as man an wife for more than twenty years. Rachel used the surname Patton as she oversaw the household, gave orders to the other slaves, and purchased expensive clothing and furnishings for their home.[138] In 1843 Columbus Patton, as the oldest son, took control of his late father's estate; he was then master of forty-four slaves. Here the narrative becomes less clear. Most available records were generated during legal wrangling over Columbus Patton's will after his death in 1856. What seems to have happened is that the Patton family became increasingly unhappy about his relationship

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[137] *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (American Historical Association, 1890), 1131; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historical Park," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/VV/ghv1.html (accessed February 8, 2010).

[138] Mark McNeese Carroll, *Homesteads Ungovernable: Families, Sex, Race, and the Law in Frontier Texas, 1823–1860* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2001), 51–52; Cary Cordova, "Rachel Patton: Mistress of Patton Place," http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/varner/slavery/article_1.htm (accessed October 26, 2007).

with Rachel, who with Columbus Patton's wealth and protection claimed all the outward trappings and privileges of a white plantation mistress. Their relationship was not unusual in the "socially fluid, multiracial province" when it began. One of Patton's brothers who lived nearby also had a slave mistress, and "many Anglo-Texan men cohabited with their slave women" before the Civil War. New laws passed to reinforce slavery after Texas became a republic, along with policies enforcing white supremacy, reflected a hardening position by whites throughout the slaveholding South.[139]

Times were changing. By 1850 wealthy families like the Pattons were reestablishing a social order that replicated the planter lifestyle they remembered from their former homes, and the country was filling up with immigrants who brought their Deep South customs with them. Denominational religion, too, was establishing a more solid infrastructure. Christopher Patton was a nominal Baptist, and estate executor John Adriance claimed he had once heard Patton discuss the construction of a Baptist church with Adriance's partner, Col. Morgan L. Smith. All three were Brazoria County planters, veterans of the struggle for Texas independence and railroad enthusiasts. Neither Smith nor Patton had experienced a religious conversion when they talked of building a church, so the impetus probably came from family members and others in the community. Smith did not find religion until 1856; he built a brick church for his slaves that year, and was thenceforth a devout Baptist.[140] Of all the closely connected men who wielded power in

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[139] "The Enslaved People of Patton Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas," http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/varner/slavery/patton_property.htm (accessed October 26, 2007): Anthony Christopher was a former slave of Charles Patton, a brother of Columbus Patton. Christopher said that his older sister Deenie "was Marse Patton's gal. He wasn't married and he keeps Deenie up to de big house." Martha Harrison interview, American Slave, XVIII (Unwritten History of Slavery), 118 (quotation); Anthony Christopher interview, ibid., Supp., Ser. 2. III (Texas), Pt. 2, 719; *Homesteads Ungovernable,* 53, 62.

[140] "The George Washington Room," http://www.caryc.net/vh/gw-room.htm:

Brazoria County, only Columbus Patton is on record as having admitted an attraction to Spiritualism. He was hardly the only influential Texan to participate in séances in the early 1850s, but was the only one to whose undoing it may have led.

Rachel "Patton" and the power she assumed were intolerable to the Patton clan, but Christopher Patton as the current patriarch controlled the bulk of the family's wealth and thought he had the clout to do as he wished. In 1851, people remembered later, Patton had begun to act strange. In 1854 the family had him declared legally insane and packed him off to the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum, where he died in 1856. Most of what is in the written record reflects the Patton family's efforts to prove him *non compos mentis* in 1854 and to break his will after he died. According to the testimony of Frederick Vogel, who first knew Patton as early as 1842, his character "was that of a very correct close business man. I noticed a change in him about 1850 or 1851. . . . I think in 1851 they started the spiritual circles in the town of Columbia and at other places besides Columbia it appeared to take his whole attention and whenever the subject was brought up it seemed to fix his whole mind on it. . . . this seemed to change his manner and look." In 1851, though, the more interesting influence was probably Rachel Patton herself. Throughout the narrative of Spiritualist experiments in the South, a unifying thread is the

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Answers of John Adriance [Case #453, Probate records, File #2 : I never heard him say anything about religion except once when he was called on for a subscription to build a church he said he was a Baptist & he and Col. Smith talked about building a Baptist church which was previous to 1854. I don't know what his religion was in 1852 & 1853 (accessed February 14, 2010); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Smith, Morgan L. (1802–?)," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/SS/fsm33.html (accessed February 14, 2010); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Adriance, John (1818–1903)," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/AA/fad16.html (accessed February 14, 2010); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Waldeck Plantation," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/acw1.html (accessed February 14, 2010); *Daughters of the Republic of Texas Patriot Ancestors Album,* Volume I, ed. Herbert C. Banks (Paducah, Ky.: Turner Publishing Company, 2001), 6; *Vassar Encyclopedia,* s. v. "A Brief Guide to Vassar's Trustees," http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/trustees/a-brief-guide-to-vassars-charter-trustees.html (accessed February 14, 2010).

reliance on "home mediums." Within families, wives and daughters often developed mediumistic powers and served as conduits for contact with the spirits. Rachel lived as Columbus Patton's wife and the mistress of his household. One can only speculate about what sort of power she actually exercised over him, how it might have been enhanced by his reliance on her as his connection to the spirit world, or how her childhood in the slave quarters might have shaped her own beliefs in spirits.

After Patton's death, Dr. J. C. Davis testified in March 1857 that Patton was "no believer in revealed religion. . . . He believed that Andrew Jackson Davis 'had discovered the true road and that God Almighty in his infinite goodness had placed us here to do as we pleased, but would not have created us as lords of creation and after his own image, and afterwords send us into Eternal misery.'" Patton had expounded his views of spiritual matters "on his front gallery, early in 1853, at which time and place he requested me to procure for him all of Andrew J. Davis' work in New York, which order was sent on."[141] At a time when Protestant denominations were working to increase their influence in the region, Columbus Patton had made common cause with Harmonialists, Universalists and spirit rappers.

There is evidence that Patton had continued to take an active interest in business affairs. In January of 1854, he and several other Columbia businessmen were incorporators of the Columbia, Wharton and Austin Railway Company, intended to connect their city with the state capital. By then, many Texans linked by wealth and power—and the urge to build railroads—were interested in Spiritualism. A key to the family's move to have him declared *non compos mentis* in late 1854 may lie in Dr.

[141] "The George Washington Room": Dr. J. C. Davis, March 9, 1857 [Case #453, Probate records, File #2].

Davis's assertion that "C. R. Patton may have gone on an indefinite time without any marked or furious insanity, had it not been lighted into flame by the many bets made on his sugar crop, which undue excitement burst the bonds of his already dethroned reason." Davis also mentioned Patton's intemperate use of spirituous liquors. Drinking, horse racing, gambling and concubinage were facts of life among men of the South's planter class. Rachel's increasing power over Columbus, and their séances, were disturbing to his family. The tipping point for the Pattons may have been wagers that threatened the financial stability of the entire Patton clan; to protect themselves they had to wrest control of the family's holdings from the patriarch, Columbus R. Patton. By 1853 southern newspapers were sprinkled with stories of people, driven to insanity by Spiritualism, whose families and friends had been forced to place them in insane asylums.[142] Using their influence to have the courts declare a powerful southern patriarch insane was easier for the family than challenging him on any other grounds. Patton was locked up in South Carolina and Rachel was sent to work in the fields.

After Patton's death, his will—written before he was declared legally insane—held some unpleasant surprises for the family. He had left the bulk of the estate to a niece, and manumitted Rachel with an income of one hundred dollars a year and

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[142] *The Laws of Texas 1822– 1897: Austin's Colonization Law and Contract; Mexican Constitution of 1824; Federal Colonization Law; Colonization Laws of Coahuila and Texas; Colonization Law of State of Tamaulipas; Fredonian Declaration of Independence; Laws and Decrees, with Constitution of Coahuila and Texas; San Felipe Convention; Journals of the Consultation; Proceedings of the General Council; Goliad Declaration of Independence; Journals of the Convention at Washington; Ordinances and Decrees of the Consultation; Declaration of Independence; Constitution of the Republic; Laws, General and Special, of the Republic; Annexation Resolution of the United States; Ratification of the Same by Texas; Constitution of the United States; Constitutions of the State of Texas, with All the Laws, General and Special, Passed Thereunder, Including Ordinances, Decrees, and Resolutions, with the Constitution of the Confederate States and the Reconstruction Acts of Congress,* Volume IV, compiled and arranged by H. P. N. Gammel (Austin: The Gammel Book Company, 1898), 35–39; "The George Washington Room"; "Defrauded by Spirit Rappers," New Orleans *Daily Crescent* (March 1, 1853), 1; "Effect of Spirit Rappings," *Daily Crescent* (March 19, 1853), 2; "Spiritual Rappings," *Daily Crescent* (March 22, 1853), 2.

permission to live wherever she wished. The family pointed to the provisions of the will as proof of Columbus Patton's insanity when he wrote it and the "undue influence and control" of his "slave concubine." The Patton family instituted a legal challenge, calling on witnesses like Dr. Davis to substantiate their contention that Patton's Spiritualism was also symptomatic of his insanity. If Rachel had used Columbus Patton's fascination with the world of spirits to strengthen her influence, she would hardly be the first or last slave to use "magical practices" to gain greater autonomy. Nor would the Patton family be the first to claim that a slave woman had exercised undue influence over the family patriarch in contesting the soundness of his mental faculties at the time his will was written. In an 1837 South Carolina suit the indignant white survivors claimed the slave paramour must have caused her master's mental incompetence, and the generous terms of his will regarding the mistress and her family, through the use of African magic, poison or mesmerism.[143] The Pattons may, in fact, have known about the South Carolina case since they had taken Columbus Patton to the state asylum there.

While the court did finally award the influential Pattons most of the estate, the will's provisions for Rachel were upheld. She was installed in a house on the plantation and permitted to continue to purchase her clothing on credit at the local store. Whatever was said of her treatment of other slaves while mistress of the house, by 1859 she had their confidence. Her experience contacting spirits, known to the slaves, could have enhanced her standing in the quarters. The executor, John Adriance, concluded that "her presence near the plantation and slaves belonging to said estate was believed to have

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[143] Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt, *Science and Medicine in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 312–314; Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) , 313.

become exceedingly injurious to the interests of said estate and perhaps dangerous," as whites often found to be the case when free persons of color interacted with those who were still enslaved. Therefore "the negro woman Rachel has been induced to remove to Cincinnati, Ohio" where the estate would send her annual allowance.[144]

For a southern state, Texas had a generous share of Spiritualist activity in the early 1850s. In Galveston, Ebenezer Allen reported that "The first manifestations of which I know any thing, occurred in the room where I now write, in Nov., 1852, and purported to come from a deceased daughter. Not one sitting around the table at the time have ever been present at any previous manifestations."[145] Ebenezer Allen was an attorney, a graduate of Dartmouth College who migrated from New England to Texas in the 1830s. He was also a personal friend of Sam Houston, became Secretary of State of the Republic of Texas in 1844, and worked on the terms of Texas's annexation to the United States.

Ebenezer Allen reported on the visit of a medium, "now in the city of New York," who had spent time in Galveston in early 1854. Allen had once heard her speak in a

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[144] "Rachel Patton: Mistress of Patton Place"; *Homesteads Ungovernable,* 52; *Digital Library on American Slavery,* http://library.uncg.edu/slavery/results.aspx?s=3&sid=162&lRec=20884901&lastset=25&perpag=25. PAR Number 21586004: **State:** Texas, **Year:** 1860, **Location:** Brazoria, **Location Type:** County, **Abstract:** John Adriance, the administrator of the estate of C. R. Patton, asks the court to review and approve the receipts and expenditures of the estate. Adriance reports that, despite drought and loss of livestock, he has made "a good amount of valuable improvements" to the estate. The estate did, however, suffer "some loss of small negroes," and he was compelled to facilitate the removal of the slave Rachel to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he will continue to send her annual allowance. Adriance explains that "her presence near the plantation and slaves belonging to said estate was believed to have become exceedingly injurious to the interests of said estate and perhaps dangerous." He is quick to make the distinction that "in relation to this matter your Petitioner rather permitted it to be done, than procured it to be done." (accessed February 8, 2010); Ruth Winegarten, Janet G. Humphrey, Frieda Werden, *Black Texas Women: 150 Years of Trial and Triumph* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1995), 29.

[145] Letter written by Ebenezer Allen, Galveston, September 23, 1854, *Telegraph Papers* VII (November, 1854–January, 1855), 103.

drawing room in the character of the late Moseley Baker, "of whom she knew nothing." The subject was internal improvements in Texas. The medium,

> or rather *he,* spoke about forty minutes, referring to and relating a chain of incidents and transactions beginning twenty years before, and coming down to the time of his dissolution; and in manner, gesture, figures of speech, and peculiarities of style, expression etc., so clearly copying his former *self,* that his friends present at once recognized and saluted him.[146]

Allen had helped secure a charter for the Galveston and Red River Railroad Company in 1848, the year Baker died. Houston merchant Paul Bremond, who believed Moseley Baker's spirit guided him, helped break ground for this line on January 1, 1853. Bremond claimed he had heard a disembodied voice while alone in his room, urging him to build it. When Bremond asked how he would find the funds, the spirit insisted that he "Proceed with the work;" Baker's spirit visited Bremond frequently. While doing a convincing imitation of Baker for forty minutes would have been quite a feat, the medium could easily have learned of Bremond's belief it was Baker's spirit advising him. The line was renamed the Houston and Texas Central Railway in 1856, with Bremond as president; the first car was named the *Ebenezer Allen.* After serving from 1849 to 1853 as the Texas Secretary of State, Allen became a manager and promoter for the line. His political involvement and his interest in railroads tied him to the network that included Columbus R. Patton and Moseley Baker, long-time Texans who lived within easy reach of Galveston by water. Allen also had family and business connections in the East, and his law partner in Galveston was the son of Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's*

[146] Letter written by Ebenezer Allen, Galveston, September 26, 1854, *Telegraph Papers* VII, 113–114.

Book in New York.[147] These facts call into question Allen's assertion that the first spiritual manifestations of which he knew anything occurred in his home in 1852.

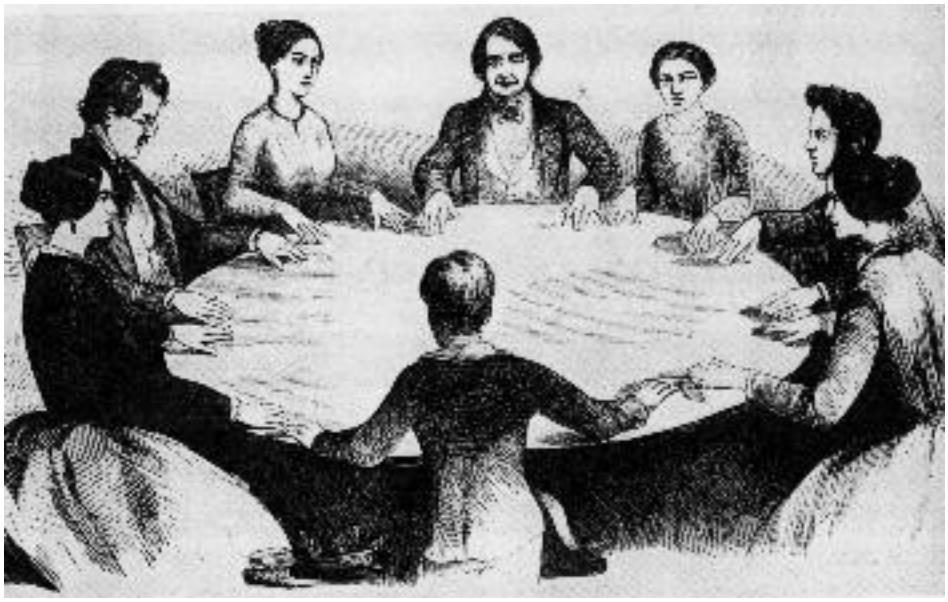

Figure 6. A Séance.

Allen's description of his first experience with spirit communication tells us that he had some idea of how they should proceed. He sketched out a picture of a family hoping for contact with a lost loved one, a typical home séance circle. All were conversing pleasantly, with their hands resting upon the table, as instructions for séances in Spiritualist publications advised. "After more than half an hour, the table commenced moving," throwing the company into a state of "strong excitement" for a time. Once everyone was again calm, "a series of affectionate inquiries were put by the mother and

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[147] *Houston, a History and Guide,* compiled by workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Texas (Houston, Tex.: Anson Jones Press, 1942), 141; Robert S. Maxwell, *Whistle in the Piney Woods: Paul Bremond and the Houston, East and West Texas Railway* (University of North Texas Press, 1998), 9; *The Handbook of Texas Online,* s. v. "Allen, Ebenezer," http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/AA/fal18.html (accessed January 28, 2004); *The Handbook of Texas Online,* s. v. "Houston and Texas Central Railway," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/HH/eqh9.html (accessed January 28, 2004); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Hale, William G. (1822–1876)," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/HH/fha14.html (accessed January 28, 2004).

brothers of the departed, and answered in a most apt and satisfactory manner through the alphabet." Their success led to occasional circles in Galveston over the next several months and the development of two writing mediums. The first was a lady who "could not be persuaded to persevere in the exercise or cultivation of her high gifts." The other, a gentleman who was a native of New York, was warned by the spirit of a departed niece of his approaching death two weeks before he became one of the five hundred twenty-three Galvestonians to die of yellow fever in the 1853 outbreak.[148] This is an early example of the transition from merely remarking on foreknowledge to ascribing it to communication from spirits. However Ebenezer Allen discovered the spirit world, he would remain an enthusiastic Spiritualist until his death, and Galveston would continue to be a bastion of Spiritualism in the South into the twentieth century.

For some living in the South, a trip to the North in the early days of Spiritualism provided an introduction to the séance. James T. Close and Isaac Hedges were both born in New York state and had moved south. While in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1851 James Close was invited "to visit Miss M., who was developed as a rapping medium, and through her I received a communication from my deceased grandmother, who left the earth-form some twenty years since. She told me the names and ages of all my father's family who are living;" and gave the ages of his deceased brother, and one sister, "all of which were correct, though I was an entire stranger to every one in the city. I could not help believing what I saw and heard, which led me to investigate the subject in all its various forms." Close married in Virginia in 1851 and settled down in Alexandria. He

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[148] Letter written by Ebenezer Allen, Galveston, September 23, 1854, *Telegraph Papers* VII; *The Handbook of Texas Online,* s. v. "Epidemic Diseases," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/EE/sme1.html (accessed February 9, 2010).

was a comfortably prosperous insurance agent with a growing family, and continued to seek communication with the world of spirits. The first circles in St. Louis were started in 1852 by Isaac Hedges, whose wife had died there in 1849 during an outbreak of cholera. Hedges had witnessed spiritual phenomena in New York and may have been among the thousands who visited the Fox sisters at Barnum's Hotel. He returned to St. Louis with instructions for forming a circle, and one of the first participants in his séances, Amanda Britt, developed as a trance-speaking medium and went on to a long professional career. Streamlining the process of communicating, mediums in St. Louis and elsewhere soon moved beyond raps to "writing, speaking, and seeing" under spirit influence. The spirit of the proprietor of a local Masonic hall gave "unmistakable Masonic signs" to a group of astonished Masons through a female medium. Participants began holding private circles in their homes, and through these family séances "various phases of mediumship began to appear in some of the most intelligent and respectable families in the city."[149] When the Fox sisters came to town in early 1852, St. Louis was a ready market for their professional services.

Before moving downriver to St. Louis, the Foxes had stopped at cities in Ohio. While they were in Cincinnati, one of their visitors was Virginia-born James Hervey Otey, the first Protestant Episcopal bishop of Tennessee. In 1852 the *Spiritual Telegraph* picked up a letter from Bishop Otey that had appeared in another newspaper. Otey said that the previous November he had been "present at some very curious and inexplicable exhibitions, made, it would seem, under the direction or through the agency of the Misses Fox—their mother and other persons being also present." The bishop "made copious notes of all that transpired" and thought, though he could detect no fraud, that it was

[149] "Spirit Communings," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 22, 1858), 32; *Modern American Spiritualism,* 354.

probably accomplished by trickery or "a new, singular, and at present, inexplicable modification of what is popularly termed mesmerism." While he had never given anyone permission to link his name with Spiritualist phenomena, the bishop had "frequently observed to others that it was too serious a matter to be laughed at; that I thought it was alike the province of Christian truth and philosophy to investigate and to expose fallacy, fraud and deception where they were found—or to consider the facts where they were fully established, and make the conclusions which enlightened reason would warrant." Otey supposed that it was a result not just of taking this position, but also "declaring my determination to examine further and more rigidly, if the opportunity should ever present itself, that my name probably was ever connected with this matter." The *Spiritual Telegraph* praised Otey's open-mindedness as "precisely what we desire and all we ask. Our aim is not to convince, but to induce such minds as his to investigate the subject." Otey was not yet convinced, but as we shall see he did continue to investigate, and even to believe in time that "ministering spirits" were all around him and the spirit of his long-dead daughter kept him company.[150]

One of the stranger chapters of Spiritualism in the South began in 1851 when about one hundred individuals, most members of the circle of Spiritualists in Albany, New York, began a communal settlement at Mountain Cove in what is now West Virginia. They published the *Mountain Cove Journal and Spiritual Harbinger,* "dictated by Spirits out of the flesh, and by them edited, superintended, and controlled." Influenced

[150] "Bishop Otey on the Rappings," *The Spiritual Telegraph* (Saturday, June 12, 1852), 2; Samuel Watson, *The Clock Struck One, and Christian Spiritualist: Being a Synopsis of the Investigations of Spirit Intercourse by an Episcopal Bishop, Three Ministers, Five Doctors, and Others, at Memphis, Tenn., in 1855; Also, the Opinion of Many Eminent Divines, Living and Dead, on the Subject, and Communications Received from a Number of Persons Recently* (Louisville, Ky.: John P. Morton and Company, 1873), xxii.

by Millerism, the group did not think it would be there long, but deteriorated fairly quickly after the spirits decreed that everyone should give up their worldly goods and unquestioningly obey the leaders. One of the two leaders was someone to whom we have already been introduced, Thomas Lake Harris of the 1849 Andrew Jackson Davis circle.[151] Harris was not a permanent resident at Mountain Cove; he was in New Orleans in the winter of 1852. There he fell into a trance and seemed to travel to his former residence in New York, where he ascertained the contents of a letter that had just arrived at the post office inviting him to deliver a series of lectures in Griffin, Georgia. On returning from the superior state, Harris determined to go to Georgia. Reverend Alford Buckner testified that when Harris arrived at Griffin and recounted his unusual receipt of their invitation, Buckner acknowledged that "precisely such a letter [had] been written

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[151] Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, Volume II, 1850–1865* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), 210; *Republic of Mind and Spirit,* 269; *Modern Spiritualism: Its Facts and Fanaticisms, Its Consistencies and Contradictions* by E. W. Capron (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1855), 117–118: It is to be remarked that, with the increase of mediums in 1850, in Auburn, there was apparently a decrease in reliability. And, although new investigators pretty generally received satisfactory evidence of spirituality in the manifestations there was less confidence reposed in the communications by those who were of more experience, except by those who were of the belief that apostles and prophets were manifesting themselves. And this brings us to a notice of the movement in its more public aspect.

In the fall of 1849, Mrs. Benedict, above referred to, was used as a medium, through whom spiritual directions were given to James L. Scott, a Seventh-day Baptist minister of Brooklyn, for his removal to Auburn, to preach and otherwise operate as he might be called upon by the spiritual powers. The leader of the movement from the interior professed to be the apostle Paul, with the cooperation of the other apostles, the prophets, martyrs and many of Christian renown. Mr. Scott removed to Auburn, and there commenced preaching and devoting his energies to the success and spread of the Auburn circle, which assumed the title of "the Apostolic Movement."

Succeeding the removal of Mr. Scott to Auburn, Rev. T. L. Harris, of New York city, visited that place in accordance with the directions of the spiritual agents of the circle. From this time forward, Messrs. Scott and Harris were the external leaders of the movement.

In February, 1850, a publication was established, entitled " *Disclosures from the Interior, and Superior Care for Mortals.*" It claimed to be "edited, superintended and controlled," by spirits out of the flesh, and to have for its object "the disclosure of truth from Heaven, guiding mankind into open vision of Paradise, open communication with spirits redeemed, and proper and progressive understanding of the Holy Scriptures, and of the merits of Jesus Christ, form whom they originated in inspiration absolute, and of whom they teach as the only Saviour of a dissevered and bewildered race." It asserted that "the circle of apostles and prophets are its conductors in the interior, holding control over its columns, and permitting no article to find place therein, unless originated, dictated or admitted by them,—they acting under the direction of the Lord Supreme."

and sent in the wrong direction." This suggests that Buckner, a Baptist minister, was part of the group that invited Harris. By 1856, Buckner was a Spiritualist and had been "excluded from the Baptist church."[152]

John B. Wolff of Wheeling, Virginia, the Methodist minister, had asserted in an 1851 letter published in the *Spiritual Telegraph* that he pioneered rapping and circles in the area "before any of us had read Davis on the 'Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse'" Wolff's was an interesting spiritual pilgrimage. A native of Martinsburg, Virginia, he had studied dentistry, medicine and law. When he began to summon spirit communications and read A. J. Davis, Wolff had been "seventeen years a member of the M. E. Church; thirteen years a preacher—more than three years in the traveling connection, now local; an ardent, zealous advocate of the doctrines and usages of that body." Living in Wheeling, he also operated the first steam printing press there. Wolff appears on the 1850 census as a printer, married, with four young children; his mother, siblings and employees were also in his household. About half the books he printed were religious in nature: the journals of evangelist Lorenzo Dow, a book about the Holy Land, and *The Believer's Golden Chain; Embracing the Substance of Some Dissertations on Christ's Famous Titles, A View of Zion's Glory, and Christ's Voice to London.* By 1851 he had received communications through eight local mediums, "by rappings, by the alphabet, by electrical vibrations or impressions, by impressing ideas on my mind, by simple clairvoyance, and by the same in a *superior state;* I count them a unit." At that point he found the dark most conducive to rappings, "though I have had the rappings abundantly in day-light. We have had many failures, on the account of the state of the atmosphere,

[152] Thomas Lake Harris, *A Lyric of the Golden Age* (New York: Partridge & Brittan, 1856), xix; "Another Clerical Convert," *Spiritual Telegraph* (January 5, 1856), 2.

and inequality of our circle." Wolff considered "one moment" of success "worth days of toil."[153]

As an ardent Methodist, Wolff used his intercourse with spirits—as had Swedenborg—for spiritual enlightenment. The Bible was the source of revealed religion for evangelical Christians like Wolff, so it was natural that he would employ this new gift to enhance his understanding of its text. The communications he received were all "of an elevating character, full of love and wisdom. . . . Any scriptural question I ask is solved to my entire satisfaction, besides the daily privilege of having the true meaning of the Bible revealed to my interior sense by impressions, whenever I hear or read it myself." All manner of doctrinal and denominational strife hinged on disagreements over fine points of biblical exegesis. "We are told that the Bible was understood at first, and that spirits impressed its true meaning on the mind of the sincere inquirer, and that they will unfold that meaning to us as they did to them. This I feel assured of in my own experience." Each Christian should know and study the Scriptures, and find for him- or herself their true meaning. How comforting it must have been to Wolff and others like him to have assurance from the spirits that their understanding of God's Word and will were correct. Wolff was among the first to claim that Spiritualism had the power, by proving the reality of spiritual communication, to "send Atheism to oblivion. After that is done," he dryly observed, "I hope something may be done for the preachers."[154]

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[153] "Spiritual Manifestations in Wheeling, Va.," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 15, 1852), 3; *History of Colorado,* Volume IV, ed. Wilbur Fiske Stone (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1919), 74; *Portrait and Biographical Record of Denver and Vicinity Colorado. Containing Portraits and Biographies of Many Well Known Citizens of the Past and Present, Together with Biographies and Portraits of All the Presidents of the United States* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1898), 1159.

[154] "Spiritual Manifestations in Wheeling, Va."

Wolff acknowledged that even before he began to experiment with Spiritualism, "mysterious phenomena" had frequently taken place in his family. In March 1848 "three loud and distinct raps occurred on a table adjoining our chamber, as if struck with a raw-hide; in a few days our oldest son went to the Spirit-land." This was before news of the Fox sisters' rapping spirit could possibly have reached Wheeling. When in February 1851 rappings occurred in the room of a sick cousin, the Wolffs were sure it was the work of a spirit. He also recounted the "visible manifestation" of the cousin's mother before she died to "a young lady about the house, who was a total disbeliever in such things, and who had never seen [the woman], and yet described her accurately." The raps, the vision, and other instances constituted ample proof of spirit communication for Wolff, though he continued to take exception to mediums who were reporting that the spirits rapped out "no hell" as *his* spirits in all cases told him "that the wicked shall be punished 'according to the deeds done in the body,' and that those who want a hell, will get *hell enough!* "[155] Wolff was as yet too much the evangelical Methodist to accept universal salvation.

In this lengthy letter he recalled a profoundly moving spiritual experience he had witnessed. "About the 23d of May, 1834," a beloved minister who was preaching "received spiritual illumination, by a direct and visible descent of a spirit upon him." The meeting had been unexceptional, "but instantly he broke forth in the most impassioned strains, and the whole audience was electrified. The appearance was that of a pure whitish light, about six inches in breadth, which I saw as plainly as I see the hand which pens these lines. It was unaccountable to me, only a boy, and schooled to infidelity, and therefore I have told it seldom since." The spirit of the minister had visited a circle

[155] Ibid.

recently to explain to Wolff that "it was a guardian spirit, and not the Divine Spirit of God as I supposed, and as he then thought." This episode might be explained by a flawed memory, enthusiasm and the vivid imagery in A. J. Davis's account of his experience of the *superior state.* Wolff interpreted all that was happening as a Methodist minister who sought his answers in Scripture, and supposed man had begun to bridge the gap "which intervenes between him and the sphere above; that we shall gradually coalesce, until the union shall be perfect, until we shall all be changed—not sleep the sleep of death, but be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. The true light is shining," wrote Wolff, "the millennium of righteousness and truth is developing, and these spiritual manifestations are harbingers of a glorious day for down-trodden humanity."[156] The only reasonable interpretation of spiritual communication for Wolff was that God had begun a new dispensation.

A subsequent year of communing with spirits brought Wolff further insights. "Generally, my whole religious faith is changed." He no longer believed in the divinity of Christ, the doctrine of the Fall, or the eternal damnation of souls, and he had discovered animal magnetism. "I am satisfied, from actual experiment made last August at camp-meeting, that religious excitements—conviction—conversion—trance—jerks—ecstacy, &c., are largely connected with *Magnetism.* I took a subject of trance, and, by volition and counter-passes, threw the influence off, after she had been affected several hours. My personal experience, as a revivalist, as a magnetizer, and as a close observer, furnish me with data to sustain me." Having conducted experiments and collected data on his findings, Wolff was certain that magnetism was "the precursor of a great day, and is the

[156] Ibid.

most important science pertaining to man in the body and out of it, yet introduced."[157]

Wolff had only recently figured out what Jesse Babcock Ferguson had learned through mesmeric experiments in Kentucky a decade earlier. The stories of these two ministers demonstrate the uneven progress of information across the American landscape. People came to Swedenborgianism, magnetism, harmonialism, phrenology and Spiritualism at different times and in various ways, not necessarily in the same sequence nor to all of them. Andrew Jackson Davis and Jesse Ferguson took the more typical path through mesmerism to Spiritualism. Wolff had first found Spiritualism, then Andrew Jackson Davis and the *superior state,* then the mesmeric principles that gave him a new understanding of the conversion experience (although he could hardly have been unaware of animal magnetism in the years before he embraced it). "To the sinner, conviction, conversion, &c., are realities" but what actually happens, Wolff claimed, is that they experience "passivity of mind and consequent harmony between mind and body." In this state, "a spiritual, overpowering influx comes in upon, fills, overwhelms the soul." But it is a mistake to conflate this influx with the Spirit of God directly contacting a person's spirit in the act of conversion, "as taught by the churches, and yet God, being omnipresent, dwells in every harmonious soul, by the inevitable law of love and harmony." [158] Wolff did not explain his understanding of the exact nature of the influx during a conversion experience, but was emphatic in denying that it was the Spirit of God. In the space of just a year, Wolff had reoriented his theological outlook to conform

[157] "A Voice from the South," *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 26, 1852), 2.

[158] Ibid..

much more to that of A. J. Davis and the harmonialists than Lorenzo Dow and the Methodists.

Wolff's thoughts returned to the minister whose "spiritual illumination" had in 1834 had made so deep an impression. He now understood that what he had witnessed was "a distinct spiritual baptism of Rev. David Merriman, in broad day-light; a clear, distinct, bodily descent; a white, pure light descended and settled on and about his head." Wolff returned, too, to electricity as a metaphor for the mysterious transfer of energy. "He was instantly aroused—the congregation was electrified—and the revival commenced and progressed from that moment." Wolff was as certain as ever that "This is the commencement of the Millennium, and it will be established on the *ruins* of all churches. Sectarianism must come down before Truth and Love can reign among men." Like other millennialists, he was convinced that creeds, dogmas and the power of the clergy must be swept aside before "Truth and Love can reign among men."[159]

Wolff the evangelist lectured on magnetism in the summer of 1852, expressing frustration that "so many incompetent and irresponsible men have used it more for gain than the good of the people." He became increasingly certain that "magnetism is the true precursor of the Spirit-manifestations. These seem to follow in my wake." There were other new Spiritualist developments in Wheeling. Spirits wrote messages in a locked trunk. "This has been done *twenty times*." A local medium was "writing and speaking in languages never learned." The community was divided on the subject of manifestations,

[159] Ibid.

and most clergymen voiced their disapproval. Despite his own shifting interpretation of its meaning, Wolff still relied on reading the Bible to exorcise "this opposing spirit."[160]

Jesse Babcock Ferguson, pastor of the Nashville Church of Christ, had continued to ponder the mysteries of the human mind and spirit since experiments with mesmerism in 1842 had convinced the Fergusons that his wife could communicate with spirits of the dead. By 1852 he was embroiled in a controversy begun when he published an article claiming, among other things, that "that Christ by his spiritual nature, or by the Spirit, did preach to the Spirits of the invisible world," assisted by "ministering angels" who brought the gospel to "[i]nfants, idiots, pagans, and the countless thousands whose external circumstances remove them far from the light of the blessed gospel" during their lives on earth.[161] Soon Ferguson would be a *cause célèbre* in the Spiritualist world and Nashville would be a center of spirit activity in the South.

Samuel Pace of Purdy, Tennessee wrote to *The Spiritual Telegraph* in 1852 to report that his family had been communicating with the spirits with his young son as the medium. The spirits were moving a table in the dark and could light a candle. The family had probably been seeking contact with their son John, "a promising young man" who died some time after the 1850 census. Pace clearly enjoyed being the local leader in this important new movement. He believed the first spiritual manifestations in the state of Tennessee had taken place at his house "the 6th of March, 1852." Within a short time,

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[160] *Spiritual Telegraph* (August 14, 1852), 2; "Spiritual and Material Demonstrations," Ibid., (October 23, 1852), 3.

[161] Johnny Tucker, *Like a Meteor Across the Horizon: The Jesse B. Ferguson Story* (Fayetteville, Tenn.: Tucker Publications, 1978), 14: "Tolbert Fanning had published a similar article by Ferguson called "Another State of Probation" in the October 1845 *Christian Review,* the publication Ferguson renamed the *Christian Magazine* in 1848. It appears the results of Ferguson's experiences with his mesmerized wife and their shared belief that they were in touch with spirits of the deceased had begun leaking into his public utterances by the mid-1840s.

neighboring families were having private séances in their own homes. Among them were Unitarian minister William H. Rose, who supported his family as a blacksmith. Rose's wife died that year, so like the Paces his family probably hoped for a message from a loved one they had recently buried. Rose received convincing communications from spirits of "departed friends" through his two daughters. Another neighborhood girl, the ten-year-old girl daughter of a Methodist minister, had developed as a rapping medium. Most local clergymen were not so open minded. "Sermons were preached against the humbug imported from the North," Pace reported, "but from this point it took the wings of the Spirits, and is now in various portions of our State." For Pace, the comfort of contact with the dead made enduring the "persecution, scorn, and contempt" of nonbelievers possible. An old acquaintance who visited the Paces to investigate was told by the spirit of a "beloved sister" that "she had departed from the body of flesh." In a few weeks a letter arrived, confirming this sad news. Pace's wife Susan had received a message through a medium in which the spirit of her mother recounted her own death, recalling that "Susan took up my hands and pressed them to her lips. The spirit had left the clay, but I knew it all. How foolish it looks to view the scene immediately after death—our friends weeping around us, while they should be rejoicing, when we are so happy."[162] Christians knew they were supposed to accept death as God's will and that

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[162] "The Spirits in Tennessee," *Spiritual Telegraph* (September 25, 1852), 3; Marcus J. Wright, *Reminiscences of the Early Settlement and Early Settlers of McNairy County, Tennessee* (Washington, D.C.: Commercial Pub. Co, 1882), 41; "Old Purdy Cemetery," *McNairy County Independent* (November 21, 1924) http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/tn/mcnairy/cemeteries/oldprdy.txt (accessed May 29, 2006). The Old Purdy cemetery and environs are a focus of activity for ghost hunters, suggesting an enduring cultural acceptance of paranormal possibilities in the region. http://theshadowlands.net/ghost/ghost157.htm; http://tnhauntings.wordpress.com/2008/05/20/old-purdy-cemetery-purdy-tn/; http://hurstnation.com/2007/10/31/ghosts-of-purdy-and-the-ghost-of-col-fielding-j-hurst/; "Spiritualism in Tennessee," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 28, 1853), 2; "From Tennessee," Ibid., (February 12, 1853), 3.

grief in some way indicated an imperfect belief in Christ's promise of eternal life for believers. Spiritualism offered *proof* that the righteous went on to a happy afterlife. The Paces had improved the nature and quality of their contact with the other side.

Pace also reported that the rappings had "broken out in Williamsporte, Tenn., also in Marshall City, Miss., and several other places." Williamsport is several miles from Purdy. The news from Marshall City might have come from Susan's sister Nancy and husband George W. Meek, who married near there. The Paces and their kin give a wonderful glimpse of the restlessness of the middling sort of southerner. Samuel, a tailor, was born in Georgia and married Susan Kyle in Alabama. Later they moved to Tennessee, probably with Susan's parents. Two of Susan's brothers, Robert and James, settled in Texas by 1840. Family lore says "Robert E. Kyle & his brother, Dr. James S. Kyle**,** had an agreement that the one who died first was to manifest his spirit to the other if there was such thing as 'spirit life.'" James Kyle died first. One night Robert was riding past the cemetery where his brother was buried. "He saw a strange light in the cemetery and it looked like the image of his brother, Dr**.** Kyle**.** Robert's horse shyed away from the apparition. Robert called out to the ghost ' *Jim, is that you?*' The ghost made no reply, just vanished." There is little information to indicate that the Paces and Kyles were religious; that the local history that generally included church affiliation mentioned none for Samuel Pace suggests he was unchurched. His words indicate he was hostile to the Protestant denominations and their clergymen who interpreted religion for docile congregants, though not necessarily a nonbeliever. He exulted that "Some honest skeptics are waked up, and *begin to think for themselves.*" Pace's position was in one sense akin to that of those who explored Spiritualism as an extension of their faith, for he told people

that "if God is the author of it, it will go on." He evinced in supporting Spiritualism the "combativeness" Catherine Albanese pointed to in adherents of metaphysical religion, and he observed with satisfaction that "opposition and persecution seem only to widen and deepen its movements."[163] Pace's reports to *The Spiritual Telegraph* indicate a greater interest in the phenomena than in the deeper theological implications of spirit communication.

In Centerville, Tennessee, a small circle with a more devout perspective formed in 1852. Washington Moore wrote to *The Spiritual Telegraph* in a tone that implied an intimacy with the editors based solely upon their shared knowledge of something the masses had not yet glimpsed. "Being a minister of the gospel," Moore felt that speaking out, "to be scoffed at by the incredulous and disbelieving multitude" and publicly avowing his beliefs was "a duty enjoined on me by my Maker, and I will not shrink from it, trusting in him to reward and compensate me for the loss of that confidence that a liberal community may have placed in me." As Bishop Otey had put it, the possibilities of spirit communication were "too serious a matter to be laughed at." Investigating with Moore were a local doctor and his wife, the Sebastians, along with "Mrs. M." and "Miss S." Moore said the doctor was "also a minister," but their denominations of choice were not stated. Nor did Moore mention that Dr. Sebastian's brother was at that time serving as a United States senator from Arkansas. Moore also referred, apparently, to the same Methodist minister Samuel Pace had mentioned, whose ten-year-old daughter had become a medium. Spiritualism and its phenomena were spreading through middle Tennessee mostly, it seems, by word of mouth. It had also reached Memphis, on the

[163] http://www.bryansite.com/bryan/kylejames1.htm#1830 (accessed 2006); "Spiritualism in Tennessee."

Mississippi River. The *Spiritual Telegraph* printed an item from Memphis in November of that year reporting that the "spiritual rappers continue to excite considerable attention. One of our own citizens—a highly respectable gentleman—has, much to his astonishment, found himself a 'medium,' though previously a skeptic."[164]

In July of 1853 Samuel Pace wrote to order some books from the *Spiritual Telegraph.* He reported that the spirits were active in Florence, Alabama, "About sixty miles east of this place." There were "some eight or ten media" there who were producing considerable excitement. For these people, it seemed to hold little more than entertainment value. Pace recounted an instance of a table following an Episcopal minister across the room, up the stairs, and then down again. "Table moving," Pace said, "is carried on as a matter of amusement."[165] Perhaps, but the Episcopal minister was investigating and making no secret of it.

Pace took a decidedly more reverent turn after hearing from a fellow Spiritualist about "one of the greatest wonders that was ever witnessed since the days of the apostles." On a night in mid-August, four families in Henderson County, Tennessee were aroused by "an unusual noise in the west, like the rushing of many waters together" that seemed to be emanating from an "unusually bright cloud." The cloud moved "some six or seven times from due west to due north from the spectators" and at various times were heard voices, music, sounds of barnyard animals, the cacophony of battle, the keening of the bereaved, birds singing and delightful music. Pace, who had once lived there, went to interview everyone who had witnessed these phenomena. He stayed several days, and

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[164] "Another Unshackeled Spirit," *Spiritual Telegraph* (November 20, 1852), 3; "Bishop Otey on the Rappings."

[165] "Progress at the South," *Spiritual Telegraph* (August 27, 1853), 67.

"having some mediums close by," they decided to ask the spirits to show them "the Scripture that would explain it." Pace and another individual were selected for the test, which involved paging through the Bible until the spirits threw their off their hands at the chosen passage. They performed the test separately, and both had their hands thrown off at the nineteenth chapter of Revelation. It begins, "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God," and the chapter is commonly interpreted as a description of the Second Coming of Christ. Autry and Pace believed it was through spirit action that the correct passage of Scripture was revealed. Pace ended the letter by suggesting that anyone wishing further information should address "Rev. Washington Perkins, who was the first who saw it, and lives in the neighborhood." Drury Washington Perkins, recently ordained, was at the beginning of a long career in the Baptist ministry. It is not clear what he thought the episode meant. When Pace next wrote, it was to report that Dr. John Autry traveled over many counties in Tennessee, Kentucky and Mississippi and while he did find much prejudice against Spiritualism he also found that "many of those who have most violently opposed it on the grounds of the misrepresentations which are current, immediately become curious to investigate the subject when they are correctly informed of its true nature and claims; and our correspondent has been the means of introducing many such to a full faith in its reality." Autry and Pace had also been discussing the discord that they already observed among Spiritualists, which the *Telegraph* opined was attributable to the pure messages from the spirit world being "differently apprehended" by people whose mental and moral states and prejudices rendered their reception less than optimal. The *Telegraph* also assured Pace that as Spiritualists were "spiritually and

religiously elevated" they would eventually converge in "a brotherly unity in the heavens" which "will constitute the church of the future."[166] Perhaps that was so, but Spiritualist unity on earth would repeatedly prove ephemeral.

Spiritualist activity was increasing steadily, stimulated by the press, word of mouth, and the travels and demonstrations of professional mediums like the Fox sisters. Catherine and Maggie Fox had journeyed to the nation's capital in February 1853. Two southerners who might not have sought out the Foxes on their own were enticed by a northern friend, Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, who said he was communicating through the mediums with the spirit of South Carolina's John C. Calhoun. Tallmadge, former senator from New York and governor of Wisconsin, had made an appointment to call on the Foxes. In his first visit, he received a message rapped out by the spirit of his old friend Calhoun. Tallmadge claimed he had formulated an unspoken question in his mind: "Can you do anything to confirm me in the truth of these revelations, and remove from my mind all shadow of unbelief?" The spirit replied through the medium, promising to give him an answer the following Monday, at seven and a half o'clock. The spirit's response guaranteed repeat business for the Foxes. Tallmadge returned, and Calhoun's spirit explained that the intention of spiritual manifestations was "to draw mankind together in harmony, and convince skeptics of the immortality of the soul." During this communication a heavy dining table moved "first one way and then the other" with no human contact. Tallmadge asked if the spirit could raise a table with himself seated upon it and received an affirmative reply. Tallmadge climbed atop a cherry tea table, which was then lifted and gently lowered by unseen hands. Tallmadge was hooked. At a

[166] "Signs in the Heavens," *The Telegraph Papers* I (May–July, 1853), 365–366; George William Lasher, *The Ministerial Directory of the Baptist Churches in the United States* (Oxford, Ohio: Press of the Oxford News, 1899); "Digest of Correspondence," *Telegraph Papers,* IV (February 1–May 1, 1854), 83.

subsequent meeting, Calhoun's spirit told him to bring three bells and a guitar the next time "for the purpose of exhibiting spirit power." At his next meeting with the Fox sisters, the bells were placed in an upside-down drawer beneath the table, where they played melodiously to the accompaniment of raps. An unseen hand grasped Tallmadge's ankle. Then Tallmadge was instructed to place the guitar upon the drawer. While he and the mediums were seated around the table, the guitar beneath it produced sounds of "marvelous and fascinating beauty, power, and even grandeur." "It was my hand that touched you and the guitar," rapped Calhoun to conclude the performance.[167]

Tallmadge invited other old friends of Calhoun's, South Carolinians James Hamilton, Jr. and Waddy Thompson, to his next séance with the Foxes. They were directed to put a Bible under the drawer beneath the table. After the raps had instructed them to read specific passages, they retrieved the Bible and read as directed from the Gospel of St. John that light had come into the world but men preferred darkness. "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the spirit by measure." Calhoun was known to have been a man of piety, said to have once instructed a servant to saddle the horse of houseguest who declined to participate in family devotions. It was fitting that he should quote from Scripture in explaining spiritual manifestations. Less well known is Calhoun's interest in Swedenborg. Reminiscing about his own early years, Methodist Bishop Oscar Penn Fitzgerald said, "Having heard that John C. Calhoun was a disciple of Swedenborg—seer, madman, enthusiast, as you like—I felt a desire to know more of the man and his system." Fitzgerald had a number of Swedenborgian friends, but as a Methodist found the Swedish mystic lacking,

[167] *Modern American Spiritualism,* 90–91.

"coherence, solidity, credibility, and symmetry." Both of Tallmadge's parents had belonged to the New Church, but Tallmadge himself found its restrictions on closer relations with the spirit world unacceptable.[168] He wanted all the information the could get from beyond the veil.

Next, the spirit of Calhoun attempted to write on paper in a closed drawer, finally rapping out that the power was not strong enough but "I wish to convince you I can write. If you can meet on Friday exactly at seven, I will try a short sentence." Tallmadge of course returned, and showed the product of that meeting to several people who had been friends of Calhoun, and even one of Calhoun's sons, all of whom "pronounced it to be a *perfect facsimile of the handwriting of John C. Calhoun.*"[169] Those inclined to believe saw all this as convincing proof. Those not so inclined remembered that accusations had been bruited about impugning the mediums' honesty almost from the beginning of their career.

Interestingly, by the time they visited the Foxes together Hamilton, Calhoun and Tallmadge had all fallen into disfavor with their constituencies and none had recently held political office. Communications from Calhoun—and from Clay and Webster after

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[168] Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 21; Oscar Penn Fitzgerald, *Sunset Views in Three Parts* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1906), 69–70. Fitzgerald also mentions that Richard K. Crallé of Lynchburg, Virginia was the first notable Swedenborgian he ever met. Crallé was the biographer of John C. Calhoun. He was "a native of South Carolina and a relative of Calhoun, who employed him as confidential clerk or amanuensis while he was Secretary of State under John Tyler. He had previously been an editor in Washington, and also filled the pulpit of the New Church Society in that city." *The American Annual Cyclopedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1864. Embracing Civil, Military and Social Affairs; Public Documents; Biography, Statistics, Commerce, Finance Literature, Science, Agriculture and Mechanical Industry,* Volume IV (New York: Appleton & Co., 1869), 608. Calhoun died in 1850, at roughly the time Fitzgerald said he heard Calhoun was "a disciple of Swedenborg." It is not impossible that Crallé put a high gloss on any interest Calhoun had expressed in Swedenborg; *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 30.

[169] *Modern American Spiritualism,* 89–91.

they died—"renewed a sense of political relevance for Hamilton and his spiritualist friends." After encountering the spirit of Calhoun with the Foxes, Hamilton sometimes held "nightly communion" with his old friend from better days.[170] A Charleston native, Hamilton had been the city's mayor, a state and national representative, and governor of South Carolina. He had also been a man of importance well beyond South Carolina.

James Hamilton, Jr., had longstanding ties with Texas and the men there who held the reins of power. By 1836 he was known both in Texas and the United States as a supporter of Texas independence, and traveled to New York and Philadelphia to talk with capitalists about investing in the new republic. The Congress of the Republic of Texas voted to offer him command of its army when Sam Houston became president, but Hamilton declined. Although business held him in Charleston, he organized the South Carolina Land Company with other prominent Carolinians and purchased more than thirty thousand acres. He had enlisted his former gubernatorial aide Bernard Bee, now secretary of war under President Sam Houston, to select land for the company. Hamilton traveled to Galveston in 1839 in a party that included fellow investor Pierce Butler, and for years was involved in the affairs of Texas. By 1850, things had gone awry in his life. His finances were a shambles, and legal difficulties further marred his reputation. The Foxes offered more than contact with the spirit of Calhoun and a link to the happier days of his past as a prosperous public man. His first son and namesake had fallen victim in 1838 to a yellow fever outbreak in Charleston, and in 1849 his youngest child, Arthur St. Clair, had died at the age of twelve. Like Sarah Morgan a devout Episcopalian, Hamilton struggled in similar ways to make sense of these losses within the framework of his faith.

[170] Robert Tinkler, *James Hamilton of South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 258.

He reflected in an 1850 letter to his wife that their son's death was "a dreadful blow" but that he (Hamilton) deserved divine punishment for his "Sins & hardness of heart." Historian Robert Tinkler pointed out that while Hamilton told his wife that Arthur was now "happy, and joined in blessed companionship his dear & never to be forgotten Brother & his other Relatives in a world where I am sure My Dear Elizabeth it will be your happy allotment to join them," he did not seem assured of his own salvation. "Buffeted by personal, political and financial defeats over more than a decade," Tinkler explained, "Hamilton needed assurance of a better world beyond the grave to keep him going." He sought it first in Swedenborgianism, and found it in Spiritualism.[171] Like Sarah Morgan he understood that according to the teachings of his Episcopalian faith these deaths might somehow have been punishment for his sins, and sought in communications with his dead the assurance that they still loved him.

Waddy Thompson was also an Episcopalian with ties to Texas. We know already of his encounter with mesmerism in Washington City with fellow southerners in the 1830s, and that his emotional response elicited disapproving gossip among the ladies in their little community. A lawyer by profession, he served in the South Carolina legislature from 1826 to 1830, was an ardent supporter of states' rights, and while a South Carolina representative to Congress from 1835 to 1841 was a vocal proponent of recognition of the Republic of Texas and then of annexing Texas to the United States. Thompson was instrumental in securing the release in 1843 of three hundred Texans held

[171] Ibid., 175–176, 256; There seems to be no evidence to date Hamilton's interest in Swedenborg or his first séance experience. Personal communication from Robert Tinkler, February 17, 2010: "My guess is that Arthur's death in 1849 pushed him in the direction of Swedenborgianism and spiritualism. Whether he ever participated in séances before his experience with the Fox sisters in February 1853, I cannot say for certain: there's simply no evidence. My hunch is that was the first time he believed he communicated with Calhoun's spirit; thereafter, he did so apparently many other times. His spiritualist communications with his dead sons may only date from then, too."

by Mexico, including his old friend and connection by marriage Samuel Augustus Maverick, whose wife Mary we will meet shortly. Waddy Thompson was in Washington to attend the trial of a former client when he visited the Fox sisters with Hamilton in 1852. Benjamin Franklin Perry, later governor of South Carolina, said he had "frequently" accompanied Thompson and Hamilton to these séances with the Foxes.[172] Thompson was to be a lifelong Spiritualist.

Among the South Carolinians who had settled in Texas in the 1830s and prospered was Samuel Augustus Maverick. He had joined the early colonists who participated in the Texas Revolution before marrying Mary Ann Adams on her family's Alabama plantation in 1836. Both brought to their union venerable southern pedigrees that included ranking officers in the American Revolution. After lengthy visits with family in Alabama and South Carolina, the Mavericks moved with their slaves to Texas in 1838, finally settling in San Antonio. Mary Ann Maverick's published memoirs tell the story of her life on the Texas frontier. Though her tone is plucky and generally optimistic, the book begins as an adventure but devolves at times after her children are born to a litany of the accidents, diseases and death so common to that time and place. One of her brothers died in Mississippi in 1846 of congestive chills (malaria). An April 12, 1847 entry introduces her interest in alternative medical therapies: "Mr. Maverick went to Matagorda to try the galvanic battery on his stil suffering shoulder, and returned the 16th,

[172] *The Handbook of Texas Online,* s. v. "Thompson, Waddy (1798–1868)," http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/TT/fth28.html (accessed April 25, 2004); Benjamin Franklin Perry, *Reminiscences of Public Men* (Philadelphia: John D. Avil & Co., Printers and Publishers, 1883), 299.

much benefited."[173] The "heroic medicine" practiced at the time focused on bleeding, purgatives, and administering a mercury compound to stimulate salivation. A groundswell of frustrated Americans were rejecting treatments that often did more harm than good and exploring other healing options. The sort of people who were drawn to Spiritualism tended also to think for themselves about the possibilities of alternative medicine, and Mary Maverick, raising her large family in primitive San Antonio, was among them.

Before she ever knew about Spiritualism, Mary and her family were experiencing prophetic and vivid dreams about death and the dead, as were others they knew, and interpreting them within their understanding of Christian faith. Deeply religious, Mary raised her children on prayer and Bible stories. In 1848, she and her friend Susan Hays had joined the Methodist church, an interim step for Mary until such time as there would be an Episcopalian congregation in San Antonio. After seven-year-old Agatha died of bilious fever[174] in 1848, a "terrible bereavement" settled over the Maverick family. Mary's faith did not ease her pain. Two weeks later she dreamed "so distinctly that Agatha ran through our room and out at the door again" that she jumped up and went looking for the child with a candle. Every day, little Augusta Maverick gathered flowers to take to Agatha's grave. "As we grieved without ceasing," Mary said, "so did she."

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[173] Mary Ann Adams Maverick, *Memoirs of Mary A. Maverick,* arr. Mary A. Maverick and her son, Geo. Madison Maverick, ed. Rena Maverick Green (San Antonio, Texas: Alamo Printing Co., 1921), 94. See also 100, 105, 110, 113.

[174] "When a continual, remitting, or intermitting fever is accompanied with a frequent of copious evacuation of bile, either by vomit or stool, the fever is denominated bilious." William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine: or, a Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases by Regimen and Simple Medicines, with an Appendix, a Dispensatory for the Use of Private Practitioners. To Which Are Added, Observations on the Diet of the Common People; Recommending a Method of Living Less Expensive, and More Conducive to Health, than the Present* (London: A. Strahan, 1800), 247.

Augusta "was ever talking of God and his angels and of 'our Tita with them,'" which suggests the images the adults in Augusta's life had armed her with for envisioning death and the afterlife for Christians. Samuel Maverick struggled to resign himself to Agatha's death. "Oh, Almighty and all just God," he wrote, "teach us how it is that the poor little boon of the breath of life, could not be spared from thy great storehouse to animate a little dear thing which thou has made so perfect." God's will was beyond human understanding, but dreams continued to bring messages from beyond the veil into the Maverick household. Less than a year after Agatha died, cholera carried off six-year-old Augusta. Just before her illness, Augusta recounted a lovely dream that made her mother tremble. "In her dream she was clothed in a new dress, all white and shining and flowing down below her feet. She got into a carriage with a large procession" and went "way off to a big church: resounding with sweet music, and filled with people dressed in white. It was a prophesy of her shroud and burial and resurrection." For Mary Maverick, it was vital to be certain that her family would be reunited for eternity. When she knew Augusta had but a few moments to live, Mary took the child in her arms and sat before the fire. Their conversation as Mary recorded it embodied the Christian ideal of a "good death," unwavering faith, and the comfort of assured reunion with loved ones for both the dying and those who remained in the flesh. "Gussie," her mother asked, "do you know our Father in Heaven?" "Oh, yes, mamma," the child answered earnestly. "I hear them singing, mamma, put my bonnet on and let me go to church." With the little bonnet on her head, she was content. Augusta gazed up at her mother and said, "Don't you hear them, mamma?" Mary Maverick knew the angels were coming for her precious child. "Gussie," she asked, "do you want to see God?" "Yes, Mama." "Do you want to see

Tita?" Augusta's last words were, "Yes, mama." Four months later, in a dream, Mary Maverick's daughters came from the spirit land to comfort her. This dream echoed the imagery of the others. "I took Augusta in my arms, and clothed her in white robes." She embraced Agatha. "They told me they were very happy, and said we should be together in Heaven. Singular how real it was, and how happy and thankful it made me." During an outbreak of "violent influenza with sore throat and measles and scarletina" (scarlet fever) in 1849, "Pallas, Aunt Ann's house boy, died—he told his mother 'God came to me in a dream, and took me to heaven,' and he asked her to pray with him and then he died."[175] When we conjure frontier San Antonio in our imaginations it is easy to overlook the fact that in the antebellum Wild West, just as in the Deep South, whites of means lived intimately with their black servants. The Mavericks and others in San Antonio may have known by then of Moseley Baker's mystical schism with the Houston Methodists and even of his fascination with Abijah Alley, but probably not of the movement that was to be called Spiritualism that was beginning in upstate New York. Their dreams and angels and visions of the spirit-land were expressions of their Christian faith.

Shortly after Agatha died, Mary conceived her seventh child. John Hays Maverick was a delicate baby, and she devoted her time "day and night to him, and he was seldom out of my arms." Despite her careful nurturing, after less than six months of life the infant died of a sudden attack of cholera infantum. "Thy will be done," she wrote grimly in her journal. In 1851 Mary Maverick was confirmed in the faith of her choice by Protestant Episcopal Bishop George Washington Freeman of Louisiana.[176]

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[175] *Memoirs of Mary A. Maverick,* 100–101, 104–105, 107, 103.

[176] Ibid., 108, 110.

Figure 7. Mary Ann Maverick and Her Children.

Mary Maverick first mentioned Spiritualism in 1853. Their friend John Winfield Scott Dancy, formerly Secretary of War for the Republic of Texas, came to dinner. That evening, "we all had a gay time trying 'table rapping.' Colonel Dancy was a spiritual medium—and he told me I was a medium also."[177] The Mavericks might have heard something of spirit communication by then from their old South Carolina friend Waddy Thompson, who in 1843 had earned their gratitude by securing Sam's release from imprisonment in Mexico City. Thompson's encounters with the Fox sisters in Washington had made him a firm, if Episcopalian, convert to Spiritualism in 1853. Or they might have learned of table rapping from Sam Maverick's sister, who had married

[177] Ibid., 114.

one William Van Wyck of New York City. Mary Maverick's memoirs are dedicated to the six members of her family in the spirit-land. By the time she wrote the dedication in 1881 the spirit-land would have meant much more to her than it had when she spoke of her daughters visiting in a dream in 1849. No less devout, she had made room in her belief system for the assurance she so badly needed that her dead were content and her family would all be together to live happily ever after in the spirit land.

John Winfield Scott Dancy could have encountered the spirits through his old friend Ebenezer Allen, former attorney general of the Republic, who had been holding séances in Galveston for over a year. Or he might have learned of spirits rapping messages while on business in New Orleans. He might even have heard something about it from relatives or the famous cousin after whom he was named; General Scott had recently purchased the New York residence of Spiritualist editor and publisher Charles Partridge. Born in Virginia, Dancy had grown up in Decatur, Alabama—a town founded by his brother-in-law. He studied at Nashville University and received his law license from Judge John Catron, whose wife Matilda would soon be delving into the mysteries of spirit communication with Reverend Jesse Ferguson in Nashville. Dancy headed to Texas after his bride died in 1836, the second summer of their marriage. By early 1837 he was a citizen of the Republic of Texas, and soon introduced long-staple cotton culture to Texas and worked out a process to irrigate his crop. On the 1850 census, Dancy had ten slaves of his own and fifteen that belonged to his brother; by 1860 he had ninety-eight. He served in the Sixth Congress of the Republic and in the Senate and House of the new state of Texas. He helped secure two railroad charters, one for the Harrisburg Railroad and Trading Company and another for the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos and Colorado Railway

of which he became vice president. Dancy was also, according to newspapers in 1853, "madly in favor of the Pacific Railway" that he hoped would pass through Texas with its terminus in New Orleans. His wife and four daughters were devout Episcopalians. "Though possessed of every Christian virtue, and giving liberally to all demnominations, [Dancy] belonged to none; but praised God for a beautiful earth as his birthright, and a glorious heaven his eternal inheritance. "[178] Dancy found a via media between denominational religion and socially undesirable areligiosity, allowing him to be a public man, family man and benefactor, and to try the spirits.

Travelers to and from Texas generally passed through the port of New Orleans. With its cosmopolitan white population and enriched by the traditions of its diverse black population, New Orleans was a fertile field for all manner of spiritual mysteries and possibilities. Mesmerist Joseph Barthet became an enthusiastic believer in spirit communication. He sent accounts of the spiritual phenomena to colleagues in Paris, and in 1852 published a how-to guide, *ABC des communications spirituelles.* Henry Rey's mother, a devout Catholic, "frequently experienced visions in which her deceased children appeared to her." Rey and his family, well-to-do free persons of color, became Spiritualists as it "spread through the Creole community." Another of Barthet's converts soon began to offer his services as a spiritual healer, as did other whites. Emma Hardinge said that there were many excellent healing mediums among the colored population, but the greatest New Orleans healing medium was J. B. Valmour, a black Creole blacksmith.

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[178] *Daily Delta* (April 21, 1853), 1; "Colorado City and the Manton Family Cemetery," http://www.texasescapes.com/CentralTexasTownsSouth/ColoradoCityTexas/ColoradoCityTexas.htm (accessed October 4, 2007); "Decatur City Cemetery," http://www.decaturcitycemetery.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=48 (accessed February 18, 2010); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Dancy, John Winfield Scott (1810–1866)," http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/DD/fda7.html (accessed June 19, 2007); John Henry Brown, *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas* (Austin: L. E. Daniell, 1895), 485.

When he explained his trance states to mesmerists like Barthet, Valmour told them to forget magnetizing and direct their "thinking toward God, wish for the well-being of one's neighbor, and God will do the rest." Barthet saw Valmour as a sort of "Christ-like figure" who did not go to Mass but was a better Christian than his church-going persecutors, and attributed Valmour's ability to continue his activities to the influence of wealthy Catholics who were among his followers. Apparently Catholic authorities in New Orleans had not rigidly enforced proscriptions against mesmerism, but Spiritualism was another matter. By 1850, items appeared in the local press about the rappings in the Northeast. When word spread in the fall of 1852 that a number of leading residents were experimenting with spiritual manifestations, the Church felt it had to speak out against séances though its official statement did "acknowledge the intervention of spirits at séances." Caryn Cossé Bell pointed out that Catholics were probably drawn to Spiritualism precisely because the Church taught the existence of spirits and "possessed an age-old tradition of spiritual mysticism."[179] Bell made it appear that the early Spiritualist activity in New Orleans was mostly within the francophone Catholic population.

In March 1853 Joseph Barthet of the "Jury Magnetique" sent pamphlets on "Spiritual Manifestations" and "Magnetism" to the New Orleans *Daily Crescent.* The paper drolly noted that it had no "medium" to comment on whether either was worth buying, so it was up to the curious to "solve the matter" for themselves by calling at one of two local booksellers. Joel G. Sever had left New Orleans by January 1853, when the *Delta* and the *Daily Crescent* reprinted a *Baltimore Sun* item about Sever, "formerly a

[179] *Revolution, Romanticism,* 425; "That Knocking," *Daily Crescent* (March 6, 1850), 2; "Stratford Knockings," *Daily Crescent* (July 18, 1850), 3.

Representative to the Louisiana Legislature from New Orleans, ex-minister, ex-temperance lecturer, &c., [having] become a medium for the spirits of the other world to communicate with the denizens of this." Apparently Sever was not popular in New Orleans. The *Delta* opined that, "This of itself—Joel's adhesion to spiritualism—is enough to stamp it indelibly as a humbug." Perhaps it had something to do with Sever having pronounced the people of New Orleans "the worst population out of h—l."[180]

Sever/Seaver/Sevier is an interesting character, about whom only bits of information can be found. The brother of an Albany, New York theater promoter, he married the greatest actress of the era, Mary Ann Dyke Duff. She was born in London in 1794 and was the first love of the poet Thomas Moore. Failing to win Mary Ann, Moore had married her sister. When the widowed Mary Duff consented to marry Sever and go with him to New Orleans in 1836, she was past the apex of her career and one source claimed she was won "by the promise of affluence in retirement" after a spate of personal difficulties. Sever was a Methodist minister as well as an attorney, and at some point Mary renounced her Catholicism and embraced Methodism. She became known for "her deeds of charity and mercy, for her persuasive entreaties to the sinning, her eloquent exhortations to the repentant, and her kindly ministrations to the sick and suffering." She took an active part in Sunday-school teaching, "joined the Temperance Society, and was the centre of a religious circle, from which the bounty of her prayers and the comfort of

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[180] "Joseph Barthet," *Daily Crescent* (March 19, 1853), 2; "Another Spiritual Medium," *Daily Crescent* (January 11, 1853), 2; "Another Spiritual Medium," *Delta* (January 15, 1853), 2. The *Daily Crescent* devoted by far the most space to coverage of spiritual phenomena. In 1848, the *Daily Crescent* had hired Walt Whitman "to help create connections with northeastern newspapers in order to exchange news and information." Whitman abruptly resigned on May 25, 1848 and went back to New York. "New Orleans Daily Crescent," *The Walt Whitman Archive,* http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/periodical_titles/per.00163 (accessed February 19, 2010).

her hand were never withheld." She also wrote poetry and an unpublished religious novel. Difficulties arose in the marriage by the early 1850s, and histories of the theater say the Severs left New Orleans because his political views made him unpopular there in the highly charged years leading up to the Civil War. Mary returned to New York, where she died in obscurity in 1857. It is not clear what became of Sever. Actually, there is more to the story of the Severs than is found in any of these secondary sources. An 1851 New Orleans city directory, which would have been compiled the year before, listed him as "att. at law & methodist preacher." The 1850 census shows Joel and Mary living in Baltimore, with Sever claiming he was born in Louisiana. Sever was in Maryland in 1852 when Rev. Henry Slicer, a Methodist who had been chaplain of the United States Senate in the 1840s, made speeches accusing Sever of apostasy and produced documents to prove Sever had been "expelled from the M. E. Church for uttering falsehoods, for impositions, and for deserting his wife and children."[181] With friends like Sever, southern Spiritualists did not need enemies. His story lends weight to the traditional historical interpretations that pronounced Spiritualism unwelcome in the South because of its association with northern reforms and notions that threatened the stability of southern social and economic institutions, but is the exception rather than the norm. Most

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[181] Joseph Norton Ireland, *Mrs. Duff* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1882), 134; Lewis Clinton Strang, *Players and Plays of the Last Quarter Century: An Historical Summary of Causes and a Critical Review of Conditions as Existing in the American Theatre at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, (Boston: L. C. Page & Co., 1903), 187–194. Another source says the Severs left New Orleans in 1854. Mary Caroline Crawford, *The Romance of the American Theatre* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1913), 220; *Cohen's New Orleans and Lafayette Directory, including Carrollton, City of Jefferson, Algiers, Gretna and M'Donough, for 1851* . (New Orleans. Printed at the job office of "The Daily Delta," 1851), 173; "Religious Controversy," *The New York Times* (September 30, 1852) http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9501EFDD1231E13BBC4850DFBF668389649FDE (accessed February 12, 2010); "Rev. Henry Slicer and Col. Sevier. *From the Baltimore Sun," The New York Times* (October 2, 1852) http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9D05E5D81738E334BC4A53DFB6678389649FDE (accessed February 12, 2010).

northern-born southerners who became Spiritualists seem to have adapted to the ways of their new homeland, and not all who questioned the South's most controversial institution were transplants.

Nor were all reforms equally distasteful to southerners. Temperance is a case in point. Sever and his wife were active in the temperance movement, but so were many in the South. In early 1850 New Orleans newspapers reported the movements of Irish temperance activist Father Theobald Mathew, who had already administered the total abstinence pledge to more than one hundred thousand during a visit to the United States before heading south. Father Mathew angered abolitionists by refusing to condemn slavery because such a stance would prevent a temperance mission to the South. At Macon, Georgia, four hundred fifty took the pledge, a thousand in Savannah, and thirteen hundred in Mobile as Father Mathew made his way to New Orleans. On his way up the Mississippi River, "several hundred" swore off intoxicating spirits in Vicksburg. During his two-and-a-half years in the United States, this "Apostle of Temperance" won half a million disciples.[182] Like any successful traveling evangelist, Father Mathew left behind an energized, though largely Catholic, following everywhere he spoke.

In New Orleans, British-born architect Charles Ferguson had been an active member of the Sons of Temperance in New Orleans before Father Mathew came to town. We do not know if Ferguson knew Joel Sever, but by 1853 Ferguson too was investigating spirit phenomena. That fall, Reverend Jerome Twichell, pastor of the

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[182] Elizabeth Malcolm, "Mathew, Father Theobald (1790–1856)," *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: A Global Encyclopedia*, ed. Jack S. Blocker, David M. Fahey, Ian R. Tyrrell (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2003), 404; "The Rev. Theobald Mathew," *Daily Crescent* (February 15, 1850) 2; "Father Mathew," *Daily Crescent* (February 20, 1850), 2; "The American Colonization Society," *Daily Crescent* (March 18, 1850), 3; "The Fruits," New Orleans *Daily Picayune* (June 15, 1850), 2; "Theobald Mathew, Apostle of Temperance, b. Oct. 10, 1790; d. Dec. 8, 1856," *The Original Catholic Encyclopedia,* http://oce.catholic.com/index.php?title=Theobald_Mathew (accessed February 19, 2010).

Lafayette Presbyterian Church, approached Ferguson and expressed a desire to observe the manifestations. Twichell was a native of Cleveland, where he had been a member of Lyman Beecher's church, and had prepared for the ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was an unlikely candidate for communing with the disembodied in light of the litany of clerical denunciations. What Twichell witnessed was Ferguson's eight-year-old daughter writing "what purported to be a communication from the spirit of a young Chinese mandarin, written in the characters of his native language," and subsequently translated for them by the spirit of Dr. Milne, who had been a missionary in China. Communications in unknown languages were something of a staple of spiritual intercourse—and of "spiritual gifts" at least as far back as the time of the French Prophets—but Twichell disputed the alleged translation. The next day, Twichell sent Ferguson "a sentence of Chinese, correctly written" as a test for the spirit missionary to translate. When Ferguson returned a translation of the sentence, Twichell refused to validate it. A friend of Ferguson's sent a narrative of the episode to the New Orleans *Daily Delta,* charging Twichell with "a systematic effort, by an unbeliever in the new dispensation, to confound the pretensions of Spiritualism." Even that encounter with summoning the spirits may have tainted the minister. Twichell, who had come to Louisiana as a missionary in 1840, was moved to a Houston pastorate in early 1855. Perhaps the God of Presbyterians was also displeased. Twichell died when the *Nautilus* was lost in the Gulf of Mexico during a storm on August 10, 1856.[183]

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[183] "Meeting of the Sons of Temperance," *Daily Crescent* (February 11, 1850), 2; *The Case of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Before the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Impartially Reported by Disinterested Stenographers; Including All the Proceedings, Testimony, and Arguments at Nisi Prius, and Before the Court in Bank, with the Charge of Judge Rogers, the Verdict of the Jury, and the Opinion of Chief Justice Gibson,* comp. and ed. D. W. Lathrop (Philadelphia: A. McElroy, 1839), 210; "Spiritualism. A Spiritual Test," *Daily Delta* (January 29, 1854), 1; John Russell Hutchinson, *Reminiscences, Sketches and Addresses Selected from My Papers*

E. C. Hyde was not born a southerner. A native of Connecticut, Hyde practiced medicine for a time in Natchez before floating south to New Orleans by 1838. A small item in the New Orleans *Daily Delta,* observing that "Some witch or gipsy must have whispered this into the ear of Dr. E. C. Hyde, and induced him to purchase that chance in Spear's Book Scheme," is probably a reference to Hyde's long-term domestic arrangement with Clarissa Keith, a free woman of color. White men who could afford to support a second household often took a quadroon or octoroon mistress under the custom known as *plaçage,* and even had second families of color. Sometimes prosperous men of color also did so, even after Reconstruction. What was *not* acceptable to white society was to live as Hyde did, with a woman of color as the mistress of his household and the mother of his children. Hyde was an apothecary and practiced medicine. He was an early supporter of Spiritualism in New Orleans, and his domestic arrangements might have added a taint of social stigma to any group he was involved with. The week after the item about him appeared in the *Daily Delta,* he wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph* to share the news that spiritual manifestations were spreading. Having witnessed two circles, he was convinced of the reality of spirit communication. "These investigations are being made in a pious, sincere, and truthful manner," said Hyde, claiming "much good has already resulted, and much more is anticipated by those advanced in the cause." But there were, Hyde acknowledged, problems. Fanatics, failing to "take the rational view of these things, as taught by Davis and others, imagine they are beset by devils, worried and

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During a Ministry of Forty-five Years in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas (Houston: E. H. Cushing, Publisher, 1874), 159, 86.

annoyed, pinched, choked, etc., after the good old Puritanical fashion of Salem witches."[184]

A month earlier, an enigmatic correspondent had written to *The Spiritual Telegraph* saying, "I know there is a society privately organized at this place, but it would be out of my power to make their acquaintance, without transcending the bounds of decorum." Signed only "S." the letter raises many questions. Was S. a person of color who could not cross racial barriers? While "Afro-Creoles assumed leadership roles as spiritualism mediums,"[185] this does not appear to have happened by 1853, so a person of color might not have been able to find a welcoming circle. Was S. a member of the American community with no entrée to French Catholic society? Or was S. a white, unwilling to participate with Hyde in a circle that included persons of color as equals? We can only speculate.

One who would soon find himself wresting with dark and mysterious forces was British cotton factor Godfrey Barnsley of New Orleans and Cass County, Georgia, where in 1841 he had begun building a lavish estate for his beloved wife. She died in 1845. Being born the third son of a landowner meant he could not expect to inherit property. He went to Liverpool at fifteen to live with an uncle, and within a few years had worked his way up to head clerk at his uncle's cotton brokerage. Determined to make his fortune in

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[184] "Adams Co, MS Sexton Records, October 4, 1825–September 30, 1908," http://www.natchezbelle.org/adams-ind/unknownsexton.txt (accessed August 29, 2007); "Assessment for Two Slaves," http://www.usc.edu/dept/law-lib/agross/2people.htm (accessed August 29, 2007); "Some witch or gipsy must have whispered this into the ear of Dr. E. C. Hyde," *Daily Delta* (April 28, 1853), 2; Peter Hanley, "Mamie Desdunes: 'This Is the First Blues I Ever Heard in My Life'," *Portraits from Jelly Roll's New Orleans,* http://www.doctorjazz.freeserve.co.uk/portnewor.html (accessed November 5, 2006). Rhodolphe Desdunes, Mamie's father, was born in 1848. Desdunes was a noted author and a descendant of wealthy refugees from Haiti. He was involved in the appeal of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case to the Supreme Court. He was also a Spiritualist; "Spiritualism in New Orleans," *Spiritual Telegraph* (April 28, 1853), 2.

[185] "Correspondence," *Spiritual Telegraph* (March 12, 1853), 1; *Revolution, Romanticism*, 188.

the United States, Godfrey Barnsley arrived in Savannah in 1824. One of the first friends he made was William Duncan, the son of a Scottish cotton factor. They would be friends for life. Barnsley's business required him to travel between New Orleans, Mobile, Savannah and the cotton mill cities of Liverpool and Manchester. In 1828 he married Savannah heiress Julia Scarborough and took her to England, where their first daughter was born. Barnsley's business was thriving, but his father-in-law was nearly bankrupt. The Barnsleys returned to Savannah and moved into the Scarborough mansion, and Barnsley took over the household expenses. By 1837 he was among the wealthiest cotton factors in the South. While they were living with her family, Julia bore six more children and developed a lung ailment, probably tuberculosis. Hoping the cooler air would restore her health, he set about creating a splendid estate for her in the wilds of Georgia on lands recently made available by removing the Cherokees and sending many of them down the Trail of Tears. The Barnsleys planned their house and gardens with care, and the family moved to a temporary home on the property. Mrs. Scarborough came to stay with Julia and the children, and Barnsley continued to travel on business. By 1843, the railroad ran from near Woodlands to Savannah, eliminating days of overland travel. When Julia's condition deteriorated, they went to Savannah to consult with her doctors. She seemed well enough in early 1845 for him to make a quick trip to Woodlands to check on things. A letter requesting him to return somehow took five days to reach him, and he arrived a few hours too late for a final farewell. He was bereft, and never forgave himself for not being with Julia when she died. Barnsley continued to travel between his offices in New Orleans and Savannah, and entered a partnership with Edmund and James Sager in Mobile. In 1846, Edmund Sager's wife introduced Godfrey Barnsley to a clairvoyant,

who suggested trying to communicate with Julia.[186] Even before Andrew Jackson Davis turned people's thoughts to the spirit world, mystics and seers and clairvoyants were offering access to the unseen on a small scale. They advertised in newspapers, especially in New Orleans. It is not clear when Barnsley actually began to believe he could communicate with spirits, or that it ever brought him solace.

Perhaps Barnsley's experience with an evil spirit was due in part to the power of suggestion. In March of 1853, in New Orleans, he received a letter from his old friend William Duncan of Savannah. "I see the 'spirits' are with you–but why should that be considered strange–Is not the old Enemy represented as going up & down the earth seeking whom he may devour & if *he* can, his emissaries may do the same–but–can you not account for the table movements on magnetic or electric principles." News of Spiritualism spread through their network of wealthy cotton merchants, but from the outset Duncan was cautious. "If you are really a medium," he quipped, ending his letter on a lighter note, "I shall hope to see some wonderfull manifestations next summer. Perhaps you could tell me who is my sweetheart–& whether I shall succeed." In April, Barnsley had letters from Mobile, Alabama. Two were from commission merchant Alfred A. Marsh, reporting on their mutual friend Edmund Sager. The first said that Sager "is a believer in the Spiritual Rappings as his wife–Mrs Sager, has *proved herself* to *be a first rate medium*. I regret extremely that these state of things exist as I am fearful that the excitement will tend to make him worse." A second letter reported the ailing Sager improved. "Lately he has not alluded to the 'Spiritual influence' and I seriously

[186] *Barnsley Gardens at Woodlands*, 8–11, 58–60. Because Coker did not footnote any of his material, I am only including this instance in 1846 because he gives specific details. He also recounts stories about Barnsley discussing Spiritualism with friends and walking with Julia's spirit in the gardens, but it is not clear where they originated.

hope it has passed from his mind." Three were written by Sager, who remained very much interested in spiritual influences. He had asked his medium for the dates of Barnsley's birth and those of his parents as a test, and reported the responses. From the outset, it seems, Barnsley's interest in the spirits was not entirely spiritual. "You say it would be a great thing if we could only know the position & course of the L[iver]pool market," wrote Sager. "I have made some enquiries as to that. the answer is that it is right to obtain any information respecting myself, my movements &c &c where the interest &c of others is not involved–but when the information would operate to my own interest & to the prejudice of others it is not right–i.e. it is right to obtain such information as we know to be right, & wrong to obtain any that we know would give us any undue advantage." Sager was not well, and one Dr. Shaw was treating him using the "medium of Electricity or some other agency." "I am not a medium now," Sager explained, "on account of the state of my health but shall be in two to 3 mos." Two months later he was dead. In October Duncan wrote to Barnsley from Savannah about his visit to the Fox sisters in New York. Duncan could detect no fraud. "I am not afraid to search into it, as opportunity shall present & if it proceeds from the *devil* I want to know, how far he has power,–which knowing will be equal to half a victory over him."[187] By 1855, Barnsley would be living the reality of Duncan's fears. His fascination with Spiritualism would last for the rest of his life.

[187] Letter to G. Barnsley, Esq N.O., March 11, 1853; Letter to G. Barnsley Esq. 23 April 1853; Letter to G. Barnsley Esq. 24 April 1853; Letter to G. Barnsley Esq N. Orleans, April 28, 1853; Letter to G. Barnsley Esq. N. Orleans, April 25, 1853; Letter to G. Barnsley Esq. N. Orleans, April 25, 1853; Letter to G Barnsley Esq, Kingston, Cass Co, Ga., October 16, 1853, Godfrey W. Barnsley Papers, 1824–1873, Box 3, Papers, Jan–May 1853, Duke.

Up the Mississippi River in St. Louis, the northernmost metropolis on the river generally thought of as part of the South, Spiritualism had flourished since Isaac Hedges witnessed spirit communication in New York and brought the practice home with him. People had begun forming private circles, and mediumship had appeared in "some of the most intelligent and respectable families in the city." Visits by "public mediums," a Miss Anderson and then the Misses Fox, "communicated an irresistible impetus in favor of Spiritualism to the whole community." The most highly publicized incident involving St. Louis Spiritualists in the early years was the church trial of Henry Stagg on charges of "heresy, or a belief in the doctrines of Spiritualism" and his expulsion from the Second Baptist Church of St. Louis in July 1853. Among the accusations against Stagg was "coveting after spiritual gifts." When church officials tried to make it a closed proceeding, Stagg's supporters staged a sit-in until "the bitterness of Christian wrath" "waxed so strong" against them that they thought it best to depart. Of the four supporters, only one can be identified as having been born into a slaveholding family. One came from New York, another from England, and none appear to have owned slaves, making these early leaders of Spiritualism on balance probably less "southern" than "in a southern city." Decades later, Stagg was a respected citizen, admired for being "naturally religious in his tendencies" while forming "his religious opinions for himself, being careful only to be right, without regard to the general or popular beliefs, and is satisfied with his religious views only when they are in accord with his own highest convictions of truth."[188] He was also an active Spiritualist.

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[188] *Modern American Spiritualism,* 354, 359; L. U. Reavis, *St. Louis: The Future Great City of the World, with Biographical Sketches of the Representative Men and Women of St. Louis and Missouri* (St. Louis: C. R. Barnes, 1876), 620.

"From the beginning of 1853 to the close of '56," an 1861 religious history observed, "spiritual publications were rapidly multiplied." Andrew Jackson Davis was prolific, and "widely influential among the believers in the Spiritual Philosophy." What led large numbers to investigate was the publication in 1853 of the first volume of Judge John Edmonds's *Spiritualism,* which went through five editions by the end of the year and sold at least ten thousand copies.[189] This was a two-volume set of spirit messages from Emanuel Swedenborg and Sir Francis Bacon through the medium George Dexter. For many of the individuals in the South who took an interest in Spiritualism, it is not clear which, or what combination, of the many sources of information on the subject triggered their experiments. Almon Gage was one of these.

Almon F. Gage became a Universalist minister and itinerated in the South for ten years. He wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph* from Key West in 1853. Since his first effort, Gage had "conversed in writing with a number of Spirits of different degrees of intelligence," and "been a medium for the Greek, Latin, French, and Spanish languages. The last-mentioned I am entirely ignorant of." The spirit of Universalist minister Adin Ballou had selected Scripture for him to read and when Gage took to the pulpit, Ballou "through me made the discourse." In addition to being able to converse mentally and easily with spirits, Gage believed himself to have "for past the six hours been in conversation with a friend nearly a thousand miles' distant." How he knew this to be true he did not say, but, "So intimately are we connected, that one mind may dictate, and the two pens held in our hands write the same language. I read a letter over to myself, and my

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[189] *Religious Denominations in the United States: Their Past History, Present Condition, and Doctrines, Accurately Set Forth in Fifty-three Carefully-prepared Articles, Written by Eminent Clerical and Lay Authors Connected with the Respective Persuasions,* ed. Israel Daniel Rupp (Philadelphia: Charles Desilver, 1861), 628; *Republic of Mind and Spirit,* 227.

friend in Maryland knows its language, and, further, we can converse with one another mentally, and, what is stranger still, the philosophy of the thing is clear to my mind by intuition or influx."[190] Spirit communication was exciting, but it also prompted many like Gage to consider the possibility of communication between embodied minds.

Nancy McDougall Robinson may have been the first plantation mistress to leave a record of her interest in Spiritualism. Robinson's diaries, telling of "a young bride coming to the 1832 Mississippi Delta and eventually facing isolation, yellow fever, war, and loss," later inspired Eudora Welty. In July of 1853 Robinson tried unsuccessfully through medium "Sister Sarah Posey" to move a table and get in touch with her dead parents and siblings. Sarah and Nancy McDougall had come to Mississippi as children. Their father, Nicholas Allen McDougall, was a judge. Mrs. McDougall died in 1850 and Judge McDougall followed her in 1851, losses the sisters still had not fully reconciled in 1853. Nancy later reflected on the spirit world in her diary: "There is a strange mystery in it—it is too happy a thought to believe that the spirits of the blest made perfect can watch over us here in our sinful state and be our guardians."[191]

Both in the North and South, private mediums were most often female and frequently young. The *Spiritual Telegraph* clipped an item from the Charleston, South Carolina *Courier* by a correspondent who claimed its editors could "vouch for his character[.]" At a séance circle of three young girls, he was given a message by raps

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[190] "Remarkable Experience," *Spiritual Telegraph* (1853), 253.

[191] Suzanne Marrs, One *Writer's Imagination: The Fiction of Eudora Welty* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 84; Randy J. Sparks, "Southern Way of Death: The Meaning of Death in Antebellum White Evangelical Culture," *Southern Quarterly,* ff. 22, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4074/is_200610/ai_n19431258/ (accessed April 25, 2010); *Mind of the Master Class,* 601, 602 ff. 50.

through a writing medium, "a young lady, whose very soul would revolt at the idea of TRIFLING with the DEAD or deceiving her friends." The "names of departed persons were given as being present and conducting the phenomena. All this, however, I can account for, I think, upon the mental biological theory."[192] In 1853, people were experimenting with and earnestly theorizing about spirit communication. The correspondent considered himself thoroughly versed in the current explanations of what might underlie the phenomena.

In December of 1853 James Henry Hammond wrote to his friend William Gilmore Simms to say that until he read Judge Edmonds's *Spiritualism* (1853) he had seen nothing about "spiritrappings" except newspaper accounts that made them sound absurd. Now, though he was not ready to believe, Hammond found the testimony of Spiritualists such as Edmonds "far stronger than anything the Bible offers us to prove that its teachings are revelations from God." He considered the religious system outlined by Edmonds to be "in all *essentials* the very same that I have hammered out for myself, without the aid of Spirits," and liked the notion that "instead of our being fallen angels we may be merely undeveloped ones."[193] Hammond had every reason to hope that was the case, having molested his four nieces (none of whom ever married) and driven his wife away by refusing to give up his slave mistresses. "Undeveloped" sounded so much more promising than "fallen."

In the early years in the South, Spiritualism was viewed by most people who left records as a conundrum that required an explanation in the context of Christianity.

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[192] "The Spirits Down South," *The Telegraph Papers* III, 419.

[193] James Henry Hammond, *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder,* ed. Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 262–263.

Whether Anglican like Godfrey Barnsley, Episcopalian like Emma Balfour and the South Carolinians, or from an evangelical or liberal Christian background, most of the people who have left their thoughts on the subject at some point wondered if the phenomena had religious import as a sign of a new dispensation or the end of times. A few settled on one of the current "scientific explanations" and a few did not care as long as it was amusing. Ultimately, though, the allure of spirit communication was its "proof" that the Christian promise of eternal life was true. Even better, if those who have left the flesh are still alive and retain their individuality and memory and emotions, there is no death.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jesse Babcock Ferguson

Since the beginning of recorded time, mankind has turned to religion to explain the mysteries of this world and every successful religion has promised that the soul, the self, would not be extinguished when we die. Protestant evangelicalism held sway in the antebellum South, and Christians were expected to have faith that belief in Christ's atonement for the sins of mankind would ensure them and their loved ones eternity in Heaven. The New Testament promised a glorious afterlife, although the nature of that "world without end" was veiled in impenetrable mystery. However the mechanics of the afterlife were conceived, Christians were supposed to find comfort in its promise, but often they did not. Letters and diaries are full of the anguished confessions of southerners whose faith simply did not offer adequate solace as they coped with the death of loved ones and contemplated their own mortality. In religion as it is actually lived, people often pick and choose from what is available to construct a usable personal faith.[194] Even for Christians, the world of the dead could intrude on that of the living, as the persistent belief in ghosts and demons suggests. By the 1850s, phrenology, animal magnetism and Spiritualism—explorations of the mysteries of the human mind that had potential religious significance—were part of the vocabulary of the South. While some southern

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[194] Cedric Mims, *When We Die: The Science, Culture, and Rituals of Death* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 342; *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 9.

Christians cleaved to evangelical orthodoxy, others embraced the possibilities of these mysteries. Our understanding of evangelical Christianity in the nineteenth-century South has not adequately taken into account these "other Christians," who alone or in small groups reinterpreted the Word of God to fit more comfortably with their individual needs and their understanding of the world.

Jesse Babcock Ferguson of Nashville was one of these "other Christians." His story illustrates what was possible when a sincere Christian, empowered by the spiritual legacy of the Enlightenment—what historian Nathan Hatch called *The Democratization of American Christianity*—embraced the right and duty to interpret the Bible as his own inner light revealed its true meaning, as the literal word of God (or not). Conversion and rebirth in the Spirit launched young Jesse and John Ferguson, sons of a Church of Christ minister, on careers as itinerant evangelists. Their inner light impelled a continuing reconfiguration of personal faith that moved beyond traditional evangelical interpretations of the Bible's teachings about salvation, Heaven and apostolic gifts. Jesse's extraordinary success as a preacher gave him the confidence and opportunity to eventually make public his beliefs, which by 1854 included universal salvation and communication with the spirits of the dead. The support and resistance these beliefs met when he shared them in the pulpit and the pages of the *Christian Magazine* he edited left a paper trail that gives us a window into the beliefs of one community of southern Christians. Some of them feared deviating from the faith of their fathers but "others" explored new possibilities and reshaped their beliefs while continuing to consider themselves good Christians.

Jesse Babcock Ferguson was the charismatic and influential preacher of the Nashville Church of Christ from 1846 to 1856. His sermons drew such large crowds every Sunday that by 1849 his wealthy congregation built a larger and more elegantly appointed new church for him to comfortably accommodate up to twelve hundred souls. Despite the fact that the marriage of slavery and evangelicalism did create southern exceptionalism, the story of Jesse Ferguson demonstrates that educated southerners, urban southerners and their northern counterparts were all very much part of the same community of ideas. The print and transportation revolutions made it so. It was an age of progress, scientific advances—and theological innovation—that excited the interest of an increasingly literate public through ever more available and affordable books, magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets. As we have seen, Ferguson's engagement with this world of ideas, despite the fact that some were also known to be embraced by northern abolitionists, was not as unusual for southerners as previous historians had suggested.[196] An early example of Ferguson's interest in progressive if controversial inquiries into the working of the human mind is his experimentation with animal magnetism, or mesmerism.

Ferguson's mesmeric experiments in 1842, with his wife Lucinda as his subject, convinced them that she, while in a trance state, had received communications from the dead. Ferguson kept these experiments and his other unorthodox speculations private. Publicly, his considerable talents as a religious orator attracted attention. The same year he began to experiment with mesmerism the Nashville Church of Christ, which had no

[196] See, for example, "The Southern Press and the Rise of American Spiritualism, 1847–1860," or Clement Eaton, "The Resistance of the South to Northern Radicalism," *The New England Quarterly* 8:2 (June 1935), 215–231.

full-time minister, invited him to be a guest speaker for two weeks. He so impressed the congregation that they repeatedly entreated him to become their settled preacher. In early 1846 he finally accepted, and soon also became editor of the Church of Christ's Nashville-based *Christian Review,* which he renamed *The Christian Magazine, Devoted to Primitive Christianity and Religious Intelligence.*

Primitive Christianity was a term that resonated for the many nineteenth-century American Protestants who were certain that Christian denominations, especially Catholicism, had lost the simplicity and purity of the church begun by Jesus and his disciples. Again and again, new faith movements sought to reclaim—to restore—this closer connection to God, uncluttered by creeds and dogmas and rituals. The most effective of these restorationist movements was the Disciples of Christ, or Church of Christ, who called themselves "the Christians." They followed Alexander Campbell out of Presbyterian and Baptist churches during the great revivals in Tennessee and Kentucky, intending to live by the Bible as the revealed word of God, especially as filtered through the New Testament. Visits from Campbell in 1827 encouraged a breakaway group of Nashville Baptists to "fully reorganize in harmony with the ancient Scriptural pattern" and become a Church of Christ. Campbell brought men of means and standing into his congregation. Among his most noteworthy and financially supportive converts was John Harding, founder of Belle Meade plantation and "one of the most industrious and successful men of the county," one of sixteen baptized by Campbell in the Cumberland River on December 28, 1830.[197] Campbell visited the Nashville church every five years or so, and remained an important influence on the congregation.

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[197] *Like a Meteor,* 36; Col. Willoughby Williams, "Recollections of Nashville, " in W. W. Clayton, *History of Davidson County, Tennessee, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men*

A nineteenth-century writer observed that Disciples of Christ editors wielded power like that of bishops in other denominations. As editor of the *Christian Baptist* and later the *Millennial Harbinger,* Alexander Campbell shaped the beliefs of the growing flock of "Christians" in the South and West. Campbell's motto was, "Where the Bible speaks; we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent."[198] The Bible did not mention animal magnetism, and Jesse Ferguson did not mention it in public.

The Nashville Church of Christ prospered under Ferguson. Its congregation, the largest and most influential in Tennessee, included many of Nashville's leading men and their families, but about half of the roughly five hundred members were of African descent. Blacks were drawn to Ferguson's message because he too believed that God had created all humans in his image and all were equally capable of the inner experience of grace, "especially 'the old, pure system taught in the New Testament.'" As Ferguson put it, "At a time when the whole community was interested in the more hopeful estimate of human destiny reflected from my pulpit, I was permitted . . . to secure ministration to neglected wants and demands of the most neglected parts of the community at large." Ferguson's sermons were inspirational and uplifting, if occasionally deviating from the interpretations of scripture older members of the congregation (and Alexander Campbell) favored. But the church was thriving, and Ferguson managed to explain away statements

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and Pioneers (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1880), 72; Jas. Challen, "The Church in Nashville," *Millennial Harbinger* (April 1860), 216.

[198] Henry E. Webb, "The Power of the Press: The Editor Bishop in a Time of Transition, 1900–1930," in *The Power of the Press: Studies of the* Gospel Advocate, *the* Christian Standard, *and* The Christian Evangelist (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1986), 35; Richard T. Hughes, "The Editor Bishop: David Lipscomb and the *Gospel Advocate*," in *The Power of the Press: Studies of the* Gospel Advocate, *the* Christian Standard, *and* The Christian Evangelist (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1986), 6; *Search for the Ancient Order*, 46.

that troubled that small minority in a way that reestablished his public posture of "Christian" orthodoxy. Privately he grew ever more heterodox.[199]

The Fergusons' belief that they had communicated with spirits, or disembodied minds, prepared them to accept the tenets of Spiritualism. Reflecting in 1844 on their mesmeric experiences, Ferguson had noted in his journal that he foresaw "such a manifestation of the saints, that the veil of flesh will be rent away and the connection will be permanent. . . . The angels of God will ascend and descend as Jacob saw, and as Jesus promised, and the [things] for which Peter asked on the Mount of Glory will be granted to all." In 1849, as the Fox sisters of New York were gaining fame for their communications with the dead, Ferguson published these reflections in the *Christian Magazine*. Privately, he and his family realized that if the Fox sisters really had established contact with the spirits, Mrs. Ferguson "is a medium!" That same year, someone in a trance state told him the manifestations were from spirits long dead, "seeking access to the world by the agency of spirits recently departed."[200]

Ferguson considered the implications of these revelations. Alexander Campbell and the Disciples adhered to the Biblical injunction that anyone who did not accept Jesus Christ during life on earth was doomed to eternity in Hell, and at the second coming of

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[199] Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1981), 268; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56; T. L. Nichols, *Supramundane Facts in the Life of Rev. Jesse Babcock Ferguson, A.M., LL.D., Including Twenty Years' Observation of Preternatural Phenomena* (London: Published for the Proprietor of the Spiritual Lyceum, 1865), 150; Ferguson's changing beliefs were heterodox from the perspective of Alexander Campbell. The terms "orthodox" and "heterodox" are contingent on what one believes is authoritative interpretation of Scripture. For the purposes of this project, we presume that each individual might assume his or her beliefs to be orthodoxy and those of anyone who was not of like mind to be heterodoxy, but that a more feasible definition of orthodoxy must place its interpretation in the custody of professional clergymen. Even so, "orthodoxy" would vary from denomination to denomination and even from preacher to preacher.

[200] *Spiritual Communion,* 11, 12.

Christ, "They that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth, and they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation."[201] Little by little, Ferguson gave hints in his sermons and writings that he was not so sure that was the case. His position was more akin to that of Universalists, who were convinced that a loving God who had created mankind in His own image would not destroy even one of His beloved creatures. "We confess," Ferguson later explained,

> that our experiences and observation so deepened and confirmed our faith in the reality and nearness of Spirit presence, that it gave a character to our ministrations that was marked by all, and led, doubtless, to the strange controversy that grew out of the denunciations of heresy and infidelity, that some ephemeral publications and irregular ministers fulminated against us. . . .[202]

In the April 1852 *Christian Magazine* Ferguson revealed that it was clear in his mind "that Christ by his spiritual nature, or by the Spirit, did preach to the Spirits of the invisible world," assisted by "ministering angels" who brought the gospel to "[i]nfants, idiots, pagans, and the countless thousands whose external circumstances remove them far from the light of the blessed gospel" during their lives on earth. He also averred that he had hesitated for the "past eight years" to express publicly everything he believed, including that he had never "committ[ed] the body of a single human being to the grave, for whom it is not a pleasure for us to know, that his soul has already entered where the knowledge of Christ may be his."[203] Alexander Campbell replied in the next issue of his

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[201] *History and True Position of the Church of Christ in Nashville: with an Examination of the Speculative Theology Recently Introduced from Neologists, Universalists, Etc.* (Nashville: Cannon and Fall, 1854), 13.

[202] *Spiritual Communion*, 11.

[203] *Spiritual Communion*, 13–14.

Millennial Harbinger, asking Ferguson to clarify whether he did indeed believe the Biblical doctrine of future punishment. Implicit in this request was the demand that Ferguson dissociate himself from the taint of Universalism and acknowledge his adherence to Campbell's belief that those unconverted in their lifetimes would in fact be consigned to Hell. This triggered a flurry of articles and pamphlets.

Campbell's July *Millennial Harbinger* featured appropriately disapproving letters from readers reacting to Ferguson's articles. Ferguson's August *Christian Magazine* denied repeatedly that he was a Universalist and devoted a good deal of ink to "The Attack of the Millennial Harbinger upon the Christian Magazine and its Editor," which Campbell then reprinted in the September *Millennial Harbinger,* vowing to "unsheath the sword of our spiritual warfare, and enter into the field." Ferguson accused Campbell of using his position as editor to become a "one-man church court."[204]

Campbell's opposition strengthened Ferguson's resolve to let no man dictate his beliefs. In early 1853, Ferguson traveled to New Orleans, where he delivered a sermon in the First Christian Church, an address at the YMCA on "The Duty and Dignity of Labor" and a sermon in the Hall of the Mechanics' Institute. His YMCA lecture, promised the *Daily Delta,* "is in every way worthy of the high reputation of its author, who is regarded as one of the most eloquent preachers in Tennessee. We shall publish it *in extenso* in our Sunday paper, when all our readers can enjoy its excellence."[205] There was Spiritualist

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[204] Ibid., 17; J. B. Ferguson, *Relation of Pastor and People; Statement of Belief on Unitarianism, Universalism and Spiritualism* (Nashville: Union and American Steam Press, 1854), 5.

[205] "Divine Service To-Day," *Daily Delta* (30 January 1853), 3; "The Duty and Dignity of Labor," *Daily Delta* (February 26, 1853), 1; "We are informed," *Daily Delta* (February 27, 1853), 4.

activity in New Orleans by then, but we do not know if Ferguson made contact with any local investigators.

In late 1853 Ferguson and his wife spent six weeks in Ohio, meeting regularly with a circle of Spiritualists that included a Methodist minister who was a medium, two of Ferguson's brothers-in-law and other committed Christians. Spiritualist publications at the time claimed everyone was a potential medium. As he had with mesmerism a decade earlier, he wanted to investigate for himself the phenomena that excited the United States and western Europe. And as he had with mesmerism, Ferguson came away convinced that Spiritualism offered empirical proof of the afterlife. One séance had begun calmly, but after a few moments he observed "a sensible agitation of the table." Apparently familiar with the theories of Michael Faraday, Ferguson "was ready to ascribe [it] to the unconscious pressure of the party, or some person in the circle." The medium was a young girl of fifteen. She moved furniture without touching it, was carried by invisible hands while seated in a chair, and elicited rappings to spell out messages. "Many who were then present," Ferguson told his Kentucky friend and kinsman William D. Meriwether, "are now believers." Musing on the significance of what he had learned, he told Meriwether that he was troubled by "fortune telling" and other frivolous uses of "a presence that might, were the mediums to go forward in their own development, be turned to the loftiest and holiest uses." Through the mediumship of his Methodist friend, the spirits told Ferguson, "We direct you in many things. In your daily walk and private devotions, we are near you. We whisper things to you contrary to your former convictions, and we see the growth of your mind. We have led you from the beaten path,

you think at times, too far. Look not back, we pray you. Fear not. Press onward and upward."[206]

Ferguson returned to Nashville and his pulpit, and continued his spiritual investigations. He experienced "raps upon my person, clothing, pillow, pulpit, and still have them in almost every serious hour of thought and meditation, and have them with me as I write." He had witnessed native-born Americans who never spoke a word of German "discourse for hours in that tongue" in the presence of Germans who "pronounced their addresses pure specimens of the power of their language." What seemed the most solid proof to Ferguson and to many others was the ability of mediums to describe "the age, appearance, time of death and the peculiarities of character of the deceased relatives of persons present, and where they could have had no acquaintance with them, and in many instances, could not have known of their existence or death." Ferguson sent copies of some of his letters to Meriwether to the *Spiritual Telegraph,* which printed them.[207]

It wasn't Ferguson's interest in communicating with spirits, though, that next caught the attention and raised the hackles of Alexander Campbell. In April of 1854 Campbell reprinted a pronouncement by the editor of the Alabama *Universalist Herald* that Brother Ferguson was "a Universalist in the true sense of the term" and that he would "be known in future ages as a Christian reformer." Everyone who dies, Ferguson believed, goes directly to the spirit world and begins an eternal progression of spiritual

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[206] Letter, Nashville, Springfield, Ohio, October 24, 1853 to William D. Meriwether, reprinted in J. B. Ferguson , *Spirit Communion: A Record of Communications from the Spirit-Spheres with Incontestible Evidence of Personal Identity, Presented to the Public, With Explanatory Observations* (Nashville: Union and American Steam Press, 1854), 17, 20–22.

[207] *Spirit Communion,* 23–24, 21.

growth. "There is a future Spiritual life to all human beings that death cannot destroy," Ferguson averred, and " *That future Spiritual life is progressive to all souls.*"[208]

This idea of spiritual progression in Heaven came from Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, who groused in 1758 that, "Today's churchman knows almost nothing about heaven, hell, or his own life after death."[209] Swedenborg wrote at length and in detail of his visits to Heaven and his conversations with angels. Less than a hundred years later Henry Ward Beecher would claim that no one in America "could consider himself educated who had not read Swedenborg's works."[210] Johnny Appleseed distributed Swedenborgian tracts to the backcountry and frontier. A few Swedenborgian ministers itinerated in the rural South. Swedenborg's tales of Heaven and angels and spirits were told and retold. His description of spiritual progress in a family-centered heaven resonated with many Christians in the nineteenth century. Like Mary Maverick in Texas, they began to speak of their dead as having gone to the "spirit world."[211] Popular hymns incorporated themes of celestial family reunion and reminded believers that at death they would "fly away." Christians who accepted the burden of original sin and the fear of Hell fretted that their unconverted loved ones would not join them in the hereafter, that their sacred family circles would be sundered for eternity. Swedenborg's eternal progression dovetailed nicely with universal salvation. For Jesse Ferguson, it was only reasonable to

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[208] Ibid., 19 (The editor was John C. Burruss.), 12.

[209] Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 181.

[210] Timothy Miller, *America's Alternative Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 80.

[211] *Heaven: A History*, 183.

believe that he never buried a member of his flock who had not already begun to progress to a clearer knowledge of God.

In July, the Fergusons visited the Meriwether plantation in Kentucky. It was there they had conducted their 1842 experiments with mesmerism. The Meriwethers had become Spiritualists, and twelve-year-old neighbor Agnes Morrison was developing as a medium. Mrs. Ferguson continued to be a home medium for her family. On this trip she delivered a message to her husband from his brother John's late wife Nancy Meriwether Ferguson admonishing one of her uncles to "submit more willingly to spiritual influences" and promising to come again.[212]

By August of 1854 Ferguson had publicly moved beyond universal salvation and proclaimed his belief in the reality of communication with spirits. "I have investigated; and I could neither be an honest man nor a philanthropist, did I not say I know that I have had intelligent and blissful communion with departed spirits." His declaration excited fellow Spiritualists. James W. Killgore, who had been writing to the *Spiritual Telegraph* for a year, forwarded a letter in September from an acquaintance in Nashville about the encouraging progress of Spiritualism there and Ferguson's public avowal. The *Spiritual Telegraph* had already printed the news a month earlier, including the fact that Ferguson had "succeeded in leading a large portion of his congregation into the new faith."[213]

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[212] *The Telegraph Papers* VII, 91.

[213] "Digest of Correspondence," *Spiritual Telegraph* (August 19, 1854), 62: "By a letter from Nashville, Tenn., we learn that Rev. J. B. Ferguson of that place fully proclaimed his views in favor of Spiritualism some three weeks since, to an audience of some twelve hundred people. The discourse created a considerable stir, and has awakened much interest and inquiry in the place, on the subject of Spiritualism. We learn that it is to be published, and when we receive a copy we will advertise our readers of its character and content."; *Relation of Pastor and People,* 13; M. C. C. Church, who wrote the forwarded letter, was among those who investigated Spiritualism with Ferguson in 1854; "J. W. Killgore, of Como, Tennessee," *Spiritual Telegraph* (September 16, 1854), 20; *Spiritual Telegraph* (August 19, 1854), 2.

Still, Ferguson sought to remain cautious. He wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph* to commend the paper for its "calm wisdom and vigilant watchfulness" and again expressed concerns about people's misuse of Spiritualism. His thoughts had turned to the problems of wishful thinking. "He has but little experience in spiritual intercourse," observed Ferguson, "who has not seen how easy it is for a medium and the neophytes around him to mistake fleshly imaginings of their own hearts for pure spiritual communications." Spiritualism was a "great cause" and Ferguson earnestly pursued his quest for spiritual enlightenment in such a way as to persuade the majority of the Nashville congregation to support his religious convictions. This was a strange Church of Christ indeed. A dissenting minority was less tractable and asked Alexander Campbell to come to Nashville to support them. This minority included men who had shared church leadership for several years while the congregation did not have a paid minister. One of these, Tolbert Fanning, had unsuccessfully opposed hiring Jesse Ferguson in 1846. The dissatisfied minority produced a pamphlet exposing Ferguson's many errors.[214]

Fanning was certain that since the Bible was the word of God, there could be no other source to dictate matters of faith. "He also affirmed," explained one historian of the Churches of Christ, "that inasmuch as God had revealed sacred truth in a book, that truth necessarily remains static from age to age, immune to the winds of change and the relativities of time, culture, and history." Tolbert Fanning and the traditionalists charged that Ferguson had veered dangerously from "the old platform, for which we have been so successfully battling for the last quarter of a century. . . ." Ferguson and his supporters

[214] "The Telegraph and the Cause," *The Telegraph Papers* VI: Letter from J. B. Ferguson, Nashville, Tenn., September 20, 1854; *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 76; *History and True Position of the Church of Christ in Nashville,* 13.

thought the minority had, in just a quarter of a century, become hidebound by creed and dogma that blinded them to new spiritual developments and possibilities. "No marvel," sniped the minority authors, "with such ideas of the church of God, that some of Mr. Ferguson's warmest members say there are as good people out of the Church as in it." Interestingly, his critics repeatedly accused Ferguson of plagiarism. The men who conspired against Ferguson called him "a most servile copyist" of liberal and unorthodox theologians in the North such as Theodore Parker, Henry James and F. W. Newman, but Fanning and the dissident minority demonstrated that they too knew the work of these writers.[215] They also went to law to regain custody of the church building.

Of the many who were drawn into Spiritualism by Ferguson, none was probably more galling to the traditionalists than John D. Eichbaum, one of the editors of the *Christian Magazine.* Eichbaum was also a professor at Franklin College, "small of stature" with a dark complexion, "quick and fiery in his movements, and a great walker" as well as an "earnest, clear-headed student of the Bible." His father, William A. Eichbaum, was a stationer and bookseller in Nashville and an agent for Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger.* Deeply devoted to the church, William Eichbaum was one of the committee that composed the pamphlet exposing Ferguson's errors, and it was at Eichbaum's home that Alexander Campbell stayed when he came to Nashville in late 1854.[216]

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[215] *Reviving the Ancient Faith,* 67, 27.

[216] Hans Rollman, "Introduction" and Robert H. Boll, "A Sketch from the Life of J. D. Eichbaum," *The Way* (May 20, 1899), 74–76, http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/rboll/eichbaum.htm (accessed July 1, 2004). The committee members who composed the *History and True Position* were Thos. Claiborne, W. A. Eichbaum, T. Fanning, Edward Trabue, W. H. Wharton and B. W. Hall.

Rebecca Harrison was probably not the only parishioner who called on Rev. Ferguson to talk privately about his "Privileges in Spiritual intercourse." He assured her that "it was in the power of every family to realize the privileges we so highly prize," and read to her from Dr. Channing's thoughts on "Spiritual Training." Within weeks, the Harrisons were believers. Ferguson was particularly impressed with the youngest Harrison, George. Young Harrison "often visited and sometimes resided in my family," and would later marry Ferguson's daughter Virginia.[217]

Ferguson, meanwhile, had published a book about his communications with spirits and continued to send long letters to the *Spiritual Telegraph*. A meditation on "Universal Religion" found enough similarity in "the ideas common to all times and all people" to posit a universal religion; diversity could be attributed to "the degree of development and culture of the times." This, he explained, was what contemporary divines called "natural religion," as opposed to "revealed," but Ferguson found the distinction baseless. "Every form of human development is natural, and what is called revelation is only one of the higher forms." The idea of God is universal. What differs is the way people imagine God, which "has ever depended, upon the degree of moral and spiritual elevation of the people who receive it." Thus what the orthodox clung to as revealed religion was, when stripped of the accretions of centuries of error, natural religion.[218]

Ferguson surrounded himself with channels to the world of spirits. Mrs. Ferguson was a medium for visions and writing. In a letter to W. D. Meriwether (with a copy to be sent to the *Spiritual Telegraph*), he approached this subject carefully. "She always sees

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[217] *Spirit Communion,* 50; *Supramundane Facts,* 88, 162.

[218] *Telegraph Papers* V (May–July, 1854), 272–273.

the Spirit while communicating; whether through herself or others. Frequently, while engaged in her household duties, she receives a request from some Spirit-friend to give forth a communication." He emphasized the propriety of his wife's actions. In an age when some thought a lady's name should appear in the public prints only twice—when she married and died—"Nothing but the highest sense of Religious duty, and that after repeated admonitions from her Spirit-monitors, could induce her to allow even this brief notice, and the use we make of the communications that follow." Ferguson's daughter Virginia had developed as a writing and speaking medium. He stressed that "Her manner, voice, and language are graceful and appropriate in the extreme. We had no thought of her as a medium till we were advised of her peculiar organization and capacity from the Spirit-world. She seems not as yet aware of her strange privileges when in the normal state." Apparently Agnes Morrison was staying with the Fergusons, for he mentioned her as well. Her gift was as a pictoral medium, who at times presented "the highest psychical and Spiritual truths under symbols most beautiful and impressive." Henry Champion was a speaking and writing medium who frequently, "by interior vision sees Spirits; is carried by them through a variety of pleasing and mournful scenes, and seems to live, for a few hours, in the magnificence of the Spirit-state. Champion and his wife had two daughters, but inflammation of the brain had claimed their infant son just before Christmas 1848. His neighbor W. W. Finn "has the high honor of first calling his attention to the subject," and Ferguson said it was to Winn's "zeal, and sacrifices, the cause of Spiritualism in Nashville, is more indebted than to any other man." Finn, too, was a medium but Ferguson had not "been favored with any of his communications."[219]

In October, the spirit of Dr. Charles Meriwether called for a séance through Virginia Ferguson to communicate with his son William. William D. Meriwether was an old friend of the family, and the recipient of Ferguson's letters about his exploration of Spiritualism. William's niece Nancy had married Jesse Ferguson's brother John, who was also a Church of Christ minister. Nancy had died in February, and had spoken to the family through Ferguson's wife Lucinda. Now a believer, William was visiting. "The circumstances were somewhat remarkable, as his son had already prepared to leave the city, and had started but returned, and found the arrangement made, as stated."[220] Even believers who thought they were cautious and logical tended to attribute such coincidences to spirit influence.

Currying national support among Spiritualists, Ferguson chronicled his persecution and his explorations of Spiritualism and named many prominent Nashville citizens who joined him in these investigations. In late 1854 the *Spiritual Telegraph* observed that the Spiritualists in Nashville had "formed a conference similar to the one in this city." The group had been addressed by "Messrs. Finn, Lyon, Beckwith, and Freeman, whose remarks were interesting, and calculated to promote inquiry. Rev. Mr. Ferguson, with whom our readers have become acquainted, also addressed the conference" and had spoken with such ability that the *Telegraph* felt it should share some of Ferguson's remarks. This is our first glimpse of other figures who were speaking out publicly in Nashville in support of Spiritualism. W. W. Finn was the son of a well-to-do paper merchant, still living with his parents in 1850, who introduced his next-door

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[219] "Nashville Public Library: Nashville City Cemetery: Grave Search," http://0-www.library.nashville.org.waldo.library.nashville.org/cemetery_graves/search (accessed April 29, 2009); *Spirit Communion*, 27–29.

[220] *Spirit Communion,* 159.

neighbor H. B. Champion to spirit phenomena. Both were mediums. James M. Lyon was a sign painter who had lost an infant son in 1847, then another infant son and a twelve-year-old daughter to cholera in 1849.[221] He would die of paralysis in January 1856. George Beckwith was the agent for a patent-medicine firm. Watson Freeman was a family man and successful merchant.

By the 1850s Nashville was a busy port on the Cumberland River and had become an important center of medicine and publishing. Many of Ferguson's parishioners were nationally-recognized businessmen, physicians, jurists and politicians. That so many of them were willing to publicly investigate Spiritualist phenomena tells us that these antebellum southerners were open to new ideas and phenomena that promised to meet their religious needs better than a strict adherence to conventional wisdom.

Among those Ferguson first named in his reports to the *Spiritual Telegraph* were people who had sought out Mrs. Ferguson for cures. Wealthy physician and farmer Joseph Bowman, his wife and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Hagan, asked her to heal a baby who had had a "weeping eye" from birth. This was accomplished by Mrs. Ferguson "simply telling the mother and grandmother that the night on which they applied would not pass without the cure, and it was so."[222] Benjamin F. Graves, a machinist from Sumner County whose wife had died in 1851, also sought Mrs. Ferguson out for healing. There can be no doubt that Lucinda Ferguson felt called to use her gift to help people, and her faith and its power were persuasive. "In each of the above cures," Jesse Ferguson

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[221] "Spiritual Conference at Nashville," *Spiritual Telegraph* (November 18, 1854), 2; "Nashville Public Library: Nashville City Cemetery: Grave Search," http://0-www.library.nashville.org.waldo.library.nashville.org/cemetery_graves/search (accessed April 29, 2009).

[222] *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 2, 1855), 1 and *Supramundane Facts,* 157.

reported, "the parties are now enjoying something of Spirit-intercourse." The *Spiritual Telegraph* had already come out in support of "our Southern friend" Ferguson in his ongoing difficulties with the Campbellites, and in this issue the editors relished the news that Rev. C. F. R. Shehane, "one of the most widely known and earnestly devoted Universalist ministers of the South" and a recent convert to Spiritualism, had early in his career been associated with Alexander Campbell and been "one of their ablest editors and preachers." Shehane had renounced Campbellism because he came to see "the tendency of Mr. Campbell's cause as a retrogression into the most narrow forms of bigotry and superstition, and feeling that his professed opposition to all human creeds and standards of religious fellowship, while making a single ordinance the test of acceptation with God and fellowship with man, was a practical inconsistency, if not a deception of the public." The announcement of Shehane's new belief had first appeared in the *Universalist Herald* of Notasulga, Alabama, but the *Telegraph* said Brothers (in the faith) Thomas Lake Harris of New York and Ferguson of Tennessee had "predicted this open avowal when they first learned that he was investigating." Ferguson was becoming, though firmly anchored in the South, one of the inner circle of recognized Spiritualist leaders. He had also begun sending thoughtful pieces to the *Christian Spiritualist,* and in February 1855 it published "Spiritualism—Its Antiquity," which began, "To the honest objector, we would offer a suggestion. Spiritual Communication is a divine institution or appointment, or the foundation of every Religion in this land is baseless. The Bible is a collection of Spiritual communications, made through human angels, extending over a history of thousands of years. If its claims, in this respect, be true, Spiritual Communications must be the result of *Eternal Law:* the Law of God, respecting the unfolding and perfection of mind."

Ferguson again decried the misuse of spiritual gifts for profit and fortune-telling. To those who wondered about the process by which spirits return, "I answer, by the same method through which they leave the world. How do they leave? Let the skeptic answer." And by what means do spirits converse? Ferguson posited electricity, comparing the process to the earthly telegraph. If knowledge of eternal principles allowed men to communicate at a distance of thousands of miles and "daguerreotype a human countenance upon a metallic plate, think you it must be impossible for Spirit-friends to stamp an idea, a thought, a sentence, a book, upon a human intellect? And which is the most reasonable, to suppose that God, in the constitution of his universe, left no means of communication for his children, or that he has given to all the agencies of reciprocal approach and friendship."[223] Ferguson's loving God would no more forbid heavenly communication than He would consign anyone to eternal suffering.

In July the *Spiritual Telegraph* continued Ferguson's report on activities in Nashville. Among those mentioned were Mr. and Mrs. Ramage. John Ramage, a shoe merchant from Scotland, and his wife Mary Claiborne Ramage had buried their infant daughter Christina in 1847. Attending with the Ramages was Mrs. Ramage's sister and next-door neighbor, Miss Sarah Claiborne. Mrs. Hagan, who had sought out Mrs. Ferguson to heal her grandchild's weeping eye, had brought two other daughters, Mrs. McGouch and Mrs. McCreary. She was probably Catherine Hagan, wife of a clerk, who lived in the household of prosperous farmer Hugh McGavock and his wife, their daughter

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[223] *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 2, 1855), 1 and *Supramundane Facts,* 157; *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 2, 1855), 1; "Descendants of Beverly Graves of Caroline Co., VA," http://www.gravesfa.org/gen217.htm (accessed April 28, 2009); "Rev. J. B. Ferguson and His Accusers ," *The Telegraph Papers* VII, 145; *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 2, 1855), 2; J. B. Ferguson, "Spiritualism—Its Antiquity," *Christian Spiritualist* (February 3, 1855), 4.

Mary, in 1850. Another to chalk up to nineteenth-century penmanship: there were many McGavocks in the county in 1850 and 1860, but no McGouches. Hugh McGavock died in 1853, which may have been what turned the family's attention to the promises of Spiritualism. He owned eighteen slaves in 1850; by 1860 his son and heir had fifty-seven slaves, placing the family firmly within the elite planter class. Captain Jesse Johnson, "well known in this city and New Orleans, and to the traveling public, as one of the oldest and most worthy steamboat captains on the western waters," had brought his son Bailey. While the searchable slave schedules do not show that he owned any slaves, cemetery records tell us that he had buried a forty-year-old male slave named Bully, who died of consumption in 1848. The next year the Johnson plot added Mrs. F. Bolton, fifty-four, who also fell victim to consumption. In 1850, forty-five-year-old slave Ed Ley died of cold. Twelve-year-old slave Charles died of flux in 1851, and thirty-year-old Dock of cold the next year. In September 1855 scarlet fever would claim Johnson's infant child. For families like the Johnsons who owned few slaves and probably lived and worked with them for years, these deaths were the loss of members of their "family black and white." The Grim Reaper's frequent visits to his family had left Jesse Johnson pondering the mysteries of the spirit world. In 1856 he would bury his mother. Three years later an infant son would die of the measels.[224]

The medium Mr. Champion, of course, had been at Ferguson's spiritual conferences, as had "Mr. Gillian, of Pittsburgh, a Spiritualist." Ferguson mentioned Miss Rebecca Rose and Mr. J. Rose, probably a brother and sister in their mid-teens, children

[224] Robert Gray, *The McGavock Family. A Genealogical History of James McGavock and his Descendants from 1760 to 1903* (Richmond: Wm. Ellis Jones, 1903), 13; "Nashville Public Library: Nashville City Cemetery: Grave Search," http://0-www.library.nashville.org.waldo.library.nashville.org/cemetery_graves/search (accessed April 29, 2009).

Onesimus B. Rose, a carriage maker. Mrs. Merrit Pilcher was there. Her husband was president of Mutual Protection Insurance Company of Nashville and a successful merchant and steamboat captain. In 1850 the Pilchers lived with her parents, Matthew and Patsy Childress Barrow, on the Charlotte Pike. Although Matthew Barrow, like Jesse Johnson, does not appear in the slave schedules, we can assume that with a declared worth of $80,000 in 1850 much of his holdings might have been in human property. Mathew Barrow died a month before his daughter began publicy looking into spirit phenomena. She would soon purchase in a home in Nashville that was "the seat of typical Southern hospitality and a center of social life" with grounds that occupied almost a city block on High Street. As a girl she had been a belle at a party in its high-ceilinged rooms honoring General Jackson and General Lafayette. "At this entertainment the lovely Nancy Barrow wore a white satin gown and shoes purchased in Philadelphia for the occasion and brought hundreds of miles by water. Its beauty was said to have caused no little heart-burning among the fair who graced the function, and the quaint tortoise shell comb worn with the costume is still treasured by her descendants." Nancy Barrow Pilcher knew her father had made all this possible for her. She was probably thinking too of year-old Matthew Barrow Pilcher, who had died in 1834, and the other infants she and her husband had buried.[225]

The springtime investigations of Spiritualism had also attracted three other Nashville notables, Drs. Cheatham and Bowling, and attorney Wm. Foster. William Lytle

[225] "Barrow Cemetery (Removed)," http://davidsoncocemeterysurvey.com/Cemeteries/A/barrow_cemetery.htm (accessed April 29, 2009); "Passing Away of Historic Old Home," From Saturday Evening News, Nashville, Tenn., 14 January 1905, http://files.usgwarchives.net/tn/davidson/news/pilchr01.txt (accessed c. 2007); "Obituaries 1934," http://www.thenashvillecitycemetery.org/1834.htm#pilcher (accessed March 18, 2010); "The Pilcher–Barrow–Swiggart Families of Nashville," http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=mpilch&id=I70 (accessed March 18, 2010).

Foster had wed Susan Cheatham, a daughter of the late General Richard Cheatham of the state militia, a Whig congressman from 1837 to 1839. Susan Foster died of consumption in 1853, leaving her husband with their two daughters. The next year the girls had petitioned through him for permission to sell a slave given to their mother in 1840, who "has become of little or of no value to Petitioners." William Lytle Foster's combined net worth in 1860 would be $45,000. Dr. William K. Bowling and his family, including stepson John L. Cheatham, were living with William Archer Cheatham, a brother of William Foster's late wife Susan, in 1850. Medical reformer William A. Cheatham had been tapped to head the Tennessee Lunatic Asylum when it opened in 1852. In a complex relationship not unusual in the great southern cousinocracy, "Dr. Bowling was Dr. Cheatham's step-uncle, having married Melissa Saunders Cheatham, the widow of his uncle John Long Cheatham after his untimely death Oct. 12, 1833." Bowling was Professor of Principles and Practice of Medicine in the Medical Department of the University of Nashville and in 1851 had founded the *Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery,* which he edited. He had buried six slaves in Nashville City Cemetery in 1852; four had died of consumption, one of drowning, and one infant of an unknown cause. Bowling, who could not believe in Spiritualism but was curious about the inexplicable things ascribed to it, once predicted the imminent death of a patient with typhoid fever who was then cured by Mrs. Ferguson's prayers. As Ferguson remembered, "Many exaggerated accounts were circulated, such as that, after he had actually died, he was brought to life; but the real state of the case was well known and accepted, My friend, the professor, detailed it to his class of students, then numbering hundreds, and while saying that he did not believe the nonsense of spiritualism, he did believe that God Almighty, by

Mrs. Ferguson, delivered a dying man." Whatever this healing power was, Bowling could believe it was the work of God but not of spirits. Bowling would go on to serve as a Confederate surgeon, and later as president of the National Medical Association. Bowling's stepson, Dr. John L. Cheatham, graduated from the Medical Department of the University of Nahville with highest honors in 1854 but in broken health. With so many around him succumbing to consumption, it is quite possible he too had contracted tuberculosis. Cheatham went into practice with his stepfather, but at some point became too weak to work. He was given a life membership in the American Medical Association and an appointment as surgeon of the Confederate state militia, but died in 1863. One of his last public acts was to advertise for two runaway slaves. Cheatham had asked Jesse Ferguson to preach his funeral sermon, and the family was so moved by it that W. K. Bowling requested a copy for publication. "How sweet the memory," intoned Ferguson at graveside, of how "he used to turn his ear to my feeble utterances, intent to catch a new realization of hope, as I labored in the night time and day time of this community to lift the chilly mantle of superstition and shed a ray of hope over all the clouds that ignorance spreads over man's prospect of destiny. He loved to listen! I love to remember!" Ferguson imagined "a galaxy of freed intelligences" looking down on them as they tossed symbolic evergreen boughs into the grave. In a prose style that appealed to the sentiments of the mourners, he described this heavenly host pouring "the blest fragrance of their love into these newly opened heart-urns, to soothe them." Ferguson and Cheatham may have had a special bond as chronic sufferers; Ferguson had battled the "white swelling," tuberculosis of the bone, since he was foureen. It was a severe case, and he suffered from "deep-seated ulcers and exfoliations" of the tibia. At the age of fifteen, he awoke one

morning believing he would be cured. Directed by an "inaudible voice," he enquired of a friend who was a physician's son what in the *materia medica* would produce the same effect as a burn, and what would function as an antidote. In secrecy, he applied sulfuric acid to the lesion until the pain became unbearable, then halted its effects with oil and cream. After three weeks of this treatment, and "guided in his diet and regimen by the voice which came in his sleep," all trace of ulceration was gone. He remained without symptoms for fourteen years,[226] but by the late 1840s the disease returned and would not leave him again.

In the summer of 1855, St. Louis medium Amanda Britt and her husband stopped in Nashville, claiming they were directed by spirit friends. Their arrival was a surprise, but Ferguson immediately planned a series of lectures. Mr. Champion seemed delighted by this turn of events, but "when under Spirit-influence he most uncompromisingly opposed her speaking in Nashville." Champion was not alone, and "every circle in the

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[226] "Susan Long Cheatham Foster," http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Foster&GScid=586935&GRid=8951052& (accessed March 18, 2010); "Cheatham, Richard, (1799.–1845)," http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000341; "PAR Number 21485425," *Digital Library on American Slavery*, http://library.uncg.edu/slavery/results.aspx?s=3&sid=345&lRec=21485216&lastset=825&perpag=25 (accessed March 18, 2010); *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture,* s. v. "William A. Cheatham, 1820–1900," http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=C068 (accessed August 3, 2006); Kay Baker Gaston, "The Story of the Cheathams in Robertson County, for the Robertson County Historical Society," http://www.rctimes.com/archive/2003/01/012203_thenandnow.html (accessed August 3, 2006); *Southern Practitioner, an Independent Monthly Journal Devoted to Medicine and Surgery,* Vol. XIX (January 1 to December 31, 1897), ed. Deering J. Roberts, (Nashville, Tenn.: John Rundle and Sons, Printers and Publishers, 1897), 178; Samuel David Gross, *History of American Medical Literature, from 1776 to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: Collins, 1876), 54; "Nashville Public Library: Nashville City Cemetery: Grave Search," http://0-www.library.nashville.org.waldo.library.nashville.org/cemetery_graves/search (accessed April 29, 2009); *Supramundane Facts,* 151; "University of Nashville, Medical Department," *Nashville City and Business Directory, for 1860–61* (Nashville: L. P. Williams & Co., Publishers and Proprietors, 1860), 243: "W. K. Bowling, M. D., Professor of Institutes and Practice of Medicine." He was also Dean of the Faculty; "Dr. W. K. Bowling," *The Louisville Medical News: A Weekly Journal of Medicine and Surgery,* Volumes XIX & XX–1885, ed. H. A. Cottell and J. Morrison Ray, (Louisville: John P. Morton and Company, 1885), 122; Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U. S. Black Men's History and Masculinity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 554; J. B. Ferguson, *Obsequies of John L. Cheatham, M. D., of Nashville, Tenn.* (Nashville, Tenn.: John T. S. Fall, 1863), 3, 5, 10; *Supramundane Facts,* 28–29, 148–149.

city were admonished that it would not do, and every Spiritualist convinced of its impropriety." Ferguson was put in the difficult position of relaying this disappointing news to his houseguests. The Britts remained with the Fergusons for a week, and "were greeted and welcomed by our Spirit-friends, but gave us no evidence of the nature and purposes of their Spirit-guides. We parted with them in love, bidding them God speed." Cracks were forming, for reasons only hinted at, in the community of southern Spiritualists. Mrs. Britt had begun her career traveling with Frances Gage to New Orleans, Mrs. Britt to deliver trance lectures under spirit influence for the Harmonial Spiritualists and Mrs. Gage to give a course of lectures on women's rights. Mrs. Gage was also well know for her outspoken advocacy of the immediate emancipation of slaves, and in 1851 had invited former slave Sojourner Truth to speak at a women's rights convention in Ohio.[227] Many southerners who welcomed the good news of open intercourse with the spirit world did not welcome interference with their social and political institutions.

In August, the *Christian Spiritualist* reminded readers that "Few, if any in the Spiritual family, labor more earnestly or effectually for the development and spread of the gospel of Spiritualism" than Ferguson, and added his observation that "Our cause moves forward with certain and hopeful steps. Our healing without fee or reward, earthly, direct or indirect, is of a character to confound skeptics and believers. Nor does it

[227] J. B. Ferguson, "The Mission of Dr. and Mrs. ," *Spiritual Telegraph* (July 7, 1855), 1; "Mrs. Britt's Spiritual Lectures," New Orleans *Daily Picayune* (March 13, 1854), 1; "Women's Right Lectures," (March 14, 1854), 4; "Mrs. Dr. Britt," and "Mrs. Gage's Lectures," (March 15, 1854), 1; "Harmonial Spiritualists," (March 19, 1854), 7; Sandra Parker, "Frances Dana Barker Gage," *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography,* http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/francesgage.html (accessed March 18, 2010).

interfere with scientific skill, so called, or the legitimate pursuits of the honorable sons of Esculapius."[228]

September brought an issue of the *Spiritual Telegraph* that devoted most of its front page to news of Ferguson's activities in Nashville. Dr. Bowling, Mr. Foster, Mrs. Ferguson, Mr. Champion and Mr. Finn were again mentioned. Notable among those joining them was the Hon. Cave Johnson, who in 1843 had been present when the House of Representatives discussed an appropriation of $30,000 so Samuel Morse could string wires from Baltimore to Washington. Johnson had led fellow congressmen in proposing jocular amendments. Johnson wished half the appropriation to go to mesmerist Theophilus Fisk so that his branch of science could also be studied. Mr. Houston of Alabama suggested including Millerism, and Mr. Stanly of North Carolina that Cave Johnson be the subject of the mesmeric experiments. Mr. Johnson assented, provided Mr. Stanly were the operator. Cave Johnson went on to serve as postmaster general, as a judge, and as president of the State Bank of Tennessee. The death of his sister in July 1855 may have caused him to think more soberly about the mysteries of communication.[229]

Mrs. Judge Catron might have discussed the phenomena with her aunt, Nancy Barrow Pilcher, and decided to learn more for herself. Matilda Childress Catron was a cousin of the wife of President James K. Polk, and it was said she had used her influence

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[228] "The Labors of Bro. J. B. Ferguson," *Christian Spiritualist* (August 4, 1855), 2.

[229] *Spiritual Telegraph* (September 1, 1855), 1; John B. Buescher, "Petitioning Congress: 1854 Memorial of the Spirit Rappers," http://www.spirithistory.com/memorial/html (accessed c. 2005); "Johnson, Cave (Jan. 11, 1793–Nov. 23, 1866), *Dictionary of American Biography,* Vol. X, http://www.cavescove.com/archives/cjpostmaster.html (accessed February 26, 2006); "Reported Deaths, Nashville Christian Advocate, 1852–1856," http://www.tngenweb.org/records/tn_wide/obits/nca/nca1-09.htm (accessed February 26, 2006).

with Andrew Jackson to have her husband appointed to the Supreme Court. Judge Catron's protégé John Winfield Scott Dancy had declared himself a medium and introduced Mary Maverick to Spiritualism in Texas in 1853. Although Matilda Catron was the wife of a wealthy and powerful man, "had been a social queen in Washington in the late thirties," was "a woman of great elegance of manner, and dress" and was still a social force in the 1850s, she was, like Mary Boykin Chesnut, a "childless wretch." She was probably painfully aware that her husband had fathered a son by a slave laundress. That young man, James Thomas, later remembered hearing the preaching of Alexander Campbell and Jesse Ferguson, whom he called a "brilliant man." He also told an interesting variant of the story of Ferguson's cure by spirit direction at nineteen, saying, "The result was Dr. Ferguson became a spiritualist."[230]

Investigating with Mrs. Catron was her sister, widow Jane Childress Marshall, who was living with the Catrons in 1850. Both mourned their brother, George Campbell Childress, who had gone to Texas in 1835 to join the Robertson colony, organized by their uncle. Childress and Robertson were elected to the 1836 convention that drafted the Republic's founding documents, and Childress was the chief author of the Texas Declaration of Independence. Unable to establish a successful law practice and support his family, he had committed suicide in Galveston in 1841. Jane Childress had married

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[230] *Spiritual Telegraph* (September 1, 1855), 1; Octavia Zollicoffer Bond, *The Family Chronicle and Kinship Book of Maclin, Clack, Cocke, Carter, Taylor, Cross, Gordon and Other Related American Lineages,* (Nashville, Tenn.: McDaniel Print. Co., 1928), 489–490; Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay, of Alabama, Covering Social and Political Life in Washington and the South, 1853–66* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1904), 74; James P. Thomas, *From Tennessee Slave to St. Louis Entrepreneur: The Autobiography of James Thomas*, ed. Loren Schweninger (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), 60; Loren Schweninger, "A Slave Family in the Ante Bellum South," *The Journal of Negro History* 60:1 (January 1975), 32; *In Search of the Promised Land*, 86; *From Tennessee Slave to St. Louis Entrepreneur,* 53.

Samuel B. Marshall, who was also part of the Robertson colony and took part in the Battle of San Jacinto; he died in Galveston in 1845.[231]

Col. Henry L. Claiborne and Mrs Lucy Claiborne, whose son John had been recently "born into the Spirit-world June 30, 1855, in his tenth year," were also mentioned by Ferguson. John died of congestion of the brain. The Claibornes' daughter Anastasia was a toddler whan she succumbed to inflamation of the bowels in 1849. Claiborne's sisters Sarah and Mary had already become interested in Spiritualism, and the siblings had seen two sisters buried in the cemetery plot they shared with the Ramages; Anastasia died in 1842 and brain fever carried off Charlotte in 1848.[232] Henry Claiborne was the treasurer and secretary of the Nashville & N. W. R. R. He owned three slaves in 1850 and three in 1860.

Mrs. Ferguson's healing by spirit power remained an important component of the couple's faith-based engagement with Spiritualism. One particular cure had been, Ferguson explained, "the means of leading us to receive and regard spiritual communications from the coloured portion of our people." John Harding of Belle Meade plantation had been "grieved at what some religious journals called my heresy and infidelity, and often in a very fatherly manner expressed his fears for my reputation and usefulness." Harding contributed generously to the support of the church (and its pastor), so Ferguson reflected on these concerns and trusted that Harding would come to see the

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[231] *Spiritual Telegraph* (September 1, 1855), 1; *Handbook of Texas Online,* s. v. "Childress, George Campbell (1804–1841)," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fch28.html (accessed March 18, 2010); "Robertson Colony Collection Office Records, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utarl/00024/arl-00024.html (accessed March 18, 2010); *The Mexican-American War and the Media, 1845–1848,* http://www.history.vt.edu/MxAmWar/Newspapers/RW/RW1845bJulyDec.htm (accessed March 18, 2010).

[232] *Spiritual Telegraph* (September 1, 1855), 1; "Nashville Public Library: Nashville City Cemetery: Grave Search."

importance of the "enlarged hope" Ferguson felt he must share with his congregation. Harding had recently buried "a very valuable house-servant" whose eight-year-old daughter the old planter "treated as a pet." He was a widower, she an orphan. They became inseparable, Harding and this "beautiful, almost white" child. Ferguson's carefully chosen words convey a common subtext. Racial mixing had created the light-skinned slaves favored for household duties, and often they were more than metaphorical members of the planter's "family black and white." Little Kizzy was probably Harding's own flesh and blood. Harding's son had taken over the management of Belle Meade and married a cousin of Hugh McGavock. John Harding made his home in Nashville but had planting interests along the Mississippi in Arkansas, where he spent a month each winter. Kizzy was left at Belle Meade. In Harding's absence, the child was physically abused by a woman slave and sustained an injury to her spine. By the time Harding returned to Nashville, Kizzy had also contracted typhoid fever. "Calling with many affectionate apologies to Mrs. Ferguson and myself for his past expressions of fear for our usefulness, he appealed to us to know if 'Kizzy' must die. I told him I thought she would, for this was my opinion after seeing her; and I confess, such was the child's deformed condition and seemingly hopeless state, that I felt it would be a relief for the little creature to die." Mrs. Ferguson was attached to Kizzy and had been nursed through an illness by her late mother, suggesting an intimate relationship between the two families. Under the direction of Kizzy's mother in the spirit world, Lucinda Ferguson spent eight days affecting a complete cure. Kizzy's mother, Mrs. Ferguson ever maintained, "gave her particular and unmistakeable evidences of her presence and of her interest, not only in the child's recovery, but in the hope such evidences must bring to all mankind when appreciated in

purity of purpose and sincerity of design."[233] The Fergusons' racial attitudes and acceptance of slavery had been shaped by their culture, but they shared an understanding that bringing spiritual truth and light to everyone created in God's image was what they were called to do.

Ferguson's sermons in 1855 covered such topics as "Spirit communion; an immovable fact in the internal consciousness and external history of man." He sent copies of his pamphlets to the *Christian Spiritualist*, which excerpted articles on "The Ministry of Angels" (which, it said, "should be read by all, who doubt the propriety of looking for Spiritualism in the Bible, or think demonism or *devilism* the only phase of Spirit-intercourse recognized among the marvels of its wondrous narrative"), "The Ministry of Angels not Infidel but Religious and Spiritual" and "Testimony for Spirit-Intercourse." Following the last, the editors quoted Dr. William Ellery Channing: "Did I think of those who are gone, as dying to those they left, I should honor and love them less. . . . They love us more than ever, but with a refined, pure, Spiritual love. Their Spiritual vision penetrates to our souls. It would be a reproach to Heaven and the good, to say that their happiness is founded on their ignorance of our wants or sufferings."[234]

The South Union Shakers who had signed the petition were also following Spiritualist news, so they would have known that Jesse B. Ferguson had created a sensation when he announced from the pulpit of the Nashville Christian Church in 1854

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[233] Robert Gray, *The McGavock Family. A Genealogical History of James McGavock and his Descendants from 1760 to 1903* (Richmond: Wm. Ellis Jones, 1903), 15, 30; *Supramundane Facts,* 151–152.

[234] "The Ministry of Angels," *The Christian Spiritualist* (September 29, 1855), 2; "The Ministry of Angels Not Infidel but Religious and Spiritual," (November 3, 1855), 3; "Testimony for Spirit-Intercourse," (November 24, 1855), 4. The quoted material is from Channing's Sermon *Future Life,* vol. 4, 232, 233.

that he was a Spiritualist.[235] The *Spiritual Telegraph* printed lengthy reports from Ferguson, and we can assume the Shakers read them.

By the end of the year, the Shakers sent one of the brethren to Nashville to seek out Ferguson. This unnamed visitor appeared on Christmas night, 1855, to join their circle and communicate with the spirits and, "so unexpectedly to himself and us, was developed as a medium at his first visit to our home."[236] After that, the Shakers and Ferguson were quite fascinated with each other, and the Ferguson family frequently extended their hospitality to their new Shaker friends. While Shakers did travel to Nashville on business, it is likely that those who visited Jesse Ferguson were, like the three sent to Kentucky in 1805, carefully chosen and focused on conversion. They urged him to visit their community.

At the end of 1855 a strange story began making the rounds of the Spiritualist press. Ferguson had sent it to the *Spiritual Telegraph,* whence the *Christian Spiritualist* picked it up, averring that "wonderful as the facts are, they are testified to by witnesses that in any court would be considered competent and reliable."[237] The following February, they revisited the story. "We copied some time since, an article from one of our exchanges, in which Brother Ferguson gave an account of some manifestations occurring at his house—his daughter being *medium*; the character of which was so near akin to the *miraculous*, that most persons who have read it, have expressed more or less skepticism

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[235] *Spiritual Telegraph,* August 19, 1854: "By a letter from Nashville, Tenn., we learn that Rev. J. B. Ferguson of that place fully proclaimed his views in favor of Spiritualism some three weeks since, to an audience of some twelve hundred people. The discourse created a considerable stir, and has awakened much interest and inquiry in the place, on the subject of Spiritualism. We learn that it is to be published, and when we receive a copy we will advertise our readers of its character and content."

[236] "Spiritualism Among the Shakers," *Supramundane Facts,* 94.

[237] "Spiritual Healing," *The Christian Spiritualist* (December 22, 1855), 2.

as to its possibility." The story Ferguson told was about his fourteen-year-old daughter Virginia, who while staying with the Meriwethers in Kentucky had produced medicines to cure a variety of diseases by stirring a spoon in an empty teacup. The editor of the *Loudon Orient* in Tennessee wrote in support of Ferguson's character: "we *do* know Mr. Ferguson, and his amiable lady and daughter, who are extraordinary spiritual mediums. Whether Mr. Ferguson reported the assertion quoted we are not able to say; but we know that the mediums of Nashville profess to perform cures by other remedies than those used by physicians." The editor's comments reveal how well known Ferguson had become, and how much people far from Nashville knew of what was going on there.

> We know that Mr. Ferguson has, for several years, as well as hundreds of others among whom are some of the most respectable citizens of that city, been a strong believer in spiritualism, and we also know that he has long been held in high estimation, not only by a large portion of the citizens of Nashville, but by men in high places all over the country—that he commands the attention and the most profound respect of large audiences on the Sabbath, composed, to a great extent, of the talent of the city and vicinity; that he receives a salary sufficiently ample to sustain his family above want, and afford them many of the luxuries of life, without being compelled to resort to any kind of humbuggery to sustain his position.[238]

The Tennessee editor's point, stated at some length, was that Ferguson was sincere in his beliefs, was joined and endorsed by numbers of respected people and had nothing to gain from fabricating stories.

The majority of Jesse Babcock Ferguson's congregation may still have supported him, but the civil courts awarded the church building to the Campbellite minority. In his 1856 farewell sermon, Ferguson claimed he was leaving of his own free will and asked

[238] "The Late 'Miracle' at Rev. J. B. Ferguson's," *The Christian Spiritualist* (February 23, 1856) 2.

God to "breathe upon our newly awakened faculties thy vision of glory."[239] Shortly thereafter, fire consumed the building.

A knowledgeable historian of the episode claims Ferguson's popularity was "undiminished by controversy." Ferguson notified the Spiritualist press in early March that he was "leaving for the principal cities of the South, induced so to do, by most earnest and repeated solicitations. I shall be absent some six weeks, and spend most of the time in New Orleans. Mr. Champion accompanies me." One of the first things Ferguson did in New Orleans was to preach a sermon in Dr. Clapp's church, where mesmerist Thomas Cripps was the organist. Clapp, without having made the leap to Spiritualism, was a New Orleans elder statesman for Ferguson's eloquent brand of religious tolerance and universal salvation. Known for attracting a fashionable congregation that also welcomed the humblest, and for allowing speakers from a variety of viewpoints to use his pulpit, Clapp could claim honestly that his orthodox friends said "that the merchants and planters who came to New Orleans during the healthy months to transact business never left the city without going to '*the American theatre, the French opera, and Parson Clapp's church,*'" On the verge of retirement, Clapp welcomed

[239] *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography,* s. v. "Jesse Babcock Ferguson," http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/jesseferguson.html (accessed September 2, 2006). Another source says that Ferguson left voluntarily before the matter was resolved, and that an out-of court settlement was reached (Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*). The extent to which he still enjoyed support from his congregation is also unclear. T. L. Nichols's *Supramundane Facts in the Life of Rev. Jesse Babcock Ferguson,* 36, claims Ferguson decided to leave when he "recognized so much of a divergence between his own views and those held by the majority of the society of which he had been considered a member, that he felt it his duty to voluntarily resign the church edifice erected for him to those who might have been called its doctrinal claimants." A more critical source says most of the congregation left with Ferguson; J. B. Ferguson, *Moral Freedom: The Emblem of God in Divinity and Life; A Discourse, Delivered in Voluntarily Surrendering the House of Worship Built for His Use, to Its Doctrinal Claimants, When Their Claim Could Not Legally Be Sustained, and When Not Authoritatively Demanded.* (Nashville: W. F Bang & Co, Printers, 1856), 3.

Ferguson and had allowed one of his own sermons to be published in a pamphlet with Ferguson's on "Spirit Communion."[240]

A week after delivering this sermon, Ferguson united in holy matrimony the Spiritualist poet and once-and-future communitarian Thomas Lake Harris and Miss Emily Isabella Waters. The new Mrs. Harris may or may not have understood that her husband intended a celibate union. Having lived for years with his grief at the loss of his mother and his first wife, Harris had found solace in an immortal spirit bride with whom he lived at night while sleeping. The Harrises went to New York City, where he founded a Swedenborgian congregation that attracted Horace Greeley, patron of the Fox sisters, and William James, Sr., as members. Harris claimed a direct revelation from God instructing him to interpret the true meaning of Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia.* To help others find their spiritual counterparts, Harris's method required taking them into his close embrace, allowing a force "which then flowed out of him" to produce in them "a vision of Christ's love" from which emerged their own spiritual mate. Apparently, "the followers Harris embraced were always female."[241] We begin to see suggestions that Jesse Babcock Ferguson was filtering reality through high-minded hopefulness.

With Clapp's retirement imminent, Ferguson may have had hints his services would be desired. He returned to Nashville to settle his affairs there. While in Nshville,

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[240] *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography,* s. v. "Jesse Babcock Ferguson"; "Personal," *The Christian Spiritualist* (March 22, 1856), 2; Theodore Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches and Recollections, During a Thirty-five Years' Residence in New Orleans* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Company: Second Edition, 1858), 251, 395; J. B. Ferguson, *Spirit Communion; an Immovable Fact in the Internal Consciousness and External History of Man. Being an Address, Delivered in the Regular Course of Public Ministration in Nashville, April 15, 1855, by Rev. J. B. Ferguson. Together with a Discourse on Christian Sympathy Angelic, Delivered in the First Congregational Church in New Orleans, La., by Theodore Clapp* (Nashville: M'Kennie & Brown, 1855).

[241] "Married," *Spiritual Telegraph* (April 5, 1856), 3; Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits who Brought Spiritualism to America* (Schocken, 1995), 16–21.

he was visited by Rev. James Tanner, a member of the Chippewa tribe who was a missionary to his people. Since the heyday of the Shakers' spiritual gifts, the spirits of Indians had frequently manifested and spoken through mediums. Ferguson's biographer explained the many appearances of the spirits of Indians to mediums—"manifestations of this kind may be found in the early records of the New England colonies"—as these spirits coming to those who occupied the Indians' former homes. Tanner was a living Indian, and a Christian, who was interested in the phenomena; like Ferguson, his spiritual journey had shaped and reshaped his beliefs. Ferguson was the most famous southern Spiritualist, known to be a Christian and a minister of the Gospel. It makes sense that a troubled minister, struggling with his own belief in spirits, would seek him out for counsel. If the Chippewas hoped to assimilate and earn full citizenship, as well as eternal salvation within the strictures of orthodoxy, they could not commune as their people always had with the spirits of their ancestors. Tanner left the Baptists and become a Unitarian in 1855. What he saw and heard in Ferguson's circle convinced him friends from the spirit world were in attendance. He returned the next day, explaining that "for years he had been struggling in his mind to overcome all such experiences as inimical to the views of his Christian missionary brethren and fellow labourers, and as tending, in their opinion, to the destruction of the hopes of his people." On reflection, Ferguson was convinced Tanner had been "brought to us that the slumbering customs of his people, which by a slavish and ignorant priesthood had been denounced as devilism, might be revived and purified, to open a new hope to a despairing and persecuted, but never cowardly or forsaken people."[242]

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[242] *Supramundane Facts,* 84–86; "James Tanner," *The Quarterly Journal of the American Unitarian Association,* Volume II (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1855): James Tanner's

Before leaving Nashville, the Fergusons wanted to spend some time with the Meriwethers in Kentucky. The Fergusons had close ties to the Meriwether family, and as was antebellum custom made extended visits to Meriville, the Meriwethers' hospitable plantation home in Todd County. This time, Ferguson thought he would visit the Shakers. On arriving at Meriville, he learned that the Shakers, "while engaged in selling their fowls, seeds, &c., among our friends and relatives, expressed much confidence in our spiritual guidance, and anxiety that we should fulfil our promise to visit them."[243] The family had circles for two weeks, waiting for spirit direction.

Finally, on June 17, the spirits revealed who should go and exactly what they must do when in company with the Shakers. The little party—Ferguson and three mediums: his wife Virginia, their friend Henry Champion and Meriwether relative Miss King—departed the next day in carriages provided by their host. After a tiring, dusty day of travel, they arrived at the Shaker settlement. Based on the location of Meriville in Todd County, it was undoubtedly South Union. That evening, the believers assembled. There was a group of about fifty, "mostly aged persons." After the Shakers did their

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grandfather was a minister living along the Kentucky and Ohio rivers when his son John was abducted and adopted by Indians. John Tanner took an Indian wife and lived among them for thirty years. James Tanner was educated and engaged in the Indian trade. He married a woman who was a Roman Catholic and a quarter Chippewa Indian. They both became Methodists in 1846 and James resolved to be a missionary to his people. In 1853 he became troubled on the subject of baptism, believing immersion the true way. He and his wife traveled five hundred miles on snowshoes to be baptized at St. Paul, Minnesota; there was a delay because he refused to "subscribe to the articles of a creed offered for his signature," but after some dithering he was baptized and went to New York for ordination. Because he rejected close communion and the Trinity, which led to more dithering before he was ordained. Tanner traveled and collected money and farming implements so he could gather his people into settlements; he stored them in a warehouse in St. Paul and all was lost in a fire. While in Boston seeking help from the Baptists, Tanner fell into conversation with some Unitarians and found his beliefs more compatible with theirs than with the Baptists. The Unitarians were interested in the future of the quarter-million Chippewas "ready to receive the arts of civilization and the institutions of the Gospel." In 1855 Tanner became a Unitarian missionary.

[243] *Supramundane Facts,* 94.

dancing, compliments were exchanged at length and Champion and Miss King described departed Brethren in the spirit world "with marked accuracy."[244]

The next day they were given a tour of the community, and especially one of their nicest houses, "built, as they told us with an air of gratified hope as they looked upon and spoke of the spiritual manifestations of this time, for those who were soon to be brought to their Zion."[245] If this structure was a product of the Era of Manifestations, the Shakers may have been waiting several years to fill it with converts.

The narrative of the visit is full of portents and revelations and spirit-inspired commands, against the backdrop of "what had become to us from its repetition rather an officious desire, that we should cast in our lot with them. . . ." Things took a turn for the weird when Mr. Champion, in the trance state, began to reveal secrets of their rituals and levels of enlightenment, and again when under spirit control he rebuked the head of the society for his autocratic leadership. Afterwards the leaders asked if they could proceed with their usual worship, and Ferguson assented because, like other visitors, "we were curious to watch it." What followed was magnetic combat.

> While their benches were being removed, our little company, by spirit-direction, was formed into its usual triangle, my seat being placed a little in advance of it towards the assembly. In regular files of two, four, and six abreast, the whole assembly was soon formed, with a few in the centre to lead in the singing, when, by singing, marching, dancing, and a constant gesticulation of the hand, the whole company would pass by us with an effort to concentrate all their magnetic power upon us. By every effort they sought to change Our position, and bring us into the centre of the room, but they failed. They laboured in this way for a full hour, and I never felt such an amount of electrical or vital magnetical influences in any assembly of any kind. But, strange to say, and almost incredible to believe, whenever they would approach our little band, Miss King, a fine, delicate lady of

[244] Ibid, 97.

[245] Ibid, 97.

> twenty-five, who made the apex of the triangle, with one wave of her hand would send that whole company reeling backward to the opposite wall. They at length became wearied with their efforts, and proposed an adjournment.[246]

Ferguson's mediums were prostrate with exhaustion. For the next two days, the Shaker leaders were solicitous. They came to their rooms and surreptitiously tried to magnetize Ferguson's party. They sent brandy for Mr. Champion, which proved to be drugged. They "sent their best mediums into our room with a view to induce us to join them," but the power of Champion's revelations of their dark secrets was too great for the Shaker mediums to overcome. On the morning of the third day, "much to the relief of all," Ferguson and his mediums departed.[247]

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, what are we to make of this gothic tale of their visit to the Shakers? It suggests that the Shakers, without natural increase, were stepping up their recruitment efforts. Winning Jesse Ferguson and/or any of his circle would have been a triumph, and the Shakers knew it could lead—as it had in the past—to many of the minister's followers coming with him. Shakers no longer had a corner on prophecy and spiritual gifts, though. Modern Spiritualism offered them to all.

Ferguson left Nashville on August 16, 1856. He purchased a home in New Orleans, but for reasons not clear did not connect with either faction of Spiritualists there. By spring 1857 he returned to Nashville "very much broken in health, with the disease of the upper part of the larger bone of the right leg worse than it had been at any former period." He recovered enough to be able to preach in Memphis, and later in Ohio. Ferguson arrived in St. Louis in late spring 1858, and after a few weeks of labor was

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[246] Ibid, 98, 94, 101.

[247] Ibid., 101–102.

"utterly prostrated with the violence of the disease." Physicians advised amputation, but Ferguson "refused alike medicine and the knife, and waited patiently for the release of death." Under the direction of spirits, the sister-in-law of his host healed him by burning the lesion to the bone with lime. "My death was predicted, but my life was restored."[248]

Ferguson was listed as a public lecturer in Spiritualist publications and held regular services in a hall rented for him in Nashville. The venue he had occupied for almost a year required work in 1859, and it was while supporters secured another that he answered a call to spend a month in Memphis. The Nashville *Daily Gazette* reported that "his instructive and popular lectures will be resumed in our city in the early autumn. May a just appreciation attend his devoted labors."[249]

Nothing in Ferguson's records indicates that he met Methodist minister Samuel Watson during this stay in Memphis, but we know that Watson had already investigated with a group that included Bishop James Hervey Otey of the Protestant Episcopal Church, South. Dr. Arthur K. Taylor, who was part of that circle, would also participate in a séance with Ferguson. Ferguson did meet many interesting Spiritualists. His hosts, with whom he was as yet unacquainted, provided a suite of rooms at the Worsham Hotel and "everything was done to make my visit agreeable." After Ferguson's extemporaneous two-hour lecture on "The Unity of Man in the Diversity of Human Manifestation" he was visited by four distinguished gentlemen. All were Masonic leaders of the highest degree, and they inquired if Ferguson were a Mason or had ever read about the craft. Responding in the negative, Ferguson wanted to know why they had asked. "Because," as Charles

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[248] Ibid., 184–185, 182, 158–160.

[249] "Public Lecturers," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 2, 1857), 2; *The Spiritualist Register* (1858) http://www.spirithistory.com/58regist.html (accessed July 2, 2006); "Rev. J. B. Ferguson," *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 25, 1859), 5.

Scott, former Chancellor of the Mississippi Supreme Court, told him, "your speech to-day was a most able and lucid exposition of the grand principles of Masonry—equal, sir, to any I ever heard, and in some respects superior." J. J. Worsham, proprietor of the hotel, "then proposed that we all visit a lady two miles from the city, who, he informed us, had given spiritual communications to many of the craft—himself included. He was lavish in his encomiums upon this lady, and all seemed especially anxious that I should see her." A carriage was ordered, and Ferguson, Scott and Worsham, accompanied by Major James Penn of the Planters' Bank of Tennessee and Judge Bernard F. McKiernan of the Criminal Court of Memphis, drove out of the city to a "plain log-house in a beautiful grove, and amid vines, arbours, and summer blossoms, it seemed a delightful retreat from the dusty city. Here we were met at the door by the lady of the house, who at once addressed me by name, and with every mark of hearty welcome." The party found this curious, as Ferguson and the medium, the widow of Marcus Winchester, had never seen each other. She seated her guests, and proceeded to deliver an address and take questions from the Masons. When they took their leave, Mrs. Winchester invited Ferguson to return the following Tuesday. As the party made its way back to Memphis, all agreed it had been an extraordinary experience. "On Tuesday I returned to the log house in the woods," Ferguson reminisced, "and there met Mr. James Hart, the artist, and Mr. Watson Freeman, of Nashville, both friends of mine; but we all met without any intention on the part of either." Ferguson went back every day for two weeks.[250]

[250] *Supramundane Facts,* 144, 141, 143. Perhaps Ferguson is being a bit disingenuous here. Mrs. Winchester's mediumistic activities were well known, and had been reported in *The Spiritual Telegraph.* Likewise, Ferguson's speaking engagement in Memphis would have been given advance publicity.

Mrs. Winchester was born Lucy Lenore Ferguson, apparently not a close relative of Jesse Ferguson. She married Archibald McLean on October 6, 1839 in Calvary Episcopal Church in Memphis. By 1842 the nineteen-year-old widow McLean married widower Marcus Brutus Winchester. Winchester had already served in the war of 1812 by the time he accompanied Andrew Jackson to the signing of the Chickasaw Cession in 1818 and then laid out the town of Memphis on land purchased by Jackson, John Overton and Marcus Winchester's father, John. Making his home in Memphis, he was its first mayor when the town was incorporated in 1826. He had married Amarante Loiselle, a genteel woman with some African heritage, known as Mary. She died in New Orleans in August 1839, leaving several children. The marriage of Marcus and Lucy produced none. On the surface, it would seem things were going well. Winchester was a delegate to an 1849 railroad convention in St. Louis and was elected to the state legislature in 1851. There may have been a certain fluidity in race relations in the early years of Memphis, but as racial attitudes and legislation hardened in the decades before the Civil War, Winchester and his family of color drew unwanted attention from some Memphians. It probably did not help that he and his first wife had been close friends of Scottish reformer Frances Wright, who came to Memphis in 1824 and started a biracial plantation community called Neshoba. The Winchesters named a son born in 1827 after Wright's friend, utopian socialist Robert Owen. Wright's scheme was that slaves would be "purchased or given to the community and employed as field laborers on the plantation, working for wages" that would be applied toward the purchase of their freedom when they had earned their fair market value. Wright returned briefly to Britain, and brought back her friend Frances Trollope. Mrs. Trollope was appalled by conditions at Nashoba,

though charmed by Marcus Winchester, whom she described as "a pleasing gentlemanlike man" who seemed "strangely misplaced in a little town on the Mississippi." Primitive conditions and inept leadership were not all that worked against Nashoba. Wright believed her system of "treating the slaves as responsible men and women," and not using the lash, would inspire them to work and learn, but "the slaves became idle unless constantly watched" and the trustees put them under an overseer. Wright believed in sexual self-determination, and that marriage oppressed women. Her "radicalism took the form of a kind of transgressive theatre, standing trousered in front of audiences exhorting them to liberate their sexual selves." In her absence, James Richardson and former Shaker Richeson Whitby were in charge. Whitby married Wright's sister Camilla, and Richardson "publicly proclaimed his sexual relationship with a black woman." Public opinion in Memphis turned from support or disinterest to active enmity accompanied by charges of "free love" and racial mixing.[251] The Neshoba experiment collapsed, and Frances Wright arranged for the remaining slaves to be freed

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[251] "Calvary Episcopal Church Register, Book I, 1839–1842" *"Ansearchin'" News* 16:3 (July–September 1969), 130; *Tennessee Encyclopedia,* s. v. "Marcus Brutus Winchester, 1796–1856," http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=W075 (accessed May 1, 2005); "Robert Owen Winchester," http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=:2657637&id=I4959 (accessed c. 2005): "Probably baptised Regis Pierre WINCHESTER in The Old Cathedral (Church of Saint Louis, King of France) in St. Louis, MO, 28 Sep 1828 Parents on certificate are Marc WINCHESTER and Amarante LAISEL. This is too close not to be true. Robert was at home, age 23, in the 1850 census. He then moved west, and there is a Robert WINCHESTER in Sebastian Co., AR in 1860."; Frances Milton Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans,* Vol. I (New York, Dodd, Mead & Company, Publishers: 1901). 34–35. Mrs. Trollope would soon decamp for Cincinnati and to work with a group of Swedenborgians creating the "Infernal Regions" exhibit. See David J. Voelker, "Cincinnati's Infernal Regions Exhibit and the Waning of Calvinist Authority"; Celia Morris, "Fanny Wright (1795–1852) ; Battle against Slavery," in *Tennessee Women: Their Lives and Times,* Volume I, ed. Sarah Wilkerson Freeman and Beverly Greene Boyd (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), 29, 39; Diane Roberts, *The Myth of Aunt Jemima: Representations of Race and Region* (London: Routledge, 1994), 70; Beverly G. Bond and Janann Sherman, *Memphis in Black and White* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 28–29.

and settled in Haiti. That year Marcus and Mary Winchester had a baby girl, and named her Frances Wright.

The 1830s brought local ordinances that curtailed the movement of free persons of color such as Mary Winchester and her children. All were required to register with the Shelby County Court and pay a one-dollar fee, and to keep "registration certificates containing their names, ages, and brief physical descriptions in their possession to prove their status." Winchester had moved his family to the log home outside the town limits. In 1852 he suffered a stroke, but recovered. By 1856, the family was deeply involved in spirit communion and Spiritualism was "one of the prominent topics of the day in Memphis." Mrs. Winchester gave eloquent lectures every Sabbath afternoon to "large numbers of visitors" under "the influence of a Spirit of an Indian Chief, who died some thousand years ago." The editor of Foulkes' *Financial Express,* in an article picked up by the *Spiritual Telegraph,* described Mrs. Winchester as "a lady of intelligence and a high sense of propriety," and, "under whatever influence she speaks," her lectures as "eloquent and full of interest." This writer like so many others rejected the idea that there was any such thing as a "dangerous truth," claiming that men should be glad to know if "this be the age when Spirits are to visit and hold communion with men upon earth," and if in fact Spiritualism were false, "the sooner we examine fully into the subject, the sooner the delusion will be exploded and exposed."[252] Two months later, Marcus Brutus Winchester suffered a second stroke and died within a few days. His will, witnessed by his friend Erasmus T. Rose, left a generous share to Lucy and divided the rest among his children.

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[252] *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing with the Powers That Be,* ed. Janet L. Coryelle, Thomas H. Appleton, Jr., Anastatia Sims, and Sandra Gioia Treadway (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 13; "Financial and Spiritual," *Spiritual Telegraph* (July 26, 1856), 101.

Four Winchester daughters—Frances, Valeria, Lisida and Laura—married white farmers and settled on property Marcus Winchester had purchased across the river in Arkansas. Son Loiselle would marry a white as well; on the 1870 census he was listed as a white farmer in Shelby County. All of the children could likely have passed as white. Robert Owen Winchester moved west. Daughter Louisa remained with Lucy.

When Jesse Ferguson visited in 1859, Lucy probably realized that without a white man of standing to represent her interests, the property she held might at her death be diverted from the Winchester children. "The material estate committed to me at her death she gave by will to me as sole heir and executor; but I received it then, as I did when spiritually given, as a trust for those who were likely to be defrauded out of their natural rights, which I trust I may be able to protect."[253] Lucy and Jesse formed a profound spiritual bond, and he made sure to include his wife Lucinda in this friendship.

Ferguson described the séance regulars. Lucy Winchester was the medium. Louisa M. Winchester acted as scribe for the circle, "for which she was admirably qualified by superior intelligence and high educational culture; James E. Chadwick, an English gentleman; Erasmus T. Rose, M.D., nephew to President Madison, a distinguished physiologist; Young Allen Carr, professor of chemistry in the Memphis Medical College; Arthur K. Taylor, professor of anatomy, &c.; James Hart, an artist of national reputation; and Andrew J. Wheeler, clerk and master of one of the courts of law." It appears Mrs. Winchester was, as she had been in 1856, discoursing "regularly from this abnormal trance condition on all the questions of recognized science, physical and metaphysical, on government, society, and, in a word, almost every theme that interests mankind; and that without interruption to her household responsibilities or their

[253] *Supramundane Facts,* 145.

regular duties." When Lucy Winchester died, her spirit appeared to Mrs. Ferguson, saying "I shall live to bless you all."[254]

The 1860 Nashville census shows medium Henry Champion and his family living with the Fergusons. That fall, Ferguson, "with improved health and inspiring influences exceeded all his previous efforts in this city, and gave great satisfaction to his numerous friends" in St. Louis.[255]

Mrs. Winchester had often predicted war, and when Ferguson was called to address a group in the Tennessee Hall of Representatives on the subject in 1861 he approached the task with trepidation. As he entered the long marble hall, "she appeared to me, holding an emblem of strength and a shield of brilliancy that gave me a power of thought and action no language can express." Ever after he would recall that "living power" and feel it with him when addressing "senates and mobs" and people of "every class and condition of society."[256]

Ferguson was a vocal supporter of the Confederacy, and escaped to England when Nashville fell to Union troops. After the war, he traveled in Europe with the Davenport brothers, spiritual mediums who were twice exposed as frauds while he was with them. Ferguson left the tour and returned to America, but his reputation was somewhat tarnished. He headed for Washington, bearing spirit messages for President Johnson from Universalist minister-turned-Spiritualist John Murray Spear, and while there he lectured

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[254] *Supramundane Facts,* 144, 146.

[255] "Lectures in St. Louis," *Banner of Light* (November 3, 1860).

[256] *Supramundane Facts,* 145–146.

and spoke in support of the president. Ferguson stayed with the president, who had been a member of his old Nashville Church of Christ congregation.[257]

The year 1867 found Ferguson again in Washington, and again staying with the president. "There are a great many Spiritualist celebrities in Washington at present, though I regret to say, that the greatest man among them all is very ill at present. I allude to Dr. Ferguson. He is suffering terribly with necrosis of the bone of the leg, and seems to get no permanent relief from anything," wrote a Spiritualist friend on March 6. Ferguson had moved to a private home where he could rest quietly, and a few days later he was well enough to come down to the parlor and make a short speech to about a hundred people, including Memphis friends Dr. Erasmus Rose and James Merriman. Nashville real estate investments had made him a wealthy man, but Ferguson was losing his battle with the white swelling. On September 3, 1870 he died.[258]

Christian Spiritualism in the South did not die with him. Within a few years, another charismatic minister in another southern city would publicly take up the cause. No one knows how many southerners attempted to lift the veil between this world and the spirit world. Historians have assumed that the South was both too orthodox and too defensive about northern "isms" to let Spiritualism take root, but there is evidence linking hundreds of individuals in the South with spirit communication.

Spirit communication could appear to be logical, sensible and even Biblical when bolstered by empirical observation and Scripture. Ferguson's message combined his

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[257] *Other Side of Salvation*, 195.

[258] A. B. Whiting, *Golden Memories of An Earnest Life: A Biography of A. B. Whiting Together with Selections from His Poetical Compositions and Prose Writings,* comp. R. Augusta Whiting, intro. Rev. J. M. Peebles (Boston: William White and Company, 1872), 142; Francis Garvin Davenport, *Cultural Life in Nashville on the Eve of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 107.

interpretation of the Bible with his belief that God had given man senses and reason that allowed them to realize Spiritualism was a step in mankind's spiritual progress, and when attacked by opponents quoting Scripture he was able to counter with Bible passages (and interpretations) that supported his perspective. *Sola scriptura* did not automatically lead to orthodoxy. Having once turned to the Bible to counter northern attacks on slavery, Jesse Babcock Ferguson turned again to Scripture for support of his belief that these spiritual gifts were a new dispensation. The Old Testament is rife with visitations from angels and St. John admonished us to "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God."[259]

The Church of Christ that welcomed Jesse Ferguson in 1846 had seemed to him to offer fellowship based on shared Christian faith and not "predicated on a vain uniformity of belief."[260] Alexander Campbell had himself declared, in a highly publicized 1843 debate, "Let men think as they please on any matters of human opinion, and upon 'doctrines of religion,' provided only that they hold *THE HEAD* Christ, and keep his commandments."[261] Ferguson and his followers apparently were convinced that he—and they—did so, but Campbell and his adherents were equally certain Ferguson's positions were well outside any reading of Scripture they could condone. Jesse Babcock Ferguson's popularity fed resentment and jealousy within the Nashville Church of Christ along with honest differences of opinion, yet all believed they were good Christians following God's revealed truth. The eventual schism in the Nashville church presaged

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[259] J. B. Ferguson, *Address on the History, Authority and Influence of Slavery* (Nashville: John T. S. Fall, 1850) supports a predominantly "rational" defense of the enslavement of blacks with some evidence from the Bible; for his Scriptural defense of Spiritualism, see especially *Relation of Pastor and People*, xxi; 1 John 4.

[260] *Relation of Pastor and People,* 14.

[261] *Stone-Campbell Movement,* 271.

differences that would soon surface throughout the denomination.[262] The Church of Christ learned that Jesse Ferguson was not alone in believing that the meaning of *sola scriptura* could not be dictated by the interpretations of others, especially if they were themselves inconsistent on the subject.

[262] *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 70.

CHAPTER FIVE

1854: The Petition and *The Christian Spiritualist*

On January 2, 1854, the following item appeared on page two of the New Orleans *Daily Delta:* "The Spiritual Telegraph comes to us enclosing a memorial addressed to Congress, asking the appointment of a Scientific Committee to investigate the phenomena (spiritual, so called,) which have been, and are now, so exciting the minds of many persons in almost every community. The memorial is to be backed by several thousand names—among them, some of eminent Senators, Judges, &c." Everyone in America who received that issue of the *Spiritual Telegraph* got a copy of the petition to circulate. By early 1854 publisher Charles Partridge estimated there were over a million Spiritualists in the United States, and Nathaniel Tallmadge thought there were twice that number. They may have erred optimistically. A skeptical historian of the movement, Joseph McCabe, guessed that there were only one-half to three-quarters of a million in the 1850s, in a total population of about twenty-five million.[263] The truth probably lies somewhere between the exuberant and cautious, particularly when we consider that there may have been no two people in 1854 who had precisely the same notion of what exactly Spiritualism was. Was it a millennial dispensation, a parlor amusement, mysterious rappings, demonic possession, rambunctious furniture or something else entirely? A number of prominent and respected men had publicly avowed their belief in spirit

[263] *Daily Delta* (January 9, 1854), 2; *Spiritualism, a Popular History*, 65.

communication, and scientists had made scattered attempts to investigate and explain the raps, moving tables and other phenomena now associated with Spiritualism.

At Nathaniel Tallmadge's request, editor Samuel B. Brittan of the *Spiritual Telegraph* composed and publicized the petition asking Congress to appoint a scientific commission to investigate the phenomena of Spiritualism. Signatures from all over the nation were stitched together into one long document, and rolled up. The petition presented to Congress in April had about thirteen thousand signatures. McCabe interpreted the low number of signers as a warning to be cautious in accepting the numbers posited by Partridge and Tallmadge. Perhaps, but it is also likely that the low numbers reflect the difficulties of organizing and executing a campaign of that potential magnitude in 1854, particularly in the South where there were fewer large cities and the population was more widely dispersed. Of the Spiritualists identified so far in the South, only a few were among those who signed the petition. Roughly 4 percent of petition signers lived in the South. About twenty million free citizens were counted on the 1850 census, so if there were two million Spiritualists in the country we can infer a minimum of 4 percent, or eighty thousand, were in the South; if one million, then forty thousand in the South. If McCabe's more conservative guess was closer to the truth, there were at least twenty to thirty thousand Spiritualists in the South in 1854.[264] Whether Partridge, Tallmadge or McCabe came closest to the actual number of southerners who believed, it is a group whose composition and beliefs warrant study.

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[264] *Spiritualism, a Popular History,* 65–66; My guess is that there were considerably more in the South than the petition would lead us to believe, bearing in mind these facts: We have already identified believers in communication with spirits who did not sign the petition; the signers tended to come from widely distributed parts of the South, some urban, some rural; and given the negative public connotations of Spiritualism cited by historians it is less likely that a southerner would have felt comfortable circulating or signing the petition.

As to the people who signed the petition, given the firm and unanimous disapprobation of organized religion and press coverage that mocked Spiritualists, it is probably safe to think that few people bothered to sign unless they leaned toward believing communication with the spirit world had in fact been taking place. What the memorial to Congress said boiled down to this: A variety of inexplicable phenomena were occurring. Many citizens ascribed them "to the power and intelligence of departed spirits, operating on and through the subtile and imponderable elements which pervade and permeate all material forms" while others "not less distinguished in all the relations of life, reject this conclusion, and entertain the opinion that the acknowledged principles of physics and metaphysics will enable scientific enquirers to account for all the facts in a rational and satisfactory manner." *Something,* the signatories agreed, was happening. Only the federal government had the sway and standing to oversee an investigation of the important question of *what* was causing these phenomena. Tallmadge persuaded General James Shields of Illinois to present the petition in the Senate. Whether in fact Shields "dealt rather scurvily with his friend, or he became timid at the last moment" will never be known, but Shields introduced the petition with a disdainful humor that made it impossible for Congress—even had any of its members been so inclined—to take it seriously. Amid the mirth, representatives speculated on whether it should be referred to the committee that dealt with postal affairs or that charged with foreign affairs, then tabled it. Emma Hardinge reminded readers in 1870 that the petition was "still preserved in the national archives;" after languishing on a shelf there for a century and a half, the names on this document were transcribed by historian John B. Buescher.[265] They are the

only extant source that points to a significant number of individuals—including a sizeable number in the South—whose names would otherwise never have been publicly linked to Spiritualism.

The numbers by state show that distribution of the petition was spotty, and that in many places where we know there were concentrations of Spiritualists no one signed at all.[266] Of the thirteen thousand signatories, fewer than five hundred were from the South. Of them, sixty-eight were in New Orleans and one hundred ten in St. Louis; these two Mississippi River cities known to have had large and well-organized Spiritualist populations accounted for 36 percent of the signatures. Those would have been easy to collect. But as we look more closely, there is much more to be learned from the petition.

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[265] *Modern American Spiritualism,* 130; *History of Sangamon County, Illinois; Together with Sketches of Its Cities, Villages and Townships, Educational, Religious, Civil, Military, and Political History; Portraits of Prominent Persons, and Biographies of Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Inter-state Publishing Company, 1881), 100–101: James Shields of Illinois was a brigadier general in the Mexican War. He was elected to the United States Senate for the term beginning in March 1849 and was defeated in a second try for the seat. While serving as auditor for the state in 1843, he challenged Abraham Lincoln to a duel; the challenge was accepted but friends intervened to settle the affair without violence; *Spiritualism, a Popular History,* 65–66; *Modern American Spiritualism,* 132–133; *Other Side of Salvation,* 72; Buescher generously posted the list of signatures and many other Spiritualist documents he transcribed on his now defunct and sorely missed website, spirithistory.com. I am surely not the only historian who is in his debt.

[266] Alabama, eleven; Arkansas, forty-six; Georgia, eight; Kentucky, forty-nine (plus two from across the river in Cincinnati who signed there); Louisiana, seventy-five; Maryland, thirty-three; Mississippi, seventeen (plus one from Wheeling, Virginia); Missouri, one hundred forty; North Carolina, eleven; South Carolina, one; Tennessee, forty (plus around twenty to twenty-five claimed but not named); Texas, forty.

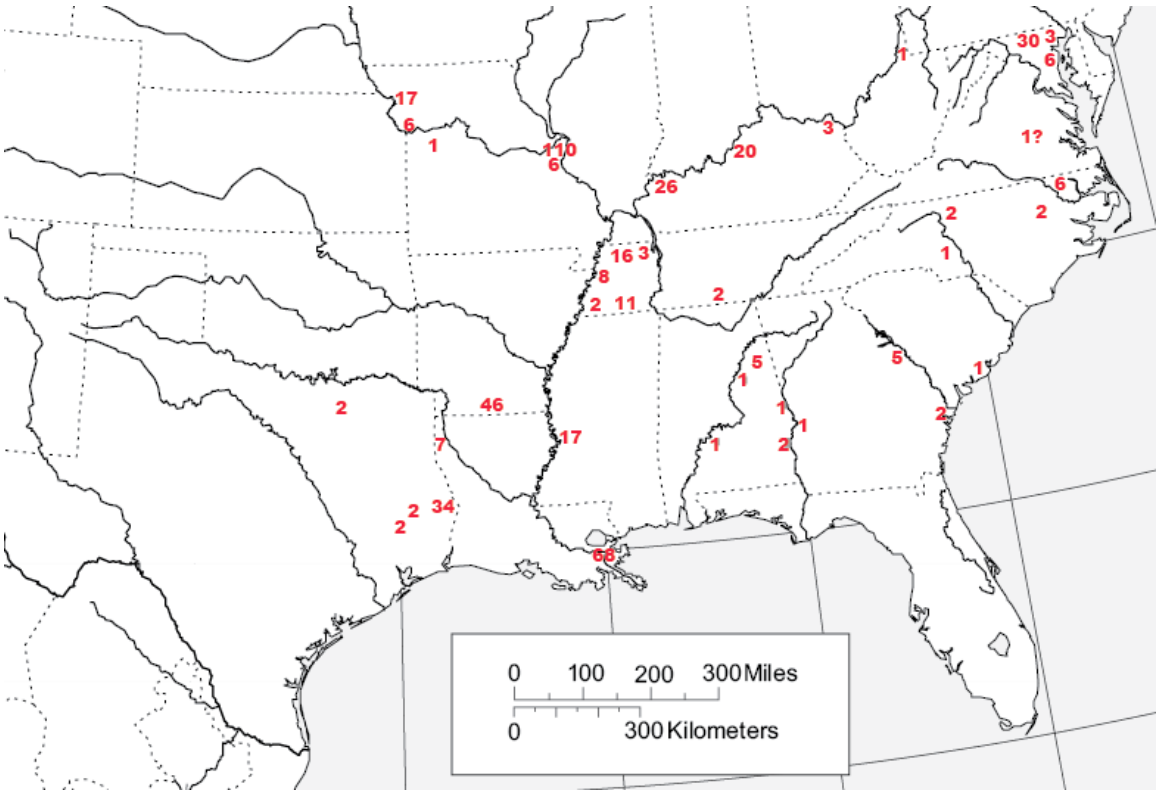

Figure 8. Distribution of 1854 Petitioners in Slave States.

The map shows the distribution of 1854 petition names in the South. Most are near major watercourses, which facilitated access to information.

Baltimore was about to become an active center of Spiritualist activity, yet only three people in that city signed the petition. Two we cannot identify, and the third, Benjamin W. Jones, was listed in the city directory as a grocer early as 1835. Thirty other residents of Maryland were signers. All lived in the town of Westminster in Carroll County, which bordered southern Pennsylvania. One student of the area's history thought that "Belief in witches and supernatural spirits were part of the Pennsylvania German culture brought into this area by the settlers," though there is no way of knowing exactly what Westminster's thirty signers believed. The story of one Henry Magin, who approached a lawyer about suing neighbor Annie Carr for nailing shingles to trees

claiming he was a *hex* (witch), was included in an article by Francis Neal Parke, the son of Westminster petitioner Joseph M. Parke, that appeared in 1936 in the *Maryland Historical Magazine.* The accusation dates from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, by which time it was standard practice to consign such beliefs to the distant past and "the ignorant classes."[267] People were not likely to admit (or preserve evidence) that anyone in their own families might have given credence to the possibility of communicating with spirits of the dead. The signers for whom we can identify a religious preference were a diverse lot. The Mathias family were Catholic, the Longwells Presbyterian. Parke was a member and Sunday school teacher at Grace Lutheran Church. The McClellands were married in a United Brethren ceremony. The Reese family was Episcopalian, and the McCollums, Swormsteads, Shrivers and Yinglings preferred Methodism. Whatever drew them all to believe in the phenomena, spiritual or not, remains unknown.

Joseph M. Parke was a community leader, and like many of his fellow signers lent his efforts to civic betterment and institution building. In the 1830s he was the first principal of the Manchester Academy, then was elected as a Democrat to the Maryland House of Representatives at about the time seven other future signers were establishing Westminster Academy. Parke helped incorporate a fire company before being admitted to the bar and moving to Westminster. For eight years he edited and published a local

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[267] Joe Getty, "Halloween Story," Carroll County Times (October 31, 1993), http://hscc.carr.org/research/yesteryears/cct1993/931031.htm (accessed February 23, 2010); Kevin Dayhoff, "One Westminster Family's Friend, and Enemy, During the Civil War," *Carrollton Eagle* (posted March 6, 2009), http://www.explorecarroll.com/community/2481/one-westminster-familys-friend-enemy-during-civil-war/ (accessed February 23, 2010). Judge Joseph Neal Parke, who studied witchcraft in Maryland, was the son of signer Joseph M. Parke; Hester Dorsey Richardson, *Side-lights on Maryland History, with Sketches of Early Maryland Families* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Company, 1913), 141.

Democratic newspaper. Along with Dr. William Mathias and William Yingling, who would both also sign the petition, he was an incorporator of the Carroll County Savings Institution. As the Civil War neared its end, although they had not all supported the same side in the late unpleasantness, Parke worked to establish a public cemetery in Westminster with a body of citizens that included fellow signers George Webster, William Reese, Jacob Reese, Nathan J. Gorsuch, Francis Shriver, David Zepp, Michael Baughman, Charles H. Heineman and William Yingling. These were men whose lives intertwined for decades, neighbors connected by business, kinship and civic involvement. Several belonged to the local lodge of the International Order of Odd Fellows. Some from Westminster were united as temperance crusaders, including Ira E. Crouse, William Yingling, botanical physician Dr. Samuel Swormstead and Francis Shriver, "one of the most indefatigable members of the Order." The Westminster Sons of Temperance claimed one hundred eleven contributing members in 1850.[268]

Elizabeth B. Wampler, the sole female among the thirty signers, was pregnant with her second daughter in early 1854. Women in the nineteenth century often thought seriously about their own mortality during each pregnancy; before germ theory and asepsis, childbed fever claimed many mothers. Born in England and in her early thirties, she probably had only her family by marriage for support. Her husband, a carpenter, was

[268] "Letter of Br. Shriver," *Monumental Fountain and Temperance Banner* (August 31, 1850), 134; "Quarterly Report of Subordinate Divisions working under the jurisdiction of the Grand Division of Maryland, Sons of Temperance, commencing in January and ending in March, 1850," *Monumental Fountain and Temperance Banner* (June 1, 1850): "… Division—Carroll No. 42; Location –Westminster; Initiated 22; Withdrawn 1; Rejected 1; Suspended 5; Expelled 1; Violated Pledge 1… Contributing Members 111."

not among the signers but some of his Yingling cousins and their spouses were. Perhaps Elizabeth Wampler was in poor health. She died April 9, 1855.[269]

Fewer than a third of the signers in Westminster appear to have been slave owners or had relatives who were, but they did not entertain an enlightened attitude toward persons of color. Merchant Jacob Reese purchased Mary Key as a house servant and mammy around 1823, freed her before 1850, and in her epitaph labeled her for posterity "A faithful servant in the family of Jacob Reese and of his son James W. Reese." In an 1858 incident, a local newspaper reported that "a crowd of some seven Etheopean bloods of town insulted a daughter of Mr. Rich. Fowler by making proposals of an unnamed nature to her," which the young lady rebuffed. She told her father she had fought off the men, and Fowler had a warrant issued for their arrest. "Six of the seven were convicted and ordered to be whipped: the first to receive twenty and the others five lashes each, on the bare back, which were administered by Deputy Stem with a degree of strength that will make the boys remember him to the end of their days," though the newspaper opined that "lodgment in a House of Correction for some years would have been more useful." Editor John K. Longwell opposed the slave trade, but is on record as early as 1833 favoring colonization. In 1835 he wrote that abolitionists were wrong, and colonization in Africa the best plan. Opposing slavery did not mean wanting to live with free blacks as neighbors. On June 2, 1859 *The Carroll County Democrat* reported the leadership of Jacob Powder and J. K. Longwell at a meeting to consider recommending further legislation "in reference to the colored population of Maryland." Powder owned seven slaves on the 1850 Carroll County slave schedule, Longwell three, Francis Shriver two,

[269] "Rudisill-Sponseller Ancestors and Descendants," http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=DESC&db=rudspons&id=I6273 (accessed February 23, 2010).

Elizabeth Wampler's husband Louis two, and George Webster one. During the Civil War, Westminster was occupied much of the time by Union troops. They arrested and tried Longwell and his wife for feeding Confederate soldiers. Michael Baughman, as mayor, was a Union man. Eight signers or their sons appear on Union rosters, only two on Confederate. The community seems to have healed fairly well once the war ended, and although the area has an active historical society and markets historic tourism, a source at the Historical Society of Carroll County had never heard of Spiritualist activity in the area and could locate nothing on the subject in a search of the finding aids to their holdings.[270]

Six names appear on the petition from Georgetown and Washington, D. C., and it is difficult to imagine how they all came together unless the first five had sought the mediumship of the sixth. The first is Charles H. Cragin, a wealthy physician. His first wife, Mary McKenney, and an infant daughter had died in April 1853, so he may have been hoping to find comfort and consolation in Spiritualism. Cragin was so convinced of the reality of communion with the dead that he became a public lecturer on Spiritualism. The next two names are James and Felix McKinney, illiterate laborers, and apparently not related to each other or to Cragin's well-born wife. Byron Ballard was living in a Washington, D. C. boarding house in 1860 and listed no employment. William Burnham was probably a Connecticut native, a farmer living in nearby Occoquan, Virginia with his

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[270] "Elizabeth Sherman Household 1822-1842," http://hscc.carr.org/property/Shellman.htm (accessed June 2006); Jesse Glass, *The Witness: Slavery in Nineteenth-century Carroll County, Maryland* (Shin-Urayasu, Japan: Meikai University Press in cooperation with the Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland, 2004), 12–13, 61, 65, 16; Kevin Dayhoff, "Memories from City Hall and e-mail from the Great Beyond," *Carrollton Eagle* (posted July 20, 2008), http://www.explorecarroll.com/community/288/memories-city-hall-e-mail-great-beyond/ (accessed July 2009); National Park Service Soldiers and Sailors System, http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/soldiers.cfm (accessed February 23, 2010). Union: Webster, Shriver, Manahan, Yingling, McCollum, Zahn, Zentz, Fowler; Confederate: Evans, Gorsuch; Telephone conversation with Ruth Ann Brown, Historical Society of Carroll County, February 23, 2010.

family. By 1870 Burnham moved on to farm in Michigan. The final signature is that of Cranston Laurie, who was a post office statistician and a well-known Georgetown medium and associate of Nathaniel Tallmadge. As a young man, he had been dismissed from his position at the post office for intemperance,[271] but apparently had no difficulty being reinstated later. Laurie was the son of Scottish parents. He and his wife were both born in the District of Columbia. His entire family developed as mediums, and are best remembered for claiming to have given séances in Abraham Lincoln's White House.

Continuing down the Atlantic seaboard, we come to Virginia. Two residents of that state signed the petition. William A. Harper did not give a location, so we placed him in the center of the Old Dominion with a question mark on our map. Mary Kirby of Wheeling was in Vicksburg when she signed, but we put her on the map at Wheeling and can speculate that she knew about the Spiritualist activities in the Wheeling area reported to *The Spiritual Telegraph* by John B. Wolff. Looking at the map, it is hard to think of Wheeling as part of the South, but at that time it was still legal to own slaves there and *The Spiritual Telegraph* had referred to it as "the South" when it published Wolff's correspondence.

[271] Donald B. Cole, *A Jackson Man: Amos Kendall and the Rise of American Democracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 226.

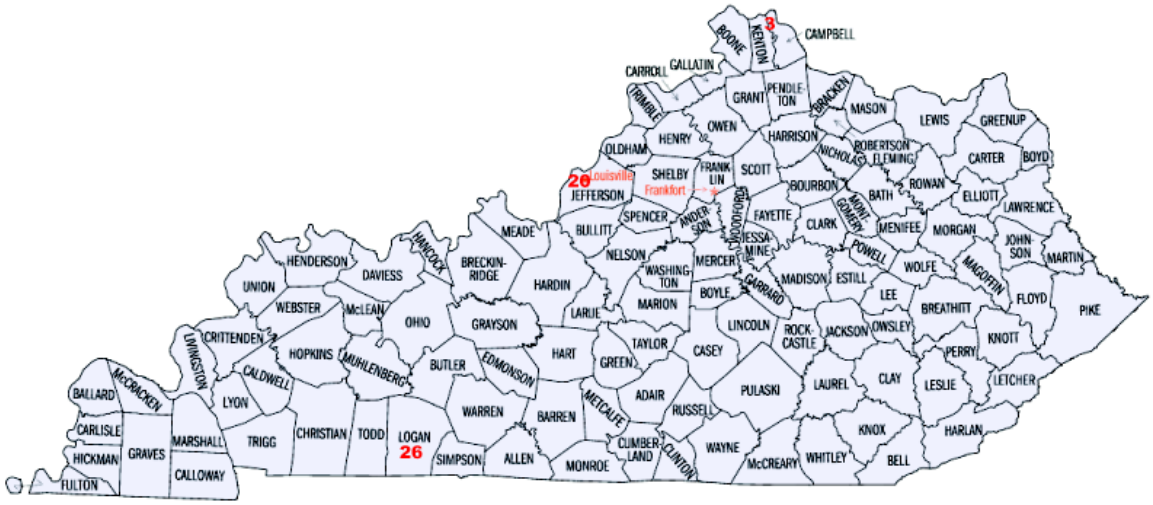

Figure 9. Distribution of 1854 Petition Signers In Kentucky.

Following the Ohio River to the west, we find three signers at Covington, Kentucky and two with them from across the river in Cincinnati. Separated by the river, the cities had been closely linked since before the 1830s when Abijah Alley and some of his family members were there. Two of the Covington signers cannot be identified. The third, Eliphalet Walker, came to Covington from Pennsylvania as a young man and married into an established Kentucky family. He was a successful manufacturer of high beaver hats, living in Covington with his business headquartered in Cincinnati. We do not know what his religious views were, but he served in the Unionist home guard during the Civil War.[272]

Continuing down the river, we find twenty who signed at Louisville. Half of these can be positively identified using the census. With the exception of prosperous shoe merchant John B. Green, all appear to have been tradesmen of the middling sort. Of the

[272] E. Polk Johnson, *A History of Kentucky and Kentuckians: The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry and Modern Activities* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), 1227–1228.

ten on the census, three were born in Germany, two in free states, and five in the South. Louisville would welcome professional mediums in 1854, and continue to be the site of Spiritualist activity for decades.

Farther down the Ohio River and inland in Logan County, twenty-six individuals affixed their signatures to the petition. One was a married physician from the town of Russellville, born in Virginia. The others were members of the community of Shakers in and around South Union, six men and eighteen women. Using the census and online Shaker records, we find that three of the men were brothers, born in Ohio in the 1830s. Two others were born before 1800, one in England and one in Virginia. Two of the women were born in Indiana; the others who appear on the census were from Kentucky, Virginia, North or South Carolina. One woman, Mary Mallory, was of African descent. Everyone else appears to have been Anglo-American. No residents of the other Kentucky Shaker community at Pleasant Hill signed the petition, though Lawson Runyan had left behind several family members who had experienced "gifts" when he departed in 1829, and the era of widespread manifestations and spirit communication among Shakers was just coming to a close when the petition circulated. This suggests lack of opportunity—that a petition never came into their hands—or failure to send signatures in a timely fashion rather than lack of interest in the phenomena of Spiritualism. The stories of Lawson Runyan and Abijah Alley tell us that even after leaving Shaker life, a yearning for these experiences remained a part of who they were.

The Ohio River flows into the Mississippi before we leave Kentucky. The Mississippi River was the great artery of commerce and communication for America's interior, but all the Tennessee signers actually lived inland from the river. Goods and

people headed for the northern Tennessee counties of Weakley and Henry probably came from the Northeast down the Ohio River as far as Paducah, Kentucky and then made a short trip south along the Ohio's largest tributary, the Tennessee River. The river continues south through the state, passing about ten miles from Samuel Pace's home in McNairy County before continuing into Alabama and flowing eastward across the northern part of that state. The Tennessee River was "navigable for medium-class boats as far as Muscle Shoals,"[273] which explains how Samuel Pace of Purdy, Tennessee could have been among the first southern correspondents of *The Spiritual Telegraph,* all but contemporaneous with John B. Wolff upriver in Wheeling.

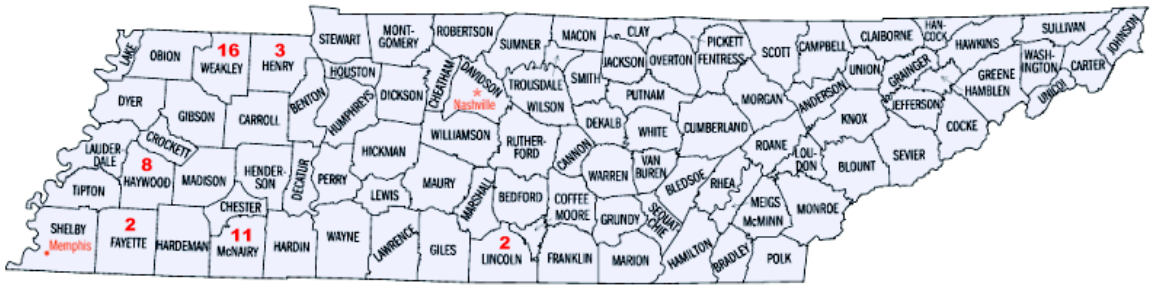

Figure 10. Distribution of 1854 Petition Signers In Tennessee.

Henry County, bordering Kentucky, would have been among the first away from the Mississippi River corridor to receive goods and information. One cluster of petition signers lived in Weakley County and adjacent Henry County, about fifty miles inland from the Mississippi. Like the signers from Westminster, Maryland this group was bound by kinship, ties of neighborhood and intermarriage. These were not townspeople, though, but farmers. They were religiously diverse within the bounds of evangelical Protestantism. None were slaveholders, but like the border-state men of Westminster

[273] *History of Woman Suffrage, 1861–1876,* Volume II, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage and Ida Husted Harper (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1887), 5.

some would support the Confederacy and others the Union. The area's original white settlers were Parhams, Killebrews and Ridgeways. Three Ridgeway brothers signed the petition, along with neighbors Nathaniel and Sarah Parham. At least one Ridgeway worshiped at the Missionary Baptist Church, and another was to be an officer in the Confederate army. Thomas J. Alexander and fellow signer Evan Maynard, Jr., would marry each other's sisters in 1855. The Killgores and Killebrews were likewise related by blood and marriage. James M. Killebrew and his sister Eliza Careline signed. She was the daughter-in-law of Elizabeth Killgore and her husband, who taught school and would be a staunch Union man; five of their sons later joined the Union army and one fought for the South. During the war, Nathan Bedford Forrest's men bushwhacked one of Elizabeth's sons in her front yard in retaliation for her husband's support of the Union. Two of Elizabeth's sons signed the petition, and three of her daughters-in law. Daughter Margaret Killgore and her husband, James M. Long, also signers, were Methodists. A young neighbor, Albert Branon, did not sign but got caught up in Spiritualism and became a follower of Nashville Church of Christ minister Jesse Babcock Ferguson.[274] Signer Anthony Sharp would move on to Texas and fight for the South. James H. D. Parrish would be remembered as "liberal in support of religious institutions," and he and his wife members of the Primitive Baptist Church. Except that they signed the petition and some were church members, we know nothing of these people's religious beliefs or engagement with the phenomena of Spiritualism. That young Albert Branon was a neighbor of men who signed the petition raises two possibilities: people in the area already knew of the activities of Jesse Babcock Ferguson, whose story we will explore in

[274] *Calendar of the Tennessee and King's Mountain Papers of the Draper Collection of Manuscripts,* Ed. Lyman Copeland Draper, Edward Earl Bennett, Ruth Hardaker, Anne King Gregorie, and Isabel Thompson (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1929), 138.

a later chapter, or Branon's interest was piqued by the petition before he learned about Ferguson.

Following the river south, we pass near the home of Samuel D. Pace of Purdy, who wrote to *The Spiritual Telegraph* claiming he had presided over the first manifestations he knew of in Tennessee at his house in 1852. Pace took the lead in circulating the petition in McNairy County. It appears he got everyone in his household to sign first. In his letters to *The Spiritual Telegraph,* Pace mentioned that people hoping to see the manifestations came to visit his family. Pace was a tailor and the first to sign; the second was James I. Neeld, also a tailor, who lived in Lincoln County and whose brother was a Methodist minister. Next were M. Almira Osborn, who was probably a widowed daughter of Pace and lived in his home with her two children; his wife; an untraceable woman from Lincoln County to the east; the Paces' daughter Viola; and their son Samuel, the medium. Next is "William F. Rose and all his family," which would have included two sons and three daughters, all mediums and all still mourning their mother's death in the autumn of 1852. The other Purdy resident to sign was James Baldridge, who would become a professor of mathematics when Purdy College opened five years later. Two of his sister's four children had died young, a three-year-old in 1849 and an eleven-year-old son in July 1853, so Baldridge too may have been hoping for contact and comfort. Pace added a note saying, "Some 15 or twenty more that are believers, but I could not see them and get names."

The third group of Tennessee signatories was along the state's southern border, west of Samuel Pace, in Fayette County and just to the north in Haywood County. Fayette County is about forty miles from Memphis. These signers were on the whole

more prosperous and more likely to be slaveholders than the folks in Weakley and Henry counties. Twenty-three-year-old bachelor John P. Smith of Fayette County owned fourteen slaves in 1850. He had been raised by a mother who was "an influential member" of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and, after serving in the Confederate army, he would marry a woman of the same faith. James M. Lane was a married man who owned five slaves in 1850. The 1860 census shows a nine-year gap between the Lanes' first child and their second, suggesting they had lost one or two or that his wife had difficulty conceiving or carrying a child to term. In the South, a woman's usefulness was gauged in large measure by the children she produced, and whatever the reasons for their atypical family pattern they may have hoped for consolation from the spirits. Thomas A. Adams of Haywood County was born at Cane Ridge in 1806, and lived in that epicenter of evangelical revival activity until he was thirty-one. His wife Elizabeth had borne several children, and they had buried a seven-year-old in 1845. The child's epitaph reads, "Rest sweet Mary, rest in the arms of Jesus where you are forever blest." Educated at home by his wife, Adams was a self-made man, a farmer, surveyor, Mason and county official who "died as he lived, trusting God."[275] Gravestones with elaborate inscriptions bespeak both prosperity and piety. Brothers Ethan H. and George W. Parrott signed the petition, as did five others from Haywood County.

Heading eastward into North Carolina we find six signers in and around Warrenton. Warren County was prospering in 1854. The Raleigh and Gaston Railroad had been in operation since 1840, linking the county to the state capital. With the coming of the railroad, the county began to grow and attract skilled tradesmen and builders. Two

[275] "George_Austin_VA Genealogical Database," http://sunbeam.rahul.net/~afaoa/cgi-bin/igmget.cgi/n=George_Austin_VA?25484 (accessed. c. 2007).

resorts catered to "the elite of the state," up to six hundred in a single season. By 1850 the county boasted twelve schools and twenty-one churches (twelve Methodist, six Baptist, two Christian, and one Episcopal). Warren County produced tobacco and corn, much of it with slave labor. Of the thirteen thousand nine hundred twelve residents on the 1850 census, 33 percent were white, 64 percent enslaved, and 3 percent free colored.[276]

The six signers from Warren County appear to have had little in common. The first, and most unexpected, is Reuben Pettiford, Jr., the fourteen-year-old son of a brickmason. His family was both black and unlettered, but free Pettifords had been living in North Carolina since before 1750. There is no telling how young Reuben came into contact with John Wesley Williams, who was learning to be a coach maker. It is reasonable to surmise, given his name, that Williams was born to Methodist parents. He may have been linked to the prolific Williams clan of Warren County, who between them owned six hundred slaves in 1850. He would marry three times, first to the daughter of noted builder Jacob W. Holt, who had recently completed Warrenton's impressive new courthouse.[277] John G. Grant was a thirty-something unmarried clerk from Morayshire, Scotland who lived in a Warrenton hotel. J. Randolph Gilleland was probably in his twenties, and appears to have moved in and out of Warren County for decades. In 1883 a J. R. Gilliland was representing Warren County in the North Carolina State Senate and married twenty-year-old Mollie Moseley. Eliza Tucker was around fifty-three when she

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[276] Manly Wade Wellman, *The County of Warren, North Carolina, 1586–1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 118, 119, 124.

[277] Paul Heinegg, *Free African Americans of North Carolina, Virginia, and the South*, *From the Colonial Period to About 1820,* Volume II, (Baltimore, Maryland: Clearfield Company, 2005; c. 1992), 932; "Warren County, NC Marriages," http://www.rootsweb.com/~ncwarren/marriages/wcmb/gr-w.htm (accessed February 25, 2010); "Holt, Jacob W. (1811–1880)," http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000039 (accessed February 25, 2010); *County of Warren, North Carolina,* 125.

put her name on the petition, the wife of a farmer with fourteen slaves; she would not live to see the 1860 census. John Wood was a carpenter in Warrenton; both he and his wife were born before 1800. How the petition passed from hand to hand among these six people we will probably never know. No trace of interest in summoning the spirits in Warren County has turned up in further research.

Two North Carolina signers were in Salem, an old Moravian community in the center of the state. G. Washington Barron had daughters named Bethania (the name of a Moravian settlement in North Carolina) and Temperance. He was a modest farmer, with Waterson neighbors who might have been his link to the other Salem signer, Sarah Waterson. She was born before 1800 in North Carolina, was living in the Single Sisters' House on the 1850 census and would die unmarried in early 1860. The Moravians were mostly of German pietist stock, and the most curious feature of their religious practice may have been casting lots to determine God's will before any important decision—choice of marriage partners, church leaders, building sites and acceptance of new members—could be made. They would write out a question for the Deity, then draw blindly from a box containing three pieces of paper: yes, no and a blank sheet. As the area around Salem prospered and outsiders moved in, church leaders eventually found they were unable to prevent the incursion of beliefs and practices from outside their faith. By 1854, this process had made deep inroads. Land had always been held communally and leased to church members, but that system was abandoned in Salem in 1856 so that non-Moravians could live there.[278]

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[278] "Obituaries from The Times, Greensboro, North Carolina, 1861," http://files.usgwarchives.net/nc/guilford/obits/times5.txt (accessed August 12, 2007); *Visiting Utopian Communities*, 27; Michael Shirley, "The Market and Community Culture in Antebellum Salem, North Carolina," *Journal of the Early Republic* 11:2 (Summer 1991), 247.

The next signature, one of two from Raleigh, may be a bit of a joke. Charles Armand Dashwood, whose family name was known to Jane Austen, was been a British peer who died in 1812. (No one claimed he was a materialized spirit.) William Johnson, by virtue of the ordinariness of his name, cannot be identified. The final North Carolinian to sign, like the first, was just fourteen years of age. Frank A. Fortner of Davidson would become a farmer and serve in the Confederate army, and like the others would leave no further evidence of interest in the paranormal.

The lone South Carolinian, William James, is impossible to identify. The 1860 census lists six, plus another six named W. James. We do know that very soon there would be "more spiritualists than anyone cared to acknowledge" in South Carolina.[279]

Down the coast in Savannah, two men signed the petition. Patrick A. Neal was born in Ireland, a fisherman living in a Savannah boarding house in 1860. John R. Davis was a mariner, born in New York and also living in a boarding house. Their intimate connection with oceangoing commerce would have afforded access to the news coming south from New York, but there is no further evidence to link these two individuals, nor an explanation why only the two of them chose to sign. Farther up the Savannah River in Richmond County, five people put their names on the petition. All were from New England. Well-to-do Augusta lumber dealer Harmon Rowley probably collected the names, and seems to be the only one who put down deep roots in Richmond County. Rowley's daughter Frances later married George Obed Lombard, probably a close

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[279] *Mind of the Master Class,* 597.

relative of signer Roswell Lombard, and named a son Roswell.[280] Jacob C. Brown was also in the lumber business, if on a smaller scale; he and his wife Lydia both signed. They settled permanently upriver in adjacent Columbia County. One signer, William Stanley, remains unidentified. Across the state in Muscogee County, which is connected to the Gulf of Mexico by the Chattahoochee River, one John Bascomb also signed.

Crossing the Chattahoochee into Alabama, we find a scattering of names on the petition, most of them poor and many illiterate. Mary A. Bartlett of Barbour County was about forty years old and could neither read nor write. L. C. Belshazer lived in the small town of Silas, where nobody owned slaves. This may actually have been one of several Deshazos in the area. Up the Chattahoochee in Calhoun County, planter Eurial Doolittle was neither poor nor illiterate. He was born in New York in 1812, and by 1840 had come south and begun a stagecoach line between Alabama and North Carolina which he operated until the coming of the railroad. He married in 1850, and by 1853 had buried at least one child. Before 1860 his wife and another of their children would be gone and Eurial would be remarried with a new baby. This wife and child too would soon depart for the spirit world. The 1870 census found him married to a niece of Texas president Mirabeau Lamar. Their first child, Robert Lee, was born in 1865. In the 1850s Doolittle had purchased a plantation in Chambers County, Alabama. By 1860 he owned sixty-one slaves. "In this," explained a Doolittle family history, "he differed from his people, but had ideas of his own and did what he considered right."[281] William Bard's was the other

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[280] Don Rhodes, *Ty Cobb: Safe at Home,* (Guilford, Conn.: Globe-Pequot Press, 2008), 40. Frances Rowley Lombard's daughter Charlie would become the wife of Ty Cobb.

[281] William Frederick Doolittle, *The Doolittle Family in America,* Part IV (Cleveland: The Salyers & Waite Printing Co., 1904), 458–459; "Descendants of Thomas Sledge," http://www.genealogy.com/users/p/o/w/Cathy-Powers-Texas/FILE/0002text.txt (accessed February 28,

signature from Chambers County. Betty Mashew signed from Dallas County, to the west; the only trace of her is an entry on the 1850 Dallas County census, listing her age as fifty and her birthplace as unknown. To the northwest, farmer Peter Smith of Talladega County claimed he was sixty-seven on the 1850 census. Neither he nor his wife Kissiah, also born before 1800 in South Carolina, could read or write. Perhaps they sensed their own mortality when they thought of spirit communication. Both were dead by 1860. Just north in Calhoun County, John Dougherty and Sarah McLane of Lick Skillet signed. She could read but not write. S. Shackelford was probably T. M. Shackelford, the only Shackelford on the 1860 census in Calhoun County (or F. M., the same individual and the only one there in 1850, this being an object lesson in the difficulty of parsing the vagaries of nineteenth-century handwriting), a farmer born in Georgia who claimed $100 in assets in 1850 and by 1860 owned five slaves. Peter M. Phillips, a farmer born in South Carolina, and one Fox Line were also signers.

If we see any pattern at all in the Deep South, it would seem to be the randomness and relative isolation of the signers. They were people who for the most part left no significant trace in the historical record, so we do not know how or if they worshipped. The puzzle is how most of them happened to encounter and sign *The Spiritual Telegraph*'s petition at all.

In Louisiana, it is easier to explain. There were many active Spiritualists in New Orleans by 1854. The majority of those who signed the petition had French surnames, Three signers were born in Germany, one in France, one in Port au Prince, another in Canada, a handful were Anglo-American and a few were Irish. Some were persons of

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2010); "Ragland, Fuller & - Bankston, Abner December 14 1840," http://news.rootsweb.com/th/read/GAMORGAN/2005-02/1108102203 (accessed February 28, 2010).

color. One of the first to sign was Numa Dufour, the French editor of *L'Abeille,* the New Orleans *Bee.* The newspaper's founder and publisher, François Delaup, was born in Port au Prince and came to New Orleans as a child in the wake of the Haitian revolution; he also signed. The *Bee*'s offices on Chartres Street included a reading room where subscribers could peruse papers from all over the United States,[282] which ensured access to the latest reporting on spirit rapping. Henry Bayon was a physician, and his sister Joséphine also signed. They were part of the household headed by their father Jerome, a physician and editor of the *Bee.* Also living there was a married sister, Marie Uranie, and her husband Arthur D'Aquin, a customhouse officer. This family had both print access and a connection to the most easily identified group of signatories, United States Customhouse employees and their family members.

Simon Narburger was a Bavarian-born customs official whose signature is the third on the petition, following Numa Dufour's. The 1851 city directory listed him as Simon Neuberger, assessor of state taxes. Twenty-year-old Patrick Neuberger, probably a son, had died in New Orleans in July 1853. He may have been one of the thousands claimed by yellow fever in New Orleans that summer, making the Neuberger family and many others prime candidates for spirit consolation. That one epidemic, reminisced pastor Theodore Clapp, destroyed "more lives than the British army lost on the field of Waterloo." Signers J. P. Raboinn, Lucien H. Desforges, Eugene Peychaud, Paul B. Bernard, N. C. Snethen, John H. Allison, L. J. Coiron and Edward Colfose were also employed by the United States Customhouse in the early 1850s. Those with French surnames were probably at least nominal Catholics. Nicholas C. Snethen's father had

[282] "Dufour, Donnet and Company," http://medianola.tulane.edu/index.php/Dufour,_Donnet_and_Company (accessed February 28, 2010).

been an influential Methodist minister and had traveled with Francis Asbury before becoming an advocate of lay representation in church government and then a founder of the Methodist Protestant Church. At his death in 1845, he declared that "while the world disappeared from his vision, heaven opened up to his view," reminding us how vividly the tropes of evangelical Christianity evoked the immediacy of entry into the spirit world. Nicholas C. Snethen and his brother Charles had both come to New Orleans to live, and in the summer of 1853 Charles had died there of typhoid fever.[283]

Among the signers who shared a surname with a customs employee who was *not* a signer were J. Gabriel Montamat, Jr., Numa Dufour, Edward H. Duplessis, Caroline Peyrat, M. Castanedo, Phillippe Charbonnet, Thomas Harper and James Gardette (who was also a member of the Magnetic Society of New Orleans). It would be interesting to know how many of the signers were members of Joseph Barthet's society, but no roster seems to have survived.[284]

The people whose names are on the petition came from a variety of backgrounds and occupations. Henry Casher and James Russ were laborers who had immigrated from Ireland. James Gardette was a dentist, the son of an eminent French dental surgeon who had settled in Philadelphia. Henry Bayon was a physician. John B. Blache and Norbert L. Vignie were auctioneers, and there is evidence that Vignie—whose father "had for many

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[283] *Cohen's New Orleans and Lafayette Directory Including Carrolton, Freeport, Algiers, Gretna and McDonough for 1850* (Printed at the Job Office of the Delta, 1849), 199–200; "List of Officers of the Customs." http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/la/orleans/history/directory/1852cust.txt (accessed August 12, 2007); Ancel Henry Bassett, *A Concise History of the Methodist Protestant Church from its Origin: Embracing the Circumstances of the SUSPENSION of the Northern and Western Conferences in 1858, the Entire Career of the Methodist Church, and the REUNION of the Two Branches in 1877, with Biographical Sketches of Several Leading Ministers of the Denomination* (Pittsburgh: Press of Charles A. Scott, 1877), 323, 324; Wesley E. Pippinger, *Daily National Intelligencer, Washington, District of Columbia, Marriage and Death Notices, 1851–1854* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2008) 176.

[284] E-mail message from Mary Lou Eichhorn, Reference Associate, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection, March 5, 2010.

years been a leading banker and commanded the entire 'respect and confidence of the wealthy portion of the community'"—conducted large slave auctions. Signer Joseph Jouben had once lived near the Vignie family on Bourbon Street. Paul Faure was a sail maker, Edouard Godchaux a notary public, François A. Bellanger a banker. M. Castanedo was probably Maria Rosa Ramis Castanedo, the oldest signer at seventy-eight. She was the widow of a Spanish colonial treasurer, head of her household on Esplanade Street in 1850 and a wealthy woman with a declared worth of $21,000.[285] Her half-brother had been Manuel Lisa, a founder of the Missouri Fur Trading Company in St. Louis.

A handful of petitioners may have been either persons of color or intimately tied to such persons. That they are sprinkled throughout the document suggests a certain fluidity in interactions. Charles Beaumont was a builder, a mulatto on the 1860 census. Celina Blache was the wife a man named Joseph Blache who was thirty years her senior, had been active in local politics, and owned property in the city. He did not sign the petition though she did, as did John B. Blache (Jean Baptiste Blache), a successful local auctioneer. In 1842 Joseph Blache was working as a tobacco inspector, but listed no occupation on the 1850 census. Celina Blache was a widow by 1860, but the census did not specify her or her children as of color until 1870. Signer Paul B. Bernard, who worked at the customhouse, is never identified as a person of color and was probably white. On the 1870 census, however, his twenty-four-year-old son is enumerated as a mulatto. This postwar hardening and clarification of the color line was part of the shift

[285] Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, 1996), 57; Ned Hémard, "I'm Not Lisa," *New Orleans Nostalgia: Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions* http://www.neworleansbar.org/NewOrleansNostalgia.html (accessed March 7, 2009).

from an antebellum triracial society of whites, *gens de couleur* and blacks to a post-liberation Louisiana where one was either white or *not.*

Many of the signers cannot be identified; New Orleans was a cosmopolitan entrepôt where thousands each year came on business or were just passing through on their way to other places. It was also subject to an annual "sickly season," and new arrivals were more susceptible to many of the tropical diseases than longstanding residents. Of those who did sign and can be traced through existing records, Americans born outside the francophone community of south Louisiana were few. James Gardette was born in Philadelphia to French parents. John Chesterfield Culbertson started life in the City of Brotherly Love around 1793, and was among the young men who came to seek their fortunes after the Louisiana Purchase and the War of 1812. He married into a Spanish family and worked as an attorney and interpreter while serving in the city government. Nicholas C. Snethen and John H. Allison worked at the Customhouse. Charles C. Crawford was an accountant. No other signers from New Orleans can be identified with certainty.

We find another small group of petitioners in northwest Louisiana, near the Sabine River in the De Soto Parish town of Mansfield. This was a region that would nurture Spiritualists for decades. First to sign was Mansfield's mayor, William Chalmers. Pennsylvania-born William Sharer was a printer, one of several men boarding with a middling planter. Andrew S. Flower, born in New York, was a lawyer. Physician James H. Mumford had come from North Carolina. The origins of James L. McCormick and Isaac Creswell are more elusive. Most interesting is George W. Meek, a brother-in-law of Tennessee Spiritualist and petition ramrod Samuel D. Pace. Pace had stayed in Purdy, but

his brothers-in-law had moved on to Texas and their sister and her husband lived just across the border in Louisiana. Their clan demonstrates the importance of shared traditions and family ties to the spread of beliefs, even over long distances and with only occasional letters as a means of communication.

The largest group of signatures from Texas is found in Jasper County, along the Neches River. Almost all of the thirty-four whose names appear on the petition were from southern families and had made their way to Texas. Many had been among the earliest American settlers. Heading the list is John Clements, the leading steamboat man and principal cotton exporter on the Neches in the 1850s. In that decade he brought six new steamboats up the Sabine, cashing in on the boom in the Neches-Sabine basin fueled by production of lumber and cotton.[286] The first settler in the area, John Randolph Bevil, had become alcalde of the municipality in 1834 under Mexican rule and in 1839 chief justice of Jasper County in the Republic of Texas. He had developed the sites for the towns of Jasper and Bevilport, which when the Angelina River was flowing well enough was an important river town until just before the Civil War. It is impossible to be sure *which* John Bevil signed the petition. There are three on the 1850 census: John, 66, born in Virginia; John, 43, born in Georgia; and John, 13, born in Texas.

Simeon Wiess was born in 1800 in Poland. He traveled extensively, was fluent in seven languages and had legal training. He had become a Royal Arch Mason in Constantinople and visited lodges in Ireland, South America and the Caribbean; the first

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[286] W. T. Block, "The Neches River Cotton Steamboats: A Romantic Interlude of Frontier Days," http://www.wtblock.com/WtblockJr/neches1.htm (accessed July 11, 2007); W. T. Block, *A History of Jefferson County, Texas*, http://www.wtblock.com/WtblockJr/History%20of%20Jefferson%20County/chapter%207.htm (accessed July 11, 2007); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Sabine River," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/SS/rns3.html (accessed March 1, 2010).

record of his presence in the United States is an 1826 visit to a lodge in Boston. Wiess remained dedicated to the craft throughout his life, and one story says he brought the papers granting a Texas lodge official status to Sam Houston, who had them in his saddlebags at San Jacinto. In 1833 Weiss moved to Galveston, then to Nacogdoches. Wiess was Jewish, but apparently never practiced his religion in Texas. In 1836 he married Margaret Sturrock, a Scots Presbyterian born in Dundee who had come to Nacogdoches with her family by way of New Orleans. Wiess transported his family and the first commercial load of cotton down the Neches, and sold the cotton in New Orleans. He settled at Wiess's Bluff, the head of low-water navigation on the Neches, in 1840, and by 1842 it had become a way point for cotton shipments moving south. Weiss speculated in east Texas land, helped fund the initial dredging of the Neches River channel, and of course was interested in railroads. There is no record of Wiess owning slaves, but he would support the Confederacy and four of his sons would enlist in the Confederate army.[287]

Besides Bevil and Wiess, there were other names on the petition associated with the early days of American settlement in Texas. James Delaney was born before 1800 in South Carolina and family lore says he came to Texas with some of his brothers in the 1830s. He was a farmer on the 1850 census, and died before 1860; two of his sons would die of disease in Confederate service. Elijah Isaacs was born in South Carolina in 1775, and had lived for several years in Mississippi before he and his wife came to Texas in

[287] W. T. Block, "From Cotton Bales to Black Gold: A History of the Pioneer Wiess Families of Southeastern Texas," http://www.wtblock.com/wtblockjr/cotton_bales_black_gold.htm (accessed July 11, 2007); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Wiess, Simon (1800–1868)," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/fwi3.html (accessed March 1, 2010); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Wiess's Bluff," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/hvw47.html (accessed March 1, 2010); W. T. Block, "A Brief History of Wiess Bluff, Texas," http://www.wtblock.com/WtblockJr/wiess_bluff.htm (accessed July 11, 2007).

1822 as part of the Austin Colony's Old 300. She had died in 1849, so he might have been thinking of her and considering his own mortality when he signed. His grant was adjacent to that of John Bevil. In 1850 Elijah Isaacs's nearest neighbor was William C. Anderson, also born in South Carolina in the previous century, who owned six slaves but was a generation younger than Isaacs. There were two Barny Lowes on the 1850 census, so we do not know with certainty which signed the petition. It was probably the elder, a comfortably fixed lumberman and one-time schooner captain who, like Elijah Isaacs and William C. Anderson, had been born in South Carolina in the previous century. The other Barny was his son, but was usually known as Barney C. to differentiate him from his father. It is not clear which of them was an incorporator of the Jasper Cotton Manufacturing Company in 1850. Barney, Junior, lived adjacent to signers Goram and Matilda May. Goram P. May was born in Vermont, one of the few Texas petitioners who was not from southern stock, but his wife Matilda was a daughter of the elder Barny Lowe. A near neighbor of the Mays was the oldest of the John Bevils. James M. John was born in Georgia in 1808, and left soon after his first wife's death. He was in Jasper County by 1834 and had enlisted in the war for Texas independence.[288]

Some of the signers were the children or grandchildren of early Texas colonizers. William Miller was born in what would become Jasper County around 1835. Luis Jourdin was a grandson of Elijah Isaacs. Arlie Moses Bevil belonged to the growing Bevil clan. Smiths and Smyths were in east Texas early, and because Smith is a common name and spelling was inconsistent it is hard to track them. One family of Smyths was so attached

[288] http://genforum.genealogy.com/cgi-bin/pageload.cgi?james,texas::delaney::138.html Delaney/Dellaney James b ca1795 SC? Posted by**:** Dave Martin, Date: November 30, 1998; "James Monroe Jean," http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~johnjean/James.htm (accessed March 1, 2010).

to their mammy that she was buried at the feet of her mistress. A daughter of this family married W. H. Smith. A William Smyth signed the petition, and just after him what may have been the only slave to do so, Sampson Smyth. Sampson Smyth was born in 1813 in Kentucky (as was the Smyth family matriarch whose beloved mammy rests for eternity at her feet) and does not appear on any census records until 1870, when he was an illiterate farm laborer. We might interpret this as an extension of agency to an old and trusted fellow believer in the spirits, or as a prank on an illiterate and superstitious field hand. Harry Smith and slave owner Thomas J. Smith also signed.

Other Jasper County petitioners had come to Texas after the revolution. Augustus Williams was born in Mississippi and part of a farming family. Next was Ephraim Harrell, a poor farmer who started life in Georgia; his wife Elins was born in Mississippi, and also signed. Their next-door neighbor L. M. Robinson had come to Texas from Tennessee. A family man, he worked as a blacksmith and was a charter member of the local Methodist congregation. James Morgan would soon marry Nancy Harrell (the lone non-signer among those under discussion, she was listed in the household of signer William King in 1850), but in 1850 he was living with Luis Jourdin's grandfather, Elijah Isaacs. Elijah's mother had been a Morgan, so young James was probably a relation. Next to sign after James Morgan was William Morgan; they were born about a year apart in North Carolina. William Morgan was living with his parents in 1850, near signer Arlie Moses Bevel. William King was born in New York at the turn of the century; his household appears to have included a blended southern-born family and four employees. King's nearest neighbor in 1850 was former Tennessean L. G. McGaughey, a farmer who had moved west to adjacent Tyler County by the time he signed. Thomas J. Smith lived

just past McGaughey on the 1850 census. Other signers had come to the area even later, all from various points in the plantation South.

Two men signed in Dallas County, which had a population of two thousand seven hundred forty-three in 1850. Both came to Dallas after that census but in time for the petition in 1854. James Burton was still in Dallas in 1860, a stage driver. Alfred P. Summers was living with his parents and attending school, but would soon be fighting for the Confederacy.

The forty-six Arkansas names all came from Union County, just above the Louisiana border. This is part of a region locals call the Arklatex, which includes De Soto Parish in Louisiana and its six signatories. All but one in the Union County group who can be identified was born in the South. Only one, James M. Killgore, reappears in the story of Spiritualism after signing the petition. Like the other Killgores who signed, James and his kinfolks were from Tennessee. Family traditions claim five Scots-Irish Kilgores, probably brothers, came to Virginia in 1763. After fruitfully multiplying for so many generations, the connections between family lines had grown murky by 1850. We can say with certainty that James M., Thomas, Harriet E. and Mary Killgore were not in Union County for the 1850 census, and that they were there in 1854. By October, James was in Washington, Arkansas. He wrote to *The Spiritual Telegraph,* complaining that the editor of the *Washington Telegraph* had "denounced Spiritualism as an insanity-gendering humbug, and directed its readers to look for its fruits to the lunatic asylums of the North." Killgore's reply, which the Washington editor rejected, was paraphrased in *The Spiritual Telegraph.* Killgore had embraced Charles Partridge's estimate that there were one million Spiritualists in America, and pointed out that thousands had "been made

unspeakably joyful and happy by it, and have, by its influence, been every way improved as to their moral and religious characters" and that "not more than forty persons are really known to have become insane from excitements growing out of its unfoldings—while hundreds and thousands have become insane under the influence of the common religion of the day."[289]

Apparently the Killgores had been made happy by whatever contact they had managed to have with the spirit world. That December, Harriet wed local Methodist minister Joseph Turrentine, not a signer, but this close tie to a practitioner of evangelical Christianity did not diminish Killgore's enthusiasm for the spirits. James M. Killgore would soon become co-owner and -editor of the *Washington Telegraph* and rename it the *South Arkansas Democrat.* Another letter to the *Spiritual Telegraph* the following summer indicated that Killgore was still actively pursuing his interest in spiritual phenomena, traveling to Ohio to visit a "spirit room" in Ross County. Jonathan Koons and his family had created something of a destination resort in Athens County, Ohio in 1852 after spirits instructed Koons to build a "spirit room" and told him that his entire family had mediumistic powers. A voice told John Q. Adams of Ross County, Ohio to build a spirit room like the Koons's, and Adams did so. Killgore had seen "another grand exhibition" at Ross's spirit room the night before he wrote. In 1857 Rev. Turrentine would preside over the marriage of James M. Killgore to Mary Helen Griffin. The 1860 Hempstead County census shows Killgore as a prospering state land agent in Washington; he and seventeen-year-old Mary Helen had a year-old son, John Henry, and

[289] "Greene County, TN Biographies: The Kilgore Family," http://www.zianet.com/jmcdgwin/kilgorecharles.htm (accessed May 29, 2006); "Mr. James M. Killgore," *Spiritual Telegraph* (October 28, 1854), 2.

owned a young mulatto girl. By 1870 James and Helen would disappear from public records, their only child living with her relatives. Harriet E. Killgore Turrentine can be presumed to have been a model Methodist minister's wife, which did not necessarily preclude an interest in the mysteries of the afterlife. When she married Joseph Turrentine, Rev. Samuel Watson was the editor of the Methodist *Memphis and Arkansas Advocate*.[290] The conference was small, so Turrentine and Watson would have had at least a passing acquaintance from church conferences. Watson was quietly investigating the mysteries of Spiritualism in Memphis by 1856, and would become after the Civil War the leading voice for Christian Spiritualists in the South. The other two Killgores who signed the petition, Mary and Thomas, are hard to trace. One Thomas Killgore lived in Union County and was an indifferent farmer.

Forty-two other names are also on the petition from Union County, Arkansas. Eight were members of slaveholding families, and all but one of these had between three and seven slaves in 1850. None would qualify as what historians categorize as a planter, owning twenty slaves or more. Several, as in other places, were neither males nor twenty-one, but no person of color was among them. Union County was established in 1829, but most who signed the petition had come in the early 1840s. They were born in South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee or Virginia, and most had moved westward and lived for a time on farms in Alabama or Mississippi before following the expanding cotton frontier to the rich bottomlands of Union County. Settlers built log cabins for their families and, if they had enough of them, for the slaves who would help clear the land and get a

[290] Fred W. Allsopp, *History of the Arkansas Press for a Hundred Years and More* (Little Rock, Ark.: Parke-Harper Publishing Company, 1922), 180; Letter, James M. Kilgore, *Spiritual Telegraph* (July 14, 1855), 2; Horace Jewell, *History of Methodism in Arkansas* (Little Rock: Press Printing Co., 1892), 369.

marketable crop in. Few people had enough slaves to spare any for house servants. Legal scholar Jason A. Gillmer's analysis of the trial of Pleasant, a middle-aged slave, for the alleged rape of a white woman in Union County makes it clear that the wealthiest whites embraced paternalism and capitalism, and the poorest were a source of annoyance and occasional vexation. Despite the questionable reputation of the accuser and the wealth and influence of Pleasant's owner, the jury returned a verdict of guilty. This was overturned on appeal, as was a second guilty verdict. Of the twelve jurors in the first trial in April 1852, James Tiffin would go on to sign the petition and Barton B. Scroggins to marry into the family of another signer.

These two men were probably representative of the men brought together as jurists by democracy. James Tiffin emerges as a respectable man willing to help a wealthy and powerful member of the community with his testimony. He and his wife Martha both signed the petition. They were married in Union County in 1846 by George W. Gill, who would also sign. Martha was a Goodwin, and like signer Gideon Goodwin's family had been born in Georgia, so they were enmeshed in a local kinship network. During Pleasant's second trial, Tiffin was one of a number of witnesses who testified about accuser Sophia Fulmer's wanton habits. Tiffin, under questioning by the lawyer Pleasant's owner had retained to protect his slave property, claimed her "general character for chastity and virtue" was bad. The lawyer asked about an encounter Tiffin had with Sophia before the rape in which she insisted he spend the night with her so that she could "tangle legs with him on a cold night," but Tiffin was not permitted to answer that question. Despite all this, Pleasant was again found guilty and the verdict was again overturned on appeal. A fire destroyed any remaining records, so we do not know if that

was the end of the matter.[291] Juror Barton Scroggins did not sign the petition, but is linked to our story.

The first to sign the petition in Union County was Mary Falkner. The only Mary Falkner on the 1850 census was thirteen years old. Her father had died in early March 1851, leaving her mother Emily a comfortable inheritance that the widow would more than quadruple to over $21,000 by the time she married schoolteacher Barton Scroggins in 1860. Emily Falkner must have been a strong woman. Within weeks of her husband's death, daughter Mary would die, then son Matthew just short of his twenty-first birthday in July. Curiously, there does not seem to be another Mary Falkner in the area in the 1850s. Mary's mother, two brothers, and two younger sisters remained to mourn. Perhaps one of them was remembering Mary and wrote her name on the petition; no other family members signed. Their neighbor Gideon P. Goodwin was about Mary's age. On the 1850 census Gideon's mother was a widow whose youngest child was six years old, so this family too was dealing with a significant and fairly recent loss. Gideon actually signed twice, the second time just before Matilda Goodwin. She was probably a sister-in-law who by 1850 had been a married seventeen-year-old mother, and at twenty-two when she signed may have recently buried the infant Matilda who was in their household in 1850. Lemuel Darden was probably sixteen when he added his signature. Some in this age range who signed did so with older relatives. Thomas and Harriet Killgore were around nineteen. George J. Carmell was about fifteen when he signed. His parents, David and Catherine, did too. Ira Hill had a wife and four young children in 1850, and farmed with three slaves. His brother John lived next door with his wife and five children. John W.

[291] Jason A. Gillmer, "Poor Whites, Benevolent Masters, and the Ideologies of Slavery: A Slave Accused of Rape in the Antebellum South," *North Carolina Law Review* 85 (2007), 568.

Hill was a ginwright, building and repairing the cotton gins that removed the seeds from cotton bolls before cotton could be baled and shipped to market. Only two Hills were signers, Ira and his brother's oldest child, Emily. Thomas P. Jones was a clerk, in his twenties. The next to affix his name was Jones's neighbor, Circuit Clerk Thomas T. Sheppard. Edward Gibson was also a clerk, and lived not far from James T. Sheppard, Thomas Sheppard's son.

Only a handful of other signers were slaveholders. H. Quarles, a neighbor of the Hill families, was farming with seven slaves in 1850. John Junious James, a judge's son, owned five. Next to sign was James T. Sheppard, who had married in 1848. His wife was dead and it is not clear if their young daughter died by 1854 or in the next few years. His father, Thomas Sheppard, with five slaves, also put his name on the petition. Walker Aills had been born Kentucky in the previous century, moved to Mississippi and then Louisiana with his brother, and then come to Arkansas. He had seven slaves.

The oldest signer was Henry Woodward, born in Virginia about 1793, and his family was the only one involved in plantation-scale agriculture. Woodward was in decline; on the 1850 census his thirty-one-year-old son Benjamin headed the household and owned forty slaves, and Henry—a namesake of the signer—at eighteen was overseer. No longer the family patriarch and far from the home of his childhood, Henry Woodward might have been thinking of the imminence of his own encounter with the mysteries of the afterlife. He was the only Woodward signer.

Of the men from slaveholding families in Union County, only Gideon P. Goodwin and Walker Aills's son Martin Luther would be among the estimated fifteen hundred to fight for the Confederacy. The mass exodus of able-bodied white men left the women,

children, and blacks to face the shortages and hunger caused by the Union blockade of goods bound for the South. John Junious James appears in the records of both the Third Arkansas Union Cavalry and the Confederate Home Guard in upstate Craighead County. By 1860 he was living in Louisiana, and his service reflects the region's disruption and perhaps a willingness to adapt to whatever regime held sway over the lives of his family at any given time as they faced the dangers and want common to refugees during the war. The daughter of a Confederate officer from Union County remembered the war years as a time of "sorrow, suffering, privation, and death."[292]

Several nonslaveholders would serve in the Confederate army or home guards, though it is not clear whether Walker Jackson, James T. Tiffin, Lemuel Darden, Andrew J. Brumbelow, Charles Cole and Willis Candle did so as volunteers or conscripts. The only signer in 1854 who was not from the slave states was George W. Gill, but coming from Cairo, Illinois was almost like being from the South. He had married a woman from Tennessee and their son Thomas, born in Arkansas around 1837, fought with the Ninth Arkansas Infantry.

Moving back to the Mississippi River, we find seventeen signatures from Vicksburg. They do not represent the cream of Vicksburg social and educational attainment. Two, William B. Minor and his son John Minor, were wealthy planters. William B. Minor was probably the nephew of Stephen Minor, the last Spanish governor of Mississippi, a son of Stephen Minor's brother John. In this historically important and well researched family, there is scant genealogical interest in William's branch. Natchez

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[292] *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders,* ed. Anne J. Bailey and Daniel E. Sutherland (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 120; Michael B. Dougan, *Confederate Women of Arkansas in the Civil War* (Fayetteville, Ark.: m & m Press, 1993), 57.

diarist William Johnson listed W. B. Minor among the gentry. In 1850 Minor lived near Vicksburg, claiming a net worth of $30,000. His son John lived in the same household, but by the 1860 was a farmer in Natchez with a declared worth of $125,000. An 1846 news item reported that W. B. Minor, who was involved in a title dispute over Pawpaw Island twelve miles above Vicksburg, shot and killed Colonel Wilkinson, living on the island, and wounded Wilkinson's son so severely he was not expected to live. In 1852 one John Minor of Vicksburg was stabbed and instantly killed on the island, but it is not clear how he fits into the family. By 1854, when he signed the petition, W. B. Minor was advertising "Minor's Magical Fever Cure," a "purely vegetable" compound "for permanent Cure of Ague, or Chills and Fever, Intermittent and Remittent Fever, Malignant Fevers, of High and Low Grades, as Inflammatory, Brain, Ship, Typhus, Congestive, and Typhoid Pneumonia. Without the Use of Quinine" in *Affleck's Southern Rural Almanac, and Plantation and Garden Calendar.* The other signers who were men of some substance were William Arnold and his son, William, Junior, who later that year moved to Bolivar County and with the help of their neighbors established the first Baptist church in the county in 1856.[293] William Washington Arnold, Senior, was born in Mississippi in 1813 and lived there all his life. When he died in 1862 his children erected a monument inscribed, "He bore the cross on earth To wear the crown in Heaven." The Arnolds spoke the language of Baptist orthodoxy, not the sort of people one would expect to take an interest in spirit communion, yet their names are there on the petition.

[293] *Diary of William Johnson*, 210; "Arnold Cemetery," http://files.usgwarchives.net/ms/bolivar/cemeteries/concordi.txt (accessed May 17, 2006); Z. T. Leavell and T. J. Bailey, *A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists, From the Earliest Times,* Volume II (Jackson, Miss.: Mississippi Baptist Publishing Co., 1904), 972.

The other signers in Vicksburg were from the working classes, leaving us to wonder how the petition passed to them from members of higher social standing. M. C. Tanner worked at the steam sawmill. Russell Vial was a sawyer in 1850, apparently a widower, with two young sons who disappeared before the 1860 census. Thomas Hanfey was probably a raftsman. Henry and Peter Gwinner were saddle tree manufacturers, born in Bavaria. James M. Lowder and his wife Martha both signed; he was a laborer and neither could read or write. E. Berry was Elizabeth Berry, born in South Carolina about 1781. She lived with a white male under the age of five in 1830, and alone in 1840 and 1850. M. A. Clark may have been Mary Ann, wife of farmer David Clark. A. C., John, Alfred and Kate Curtis may have been transients; they left no trace in the records.

The largest concentration of signatures in the South was the one hundred ten at St. Louis. Four we have previously discussed: Henry Stagg, who was disfellowshiped by the Baptists in 1853, and his supporter Charles Levy; Willis L. Williams, who magnetized a young woman at a social gathering in the 1840s and offered fellow politicians the opportunity to kiss her but within months was saving souls at a revival; and Isaac Hedges, credited with holding the first circles in St. Louis in 1852 after having seen spiritual manifestations in New York. Like New Orleans, St. Louis had many settled residents but was also a break point in travel and commerce, so many who signed might have been transients. We can identify fewer than half of the signers in the census and other records. Of these, eighteen were not native born: seven came from various parts of Germany, four from England, three from Ireland, two from Switzerland and one each from Italy and Scotland. Nineteen who signed were born in free states, and eleven in slave states. Three

signers owned a single slave apiece, and William C. Anderson had two. Virginian George Pegram owned three flour mills and a young woman with two infants. Pioneer fur trader Kenneth MacKenzie, dubbed "King of the Missouri" when he dominated the trade of the upper Missouri River but more recently engaged in importing liquors, owned four men of laboring age. Willis L. Williams owned three adults and four children, and watchmaker Joseph Papin three adults and three children. Emanuel Block, a dealer in wines and liquors, owned forty-six slaves. These were men of means and influence. Other prominent signers chose not hold slave property. Charles D. Colman and his wife had recently come from New York, where he had been a leading attorney. Former Baptist Henry Stagg brokered insurance, iron and investments. Daniel B. Hunt, originally from New York, had been a river pilot in 1845 and by the 1860 census would list his occupation as "Money Broker" and his net worth at almost $40,000. Merchant Anthony Miltenberger and his family would by the 1860 census be managing with three hired servants and a live-in seamstress.

Those signers who were not among the city's most wealthy were spread among diverse occupations. Most common was clerk; five were clerking and two were bookkeepers. Of the five physicians, we can say with certainty that two were homeopaths. Four carpenters signed the petition. One signer was a pawnbroker and poet, and his words remind us how pervasively the language of phrenology had been absorbed into common parlance, if only as a metaphorical device. When John Simmons Freligh collected his poetry for publication in 1852 as a gift to his wife and son, he reminisced about his early literary ambitions: "I next aspired to write for the Magazines, and appeared in Graham's, the Lady's Book, New York Knickerbocker, and others, till the

rapid development of the bump of Acquisitiveness left but little room for Ideality, and I ceased to write—for who ever heard of a 'Money Lender' writing Poetry ! ! !" In a New Year's reflection, Freligh gave voice to the idealization of the domestic circle and the yearning for assurance that they would spend eternity together:

> Though our little band unbroken,
> Cannot long on earth remain,
> May we all be re-united
> In one bright eternal chain.

Freligh, as it turns out, had been an early devotee of Andrew Jackson Davis and a reader of *The Univercoelum* by 1848. He would have read of the "Strange Manifestations" that had begun in Hydesville and were occurring in Rochester, "said to consist of certain noises as if made by the rapping of knuckles upon the floor or table—the agency by which they are caused being *entirely invisible!*" *The Univercoelum* had also reported that the noises "purport to be made by departed spirits in answer to questions that are propounded to them." Freligh, originally from upstate New York, had married in St. Louis and become a father by 1840 but, being a man of literary inclinations, probably maintained an active correspondence with old friends and family. However he came to be reading A. J. Davis and *The Univercoelum,* he had written to Davis by 1849 asking for an explanation of the immortality of the soul. In a second letter, he thanked Davis for his reply, "which appeared in a late number of the Univercoelum" and had given him "great consolation." Freligh wrote more than once before Davis got around to addressing his further questions, this time about whether all "the matter of earth will be converted to spirit" and "what and where is the final home, resting place, or destination of the soul?" In a lengthy response, Davis speculated on the nature of spirit and various topics, finally getting to the point: "After the individual souls leave this planet (and all planets in

universal space which yield such organizations of matter)," they ascend to "the *Second* Sphere of existence. Here *all* individuals undergo an angelic discipline, by which every physical and spiritual deformity is removed, and symmetry reigns throughout the immeasurable empire of holy beings." Davis said with assurance that "When all spirits shall have progressed to the Second Sphere, the various earths and planets in the Universe, which once swarmed with life and animations, will be depopulated and not a living thing will move upon their surfaces."[294] Davis was taking exception to millennialist interpretations of apocalyptic unpleasantness at the end of times, and to the stance taken by most Christian ministers that only the souls of those who professed belief in Jesus Christ would leave the planet "alive." By the time he signed the petition in 1854, Freligh had been considering these ideas and undoubtedly following the news of spirit manifestations for five years. He might well have availed himself of the opportunity to witness spiritual phenomena for himself when Maggie and Catherine Fox came to St. Louis in early 1852.

A signer who had definitely met the Foxes in 1852 was daguerrean Thomas Easterly, for whom the girls sat during their visit. Some petitioners were mourning young children, who died with terrible frequency in the nineteenth century. George Pegram and his wife had buried two infant sons, one in 1845 and one in 1852. James Saulter had lost two-year-old Edward to brain fever in 1853. Charles Rumford's five-year-old daughter Mary Ellen had died of whooping cough in the summer of 1852, and Andrew J. Whitley's daughter of congestion of the brain. Disease also stalked those in the prime of

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[294] J. S. Freligh, *Poems* (Saint Louis: Printed by Charles & Hammond, Book and Job Printers, 1852), 5; "Lines, Accompanying a New Year's Gift to my Wife," *Poems,* 126; "Strange Manifestations," *The Univercoelum and Spiritual Philosopher* (February 3, 1849), 155; "Concerning the Spirit's Destiny," *The Univercoelum and Spiritual Philosopher* (March 31, 1849), 281–283.

life. Henry Spence's son and Peyton Spence's brother, twenty-two-year-old Mark, was a cholera victim in the autumn of 1852. William Vanhorn's daughter Elizabeth succumbed to consumption in 1853. Some signers still thought of lost loved ones who had died less recently. Daguerrean John J. Outley had lost his young wife Mary in 1847 and his fascination with the mysteries beyond the veil never subsided; twenty years later medium Maud Lord Drake would hold cabinet séances at his gallery.[295] Antoine de Rehl McNair had buried two wives and perhaps four children by 1854. John T. Temple had lost his wife, the mother of his children; he remarried in 1852. Isaac Hedges's wife was a victim of an 1849 St. Louis cholera epidemic.

Information about the religious inclinations of the St. Louis petitioners is frustratingly scarce. John T. Temple and his family were pious Baptists while they lived in Chicago, with Temple taking the lead in securing a minister in 1833 and building a meeting house, then helping to organize a Chicago branch of the American Bible Society in 1835.[296] His wife Elizabeth's was the first recorded baptism in Lake Michigan. Isaac Hedges was also a devoted member of the Baptist Church until he was ejected for his Spiritualist inclinations. Andrew Whitley's son rests in Wesleyan Cemetery, so we can suppose that the family was Methodist. Emanuel Block was of Jewish ancestry.

We know more about the Spiritualist beliefs and later activities of some of the signers. Lucas and Amanda Britt had already begun traveling by the time the petition got to Congress. She would have a long career as a professional medium, and would by 1859

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[295] "Missouri Digital Heritage: Missouri Birth and Death Records Database, Pre-1910," http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/birthdeath/; Mrs. Maud Lord Drake, *Psychic Light: The Continuity of Law and Life* (Kansas City, Mo.: The Frank R. Riley Pub. Co., 1904), 136–138.

[296] "Temple, John Taylor, M.D. (1804–1877)," *Early Chicago Encyclopedia,* http://www.earlychicago.com/encyclopedia.php?letter=t&sel=temple#e2583 (accessed August 8, 2009).

divorce her husband and marry signer Peyton Spence; they all eventually would settle in New York City, and go into business together. Nathaniel and Frances Hyer moved downriver to New Orleans. Mrs. Hyer was one of the first St. Louis residents to develop as a medium after the Fox sisters' visit, and the couple remained attached to the occult for the rest of their lives. Charles Levy discovered his own mediumistic powers around the same time. Anthony Miltenberger, though never a medium himself, was "foremost amongst the earliest inquirers into the phenomena" and a driving force in the organization of Spiritualists in St. Louis.[297] We will be seeing some of these people again as our story unfolds.

Before we leave St. Louis, there are two probable signers of color to consider. One, Henry Mitchell, was listed in the 1860 city directory as "(col'd.), musician" though he does not seem to be enumerated in the census. John Boss was one of two elderly black Kentucky-born servants in the 1860 household of wealthy lawyer Edward Carrington Cabell, who was born in Virginia. The Cabells, who moved to St. Louis in 1859, also had two live-in Irish domestics. Boss signed just after Henry Spence, so perhaps he was in Spence's employ in 1854.

Outside St. Louis, there were two groups of signatures from the western part of the state. Buchanan County's principal town is St. Joseph on the Missouri River, which in the 1840s and 1850s was the jumping-off point for people headed west on the Oregon Trail. The California gold rush in 1848 created a surge in westward migration. Of the names we can trace, three came from slave and three from free states, with one born on the Isle of Man. Signer Aquilla J. Morrow had brought his family from Kentucky to St.

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[297] *Modern American Spiritualism,* 355.

Joseph in the 1840s and started a plow factory. Most of the others were farming. There were nine hundred two slaves in the county in 1850, but only one of the petitioners was a slaveholder. He, though, was zealous. John Henry Whitehead had married a cousin in Virginia in 1825 and was in Buchanan County by 1840. On the 1850 census he owned two slaves, and advertised a $500 reward in 1854 for runaway Sam. His son and one of the Choteaus of St. Louis were partners, licensed traders with Indians. After signing the petition, John H. Whitehead would go with his brother and son to Kansas as pro-slavery squatters.[298] To date no information about their church affiliations has been found.

Pettis County and Johnson County are adjacent and landlocked. Those signers who appear in census listings were all born in slave states. Five members of the Brown family put their names on the petition, the only slaveowners to do so. As with other groups for whom we have only the information in the census, we know nothing about their religious lives.

In the end, this group of several hundred people leaves more questions unanswered than we would wish. What it tells us is how far into the South *The Spiritual Telegraph* and its message had reached by 1854, and how diverse were the individuals in the South who did not doubt the reality of the phenomena many attributed to the agency of spirits and were willing to sign the petition asking for government oversight of a project to investigate and determine a cause. As a side note, it points to a more casual definition of citizenship among petitioners than the criteria that determined the right to

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[298]Barbara Brackman, "Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History #8, Week of February 15–21, 1854 (2004)," *Kansas Territorial Sesquicentennial Commission,* http://www.kshs.org/sesquicentennial/series_2004february.htm (accessed August 8, 2009); *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, Etc.,* Volume I, ed. Frank W. Blackmar (Chicago: Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 530.

vote. Age, gender, race and perhaps even slave status were not barriers to signing the petition.

More to the point, the petition offers a rare opportunity to recover fragments of the stories of hundreds of people whose lives would otherwise been forgotten and give them a place in the history of religious thought in the American South. The very nature of the document and its signers, however, makes efforts at recovering individuals' beliefs difficult. Some are found in records of church membership or temperance and lodge activity, but most are not. Like the country as a whole, they were almost all at least culturally Protestant (outside New Orleans) and demonstrate significant immigration and internal migration. They also personalize what from a twenty-first-century perspective was a time of stunning morbidity and mortality. Many of them cannot even be found in the census, an indication of the restlessness and mobility of the era.

That the *Spiritual Telegraph* and serious discussion of Spiritualism and the associated phenomena reached into so many locations and lives at all levels of southern society could not have been documented before John Buescher found the petition in the National Archives. It is now demonstrable that Spiritualism was very much a topic of conversation to all sorts of people all over the South in 1854. Most signatories lived on or near a waterway, which improved their access to newspapers and word-of-mouth information. Most seem to have signed as the petition passed through families, neighborhoods and groups with shared professional or other interests. In densely urban St. Louis and New Orleans, organized Spiritualists easily gathered scores of signatures. Many places we know had *Spiritual Telegraph* and subscribers are not represented, and in other locations such as Vicksburg the people who signed did not include individuals

linked to Spiritualism through other documentation. The seeming randomness of the places and signatures represented on the 1854 petition suggests there were thousands of others in the South who shared the convictions of those who did sign.

The Christian Spiritualist (1854–1857)

I met with several kinds of associations in America of which I confess I had no previous notion; and I have often admired the extreme skill with which the inhabitants of the United States succeed in proposing a common object for the exertions of a great many men and in inducing them voluntarily to pursue it. –Alexis de Tocqueville

Soon after the petition's ignoble reception on the floor of the Senate, an angry and indignant Nathaniel P. Tallmadge and some of his fellow travelers launched another Spiritualist project. Centering their energies in New York City, they founded the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge and under its auspices yet another Spiritualist newspaper, the *Christian Spiritualist.* The Society's agenda was ambitious. They had rented a large space at 553 Broadway and were "fitting it up" to become a central location where "all honest enquirers after Spiritual knowledge" were invited to come "from all parts of the country, and the world at large" to try the spirits. "It is the intention of this Society to have, at all convenient hours, test and other Mediums, in attendance at their rooms, whose lives and conduct will be in accordance with the principles of the Society, and who will in no case exact or receive pay from Visitors or Enquirers."[299]

From the start of their public mediumship, the Fox sisters had faced charges of legerdemain and had submitted to examinations by physicians and scientists whose working hypothesis was that the raps were produced by manipulating the toe or leg joints.

[299] "To Spiritualists and Enquirers after Truth," *Christian Spiritualist* (May 13, 1854), 2.

Nothing conclusive came of these investigations; skeptics pronounced themselves convinced that the girls' diminished ability to summon rappings when their feet were firmly held was proof they were frauds, while supporters argued that the spirits were repelled by the hostile atmosphere the scientists created. Kate and Maggie Fox were synonymous with mediumship to the American public, but the enormous demand for the services of mediums by the early 1850s had created new employment opportunities for "mesmerists, magicians, and fortune-tellers" as well as those who believed themselves to truly commune with the other side, creating what historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom described as "a whole new era in American roadshow entertainment."[300] Newspapers regularly and with relish printed revelations of mediumistic fraud, dark rumors of spirit-induced insanity and dire clerical warnings about the dangers of undertaking forbidden converse with the other side.

To place Spiritualist activity above commercial interests and in the hands of men of the highest order of intellect and respectability was apparently the aim of the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge. The petition and its effort to enlist a broad base of support had met with ridicule, but by 1854 there were many reputable men of science, commerce and the law who were believers. The Society's carefully chosen membership included many of these eminent men and pointedly left out others. Thus from its inception the Society rankled the excluded who, having "borne the heat and burden of the day in the early pioneer work" resented this snub by those who had "come into the vineyard at comparatively the eleventh hour." Apparently among the slighted were Samuel B. Brittan and Charles Partridge of the *Spiritual Telegraph,* Andrew Jackson

[300] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 488–489.

Davis, Thomas Lake Harris and others who saw themselves as deserving recognition as leaders of the Spiritualist movement and the courtesy of inclusion. The Society's message, though embracing belief in spirit communication, adhered to the petition's stance that whatever was happening ought to be carefully, scientifically investigated. By creating a venue for mediumship free from the taint of commerce, and a membership without such public relations baggage as Harris's failed Mountain Cove adventure or Davis's circumvention of Jesus Christ in accessing the "superior condition" (not to mention Davis's more recent association with what would continue to be the most troublesome flashpoint for those who posited the purifying influence of Spiritualism: free love). Calling their paper the *Christian Spiritualist* was a clever gambit, and they did use comfortingly evocative language in discussing "the privilege of open communication with the Spirits of just men made perfect" and "the pure teachings of Jesus Christ," but notably absent was any acknowledgement of Christ as either the savior of mankind or the requisite intercessor between man and God. The Society, seemingly intent on not alienating potential evangelical converts, claimed to have "caught the fire" of the "divine rapture" of the spirits who guided them, and, wrapping themselves in the millennialist mantle of a new dispensation, to be "devoted in soul, body, and property to the cause of spreading the glorious light of the 'Kingdom of Heaven now at hand upon the earth.'" Yet even at the outset they made statements that had to trouble the orthodox, as when they quoted a spirit who averred that "'Jesus Christ is the True Vine.' Other mediums are the branches." *Other* mediums? Vowing to "endeavor to separate from true Spiritual guidance" what they deemed "false and frivolous manifestations," the Society hired Kate Fox "at a liberal salary" to lend her most credible mediumistic name to the enterprise by

holding séances "at which the public were admitted free each morning from ten to one."[301]

Rubber goods manufacturer Horace H. Day of New York opened his deep pockets to underwrite the rent, the *Christian Spiritualist* and the salaries of the Society's employees. Nathaniel Tallmadge was the organization's president. In his open letter accepting that office, Tallmadge challenged "ye men of America" to "come forth and meet us in the fight, expose our errors, draw the shroud away, and enable the world to see us as we are." Tallmadge clearly did not doubt the outcome of honest investigation by earnest men. "We profess to know that angels from Heaven—that the spirits of good men, progressing toward perfection—have come here upon the earth we stand on, and talked with us, face to face, and uttered words to us bearing the impress of their divine origin. We sincerely believe this."[302] Adding their names to the enterprise were a number of notables, including some from the South. Among the thirteen vice-presidents, we find Judge Wiley P. Fowler of Kentucky and a North Carolinian, Major George W. Rains of the United States Army.

Fowler seemed surprised by the honor of "being associated with so many names, alike distinguished and honorable" in his letter accepting the position, and admitted that though he was not driven from investigating by "the fear of the ridicule and contempt of

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[301] *Modern American Spiritualism,* 134; "The Ends and Aims of 'The Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge'," *Christian Spiritualist* (May 13, 1854), 2.

[302] A *New York Times* obituary noted that Day had spent half a million dollars in litigation brought by Goodyear for patent infringement, and lost the legal battle. The piece reported that Day had been married "to a lady by whom he had children. Several years ago, however, he was divorced from her. He then married a lady under whose guidance he became a firm believer in the doctrine of Spiritualism." "Obituary. Horace H. Day," *New York Times* (August 27, 1878), 4; J. W. Daniels, *Spiritualism versus Christianity; or, Spiritualism Thoroughly Exposed* (New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1856), v.

the ignorant and uninformed," neither had he ever "sought to be conspicuous as a believer in Spiritual Philosophy." He reiterated the assertion of the Society that honest Spiritualists were willing to accept proof, if any could offer it, that their beliefs were founded in error. "Until this is done, it cannot be against the suggestions of sound philosophy, or the dictates of common sense, to yield to the concurring evidences of three of our senses, and other facts sustained by undeniable proof." Born in 1799 in Tennessee, Fowler had come with his family to Kentucky as a child. He was one of five brothers, all of whom became early residents of Texas. Wiley Fowler and his brother John were there by 1817 to join a group of relatives on the Red River. Wiley Fowler soon returned to Kentucky, but John remained in Texas and served as a senator in the Congress of the Republic of Texas. Littleton Fowler achieved distinction as a Methodist missionary in Texas and was elected Chaplain of the Texas Senate; he died in 1846. Brother Bradford participated in the Texas Revolution and later died in the California gold fields, and Andrew Fowler was a civic-minded citizen of both the Republic and the state of Texas. No information has surfaced linking the Fowler brothers in Texas to Spiritualism, but they lived among believers. When Wiley P. Fowler became a part of the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge he was one of he most respected legal minds in Kentucky, "a man of commanding presence and courtly manners," almost six feet tall, of fine form, "straight as an Indian, with dark penetrating eyes, and a face and head indicative of a strong character and high order of intellect." He had buried a first wife and a five-year-old daughter by 1847. Although he owned twenty-four slaves in 1850, Fowler would elect to support the Union while three of his sons served in the Confederate

army.[303] Fowler maintained his commitment to Christian Spiritualism for the rest of his life.

George Washington Rains was a native of New Bern, North Carolina, and like his older brother Gabriel James Rains was a graduate of the United States Military Academy. While stationed at Governor's Island, George W. Rains had been one of a group of men in New York City who had "carefully, honestly, and scientifically investigated the rappings and all phenomena connected therewith" over a period of about two years. The group included publisher Charles Partridge and the man who was probably the most eminent and influential convert to the cause, Judge John W. Edmonds. Leah Fox Fish Underhill described an 1853 experiment in which Rains had constructed an elaborate platform with chains and pulleys on which the medium was suspended as the others in the room stood on magnets. Major Rains, "an educated chemist and fine electrician," had brought his "electrometer, and made every experiment that their ingenuity could invent or suggest." The physicians present placed stethoscopes "on different parts of my person" and declared that the rapping had "nothing whatsoever" to do with the body of the medium. Major Rains and his brother would serve as Confederate generals, known both as Spiritualists and as the "bomb brothers" for their effective and innovative teamwork in manufacturing gunpowder and mining southern waters.[304]

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[303] *Christian Spiritualist* (July 15, 1854), 2; Dora Fowler Arthur, "Jottings from the Old Journal of Littleton Fowler. With Biographical Introduction," *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 2:1 (July 1898), 73–84; Glenn Dora Fowler Arthur, *Annals of the Fowler Family, with Branches in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, California, and Texas* (Austin, Tex.: 1901), 85–86.

[304] A. Leah Underhill, *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism* (New York: Thomas R. Knox & Co., 1855), 313; Stephen F. Miller, *Recollections of Newbern Fifty Years Ago with An Appendix Including Letters from Judges Gaston, Donnell, Manly and Governor Swain* (Raleigh, N.C.: S. D. Pool, 1874), 29–30.

Listed among the Society's Board of Advisors were petition signers A. Miltenberger and P. E. Bland of St. Louis, and Cranston Laurie of Washington. There was a fourth name from the South we have not yet encountered, J. Tanner of Baltimore. John Tanner had become a homeopathic physician after a homeopath had cured him when "the allopaths had given him up." He studied in Leipzig, had begun to practice medicine in Baltimore by 1845, and opened the first homeopathic pharmacy there in 1850.[305] The Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge made an effort to include men from the South as it organized, realizing no doubt that representatives of the cause outside New York City would be vital to its success. There were local societies in many cities by then, but the Society was the first attempt at a national organization of Spiritualists.

Emma Hardinge was later given space at Society headquarters by Horace Day to help meet the demand for free sittings. While admitting that the Society soon fell apart and was only held together for a few years by a devoted few and the generous support of Horace Day, Hardinge maintained that its office "formed a nucleus where friends and strangers could assemble together, interchange ideas and greetings, read the papers, buy or borrow all the spiritual literature of the day," and of course attend circles. The *Christian Spiritualist*, she explained, had a limited subscriber base but its "very large gratuitous circulation" had enabled it "to become a missionary for a wide-spread field of usefulness" for the three years of its existence. Early items in the paper enthused about

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[305] "Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge," http://www.spirithistory.com/54dffsn.html (accessed c. 2004); William Harvey King, *History of Homeopathy and Its Institutions in America,* http://www.homeoint.org/history/king/1-11.htm (accessed April 6, 2007); *Baltimore Wholesale Business Directory and Business Circular for the Year 1845,* http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000528/html/am528--18.html (accessed April 6, 2007).

the “Wonderful Spiritual Manifestations in Ohio” at Koons’s spirit room, and reported on the successes of one Mr. Pierce and his mediumship in “Baltimore, Cincinnati, St. Louis, New-Orleans, &c.” Pierce described the “benefits which he had witnessed arising from Spiritual influence; the blind had been made to see, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the lame to walk, and many who had never believed that there was a God, had been brought out of their unbelief.” The truth would make men free. “Spirits,” Pierce had claimed, “were hovering around and above us, to assist in accomplishing this great work; even now he could see them, laden with flowers, asking earth’s inhabitants to receive them; and when they were repulsed, they turned away with saddened hearts and downcast eyes.” Thomas Lake Harris wrote at length from New Orleans about visits from professional mediums including Pierce and petitioner Amanda Britt of St. Louis, and the home mediumship in Charles Ferguson’s family that had begun in August 1853. Harris included a transcription of a lengthy message by the spirit of a missionary to China through one of Ferguson’s daughters, which ended with the spirit “Trusting that the cause which you and all of us are engaged in, is to result in the redemption of mankind from error and the final establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.” Taking a more decidedly millennialist turn of phrase, the Society announced its intention to send forth emissaries “in the name of the Society, to proclaim the near approach of the kingdom of the Heavens” with “‘the good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, peace on earth and good will toward men.’ They will go, also, to aid in establishing correlative societies for the promotion of this great, this glorious cause.” The paper requested readers to forward the “names and residences of Spiritualists and mediums, and, as far as practicable, the development and condition of mediums” and it printed news of the

movements of professional mediums. There was also a note of appreciation for Thomas Lake Harris from Dr. W. F. Allen and Charles Ferguson on behalf of the New Orleans Harmonialist Spiritualists, and the text of a lengthy discourse Harris had delivered to them under spirit influence.[306]

By June, the *Christian Spiritualist* was reporting on the activities of Mrs. French of Pittsburgh, who had been in Washington City. "As a healing medium, Mrs. F. has been very successful; the medicines prepared through her, by direction of Spirits, has in almost innumerable instances proved entirely efficacious." An advertisement for her "Nerve Soothing Vital Fluids Prepared Entirely Through Spirit Direction" and her services in clairvoyant examination and prescription ("when the parties are present, $5; if absent, $10. No charge when parties have not the means to pay") appeared on the same page.[307] Healing would continue to be an important part of the work of many Spiritualist mediums, with the spirits—in common with the homeopaths and Thomsonians—more likely to do no harm than the allopathic physicians with their heroic bloodletting, salivating and purging.

The following week a letter from St. Louis noted that the cause was prospering and it was thought there were ten thousand believers there. In the absence of Mrs. Britt, the spirits had occasionally delivered their lectures through petitioner Frances Hyer, who had just departed to visit the Society in New York. A June report on activities in Baltimore pronounced the cause progressing and mentioned healing medium W. M.

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[306] *Modern American Spiritualism,* 140, 134; *Christian Spiritualist* (May 13, 1854), 3. Harris also had sent descriptions of the events at Ferguson's home to the *Spiritual Telegraph; Christian Spiritualist* (May 13, 1854), 4.

[307] "Movements of Mediums," and "Wonderful Discovery: Nerve-Soothing Vital Fluids, Prepared Entirely Through Spirit-Direction, Through Mrs. E. J. Frence, Medium, Pittsburgh, Pa.," *Christian Spiritualist* (June 3, 1854), 3.

Laning.[308] Laning, an artist who made his living as a sign painter, would continue to be actively involved in the cause and a correspondent of the *Spiritual Telegraph.*

In July, the *Christian Spiritualist* ran a letter written to Nathaniel Tallmadge by Thomas Neibert of Natchez. Neibert reported spirits had instructed by rapping that he was to put fifty pieces of paper in a locked cupboard and that in "less than half an hour there was a communication of at least ten lines on each piece, and each communication perfectly characteristic of the individual professing to communicate." A spirit "professing to be Samson of old" had broken a table into small pieces when "not one person was near it." Young Neibert declared that "The whole company, (some ten or fifteen, all skeptics except myself), were perfectly convinced." A question was posed for Dr. John Bovee Dods—who theorized two brains, one "lower and hidden from the ordinary mind" as an explanation for Spiritualist phenomena—and Professor Michael Faraday—whose experiments purported to prove that when séance participants placed their hands on a table they could agitate it through unconscious movements of their muscles: "Are the splinters, still kept, permanent phantoms engendered in the Back brain?" Neibert had sent a similar letter to the *Spiritual Telegraph,* arguing against Dods's "double-mind" theory. Neibert had said that while still a skeptic he and some friends had hatched a scheme to "go to a medium, and expose the humbuggery of the pretended 'manifestations.'" Within minutes, the medium had entered the room where they were sitting, told them what they were planning, and claimed he had been warned by the spirits. Neibert reasoned that the medium "could only have been informed in some extraordinary and preternatural way, of which the spiritual claims of the medium presented the most rational solution." Perhaps,

[308] "Correspondence," *Christian Spiritualist* (June 10, 1854), 3; "Correspondence," *Christian Spiritualist* (June 24, 1854), 3.

but Neibert lived among white slaveholders to whom servants were often all but invisible. For reasons of his or her own, a slave might have passed information to the medium. Thomas Bird Neibert's family owned one of antebellum Natchez's most imposing mansions, Choctaw, built around 1836 for his father, Maryland native Joseph Neibert. Thomas Neibert may have been born there soon after it was built or moved in as an infant, but would have known no other home in Natchez. It is less likely he remembered his father, who died in 1837. Natchez diarist William Johnson's October 1 entry gave the grim details of Joseph Neibert's funeral: "The Remains of Mr Joseph Neibert was buried—He had Died on Thursday night Last and was brought down in a Skift—The Corpse Smelt so bad that the people could not follow him to the grave—they went Out a Small Distance, then stoped there[.]" Joseph Neibert's death at age forty-one marked the start of a precipitous decline in the family's fortunes. On the 1840 Natchez census, Joseph's widow Sarah owned four slaves, including one who was deaf and dumb. Joseph Neibert was one of many who had speculated heavily in real estate; the speculative bubble burst the year he died and plunged the nation into a five-year depression. His estate was declared insolvent in 1842. By 1850 Sarah Neibert owned just one slave, a forty-eight-year-old woman who was probably her children's mammy and the last slave she would wish to part with. Thomas's older brother Joseph had managed to attend Amherst College from 1848 to 1850, and their records indicate he described himself as a lawyer and planter. When Thomas Neibert began communicating with the spirits, his life was financially and emotionally tenuous. His mother, Sarah Neibert, had been watching her world disintegrate since her husband's death. It is tempting to speculate that it might have been she of whom Dr. William Henry Holcombe wrote in his diary on May 26,

1855. He had been called to a woman "deranged in the subject of Spiritualism. She wanted me to certify that she was not insane, that she was 'well balanced.' She ordered her servants to fetch every physician in Natchez to come free her from 'the foul imputation of lunacy.'" By the summer of 1856 the Neiberts would have lost their Natchez home and Thomas would be writing to the *Spiritual Telegraph* from New Orleans, where his brother would become a grocer. Thomas would die in 1858, his mother in 1859; both are buried with other family members in Natchez.[309]

The *Christian Spiritualist* ran a letter in August from D. A. Street, a Cumberland Presbyterian in Savannah, Tennessee. Savannah is about fifteen miles from Purdy, home of the energetic Samuel D. Pace. Street had come from Lunenburg County, Virginia and had been the first classical teacher at Purdy, "a fine scholar, wholly given up to books and learning." He had probably struck up a friendship with Pace, who "was inclined to be a literary man, and indulged a great deal in writing poetry." Street was "an occasional reader of the Telegraph" and recently, "By accident, one of your papers, the Christian Spiritualist, fell into my hands a few days ago, and I examined it quite carefully." Street

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[309] *Other Side of Salvation,* 8: "Dods crafted an explanation for spiritualistic phenomena that treated them as the products of *two brains:* A lower mind, hidden from the ordinary mind, was capable of imagining and making manifest to the higher mind phenomena such as levitation, the appearance of spirits, and the production of mysterious sounds. These phenomena would occur *psychologically,* through the automatic emission of electromagnetic charges that entered the brain from the atmospheric ether through the organ of the lower brain, the cerebellum."; "Facts for Dr. Dods and Professor Faraday," *Christian Spiritualist* (July 29, 1854), 2; "Mr. T. B. Neibart, or Neibert, or Neibret," *Spiritual Telegraph* (July 1, 1854), 34; "Choctaw ca. 1836," http://www.natchezpilgrimage.com/houses_body.htm (accessed c. 2004); birth and death records for the Neibert family are from a June 23, 2007 message from Mike Downey, Director, Natchez City Cemetery; *Diary of William Johnson*, 195; "Charles G. Dahlgren, Administrator de bonis non of Joseph Neibert, deceased, *vs.* Stephen Duncan, et al.," *Reports of Cases Argued and Decided in the High Court of Errors and Appeals for the State of Mississippi*, Volume VII (Boston: Charles Little and James Brown, 1847), 293; *Biographical Record of the Alumni of Amherst College, During Its First Half Century, 1821–1871,* ed. W. L. Montague (Amherst, Mass., 1883), 85; William Henry Holcombe Diary #1113 (typescript copy), SHC, 82; "The South—Mr. Harris—What the People Want," *Spiritual Telegraph* (August 23, 1856); Advertisement for Cooper & Neibert, Retail and Wholesale Grocers, *Daily Delta* (March 6, 1858), 4.

found the evidence for Spiritualism compelling, but was most interested in the theological implications. The prophets had clung to the Old Dispensation founded by Abraham just as Christians adhered to the new dispensation promulgated by Jesus. Street could not surrender his Calvinist belief that man was inherently depraved, so without Christ as intercessor human "reason is not a safeguard." The editorial rejoinder: "We do not ask antiquity to give weight or cogency to our reasoning: the experience of each human soul is what we intend to appeal to, not opinionated minds. . . . The evil that is in the world must be attributed to something else besides an innate tendency in man to do evil, for that was not placed in the soul by the Creator"[310] Street had put his finger on the insurmountable weaknesses in the Society's appeal to the orthodox, and the editors could not adequately respond without making a definitive statement supporting or rejecting the divinity of Christ. Nor could they agree with the orthodox notion of original sin, and though they did not say so they probably also rejected the idea of souls doomed to an eternity in Hell.

Many publications printed regular lists of monies received from subscribers. In the first August issue we find George W. Christy of New Orleans, an educated and well-connected man. Sir William Drummond Stewart of Scotland and his friend William Sublette, formerly of the American Fur Company, had put together a summer excursion party of privileged and adventuresome gentlemen in 1843. When they headed for Fort Union at the confluence of the Yellowstone and the Upper Missouri, George W. Christy, "a graduate of Harvard University, and a gentleman of great taste in Natural History," was one of the party. Christy was a gentleman scholar, with a particular interest in

[310] *Reminiscences of the Early Settlement and Early Settlers of McNairy County, Tennessee*, 3.

ornithology. From 1850 to 1854 Christy's father William had been Surveyor of Customs at New Orleans, so the Christy family might have known the Customhouse employees who signed the 1854 petition. The Christies also had close ties to Texas. The elder Christy was a close friend of Sam Houston, who said of William Christy's support of Texas independence, "He was the first in the United States to espouse our cause. His purse was ever open to our necessities. His hand was extended to our aid." A grateful Houston presented William Christy with the bridle and saddle captured from a Mexican general at the Battle of San Jacinto, and recuperated at the Christy home in New Orleans from a gunshot wound sustained in the 1836 defeat of Santa Anna. George W. Christy wrote poems, and at least one was published in the *Spiritual Telegraph.* Eliza Ripley in her memoir of antebellum New Orleans recalled Christy as "not noted for self-effacement and modesty. His signature always appeared in full to his sentimental effusions" when they were printed in the *Picayune.* Christy seems to have gone through a religious phase, and is listed as a Minister on the 1860 New Orleans census. He served as an officer in the Confederate army, and was thenceforth a notary public. On another list of receipts in August 1854 are some names we have already encountered, petition signers Charles H. Cragin of Georgetown and Nathaniel Hyer, who was living by then in New Orleans. James Koons of Athens County, Ohio, known for the manifestations at his spirit room, was listed, as well as some southerners new to this study. The most significant new name is Nathan C. Folger of New Orleans, who will emerge later in our story in connection with a dangerously unbalanced opponent of Spiritualism and again protesting a fraudulent medium in New Orleans. The Folgers were an early Nantucket Quaker family, and Nathan's father had migrated to Hudson, New York during the American Revolution.

Folger had written to the *Spiritual Telegraph* in June 1854 about a severe attack of cholera that was cured by positive and negative powders he had obtained during a three-day visit at the "Spiritual Springs" en route from New Orleans to Hudson. Nathan C. was not the only Folger inclined to be a seeker after new religious and spiritual truths. He shared a great grandfather with Lydia Folger, whose branch of the family had remained in Nantucket; she was the wife of noted phrenologist Lorenzo Niles Fowler. A brother of Nathan and Lydia's great grandfather had a grandson named Reuben Folger, who in the 1830s was a Presbyterian living in New York City. Reuben was warmly attached to his cousin Benjamin Folger, who had been raised in Hudson by relatives. The wives of Reuben, a Wall Street broker, and Benjamin, a wealthy hardware merchant, had begun holding prayer meetings with other earnest seekers of Christian perfection in the late 1830s. They sound much like others we have encountered in the throes of religious experience, or what would later be interpreted by some as spirit influence. "Anyone—man or woman—could speak at meetings, but only if she or he felt the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Some claimed the gift of interpreting prophecy. Some knew the meaning of visions and dreams. Others could heal the sick. . . ." In common with the Shakers, they believed only celibacy was conducive to holiness. Reuben was embarrassed by his wife's activities, but Benjamin's own wife drew him into the group. They eventually fell under the sway of a self-anointed prophet who called himself Matthias.[311]

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[311] John E. Sunder, *Bill Sublette: Mountain Man* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 197, 199; *A Catalogue of the Officers and Members of the Harvard Natural History Society* (Cambridge: Metcalf and Company. Printers to the University: 1848), 12; Ned Hémard, "Forgotten Texas Hero," *New Orleans Nostalgia: Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions,* http://www.neworleansbar.org/NewOrleansNostalgia.html (accessed March 12, 2010); "Tranquility, A Poem From the Inner Life," *The North-Western Orient* (December 1, 1855), 59. A line above the poem says, *From the Spiritual Telegraph.*"; Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans, Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 150; "Receipts for the Christian Spiritualist," *Christian Spiritualist* (August 26, 1854), 3; The spring, in Chautauqua County, New York,

Matthias's activities (and notoriety) made wonderful fodder for the press, so Nathan C. Folger and Lydia Folger Fowler would have been aware of the stories. Nathan C. Folger was a prosperous New Orleans clothing merchant who specialized in "plantation goods" and will soon figure again in our narrative.

A correspondent wrote in late August about "large numbers of inquirers" in Portsmouth, Virginia and mysterious occurrences in the home of Biggus Woodward of Bermuda Street that had become "town-talk," or gossip, though "substantiated by such men of known truth and probity as Richard Dove, Esq., Miles Bell, Esq., and Mr. Thomas Keating." It is not clear who Biggus Woodward was; James and Richard Woodward were both carpenters living at 42 Bermuda Street in the 1852 Norfolk city directory. Dove was the town's Sealer of Weights and Measures, Bell a railroad clerk. The letter ended with a request. "If your Society could send on a Brother here to deliver addresses on the subject, I have no doubt that a large accession could be made to the Spiritual ranks from this City and Portsmouth." In January, a letter indicated Woodward and Dove had been joined by others, "actuated by a thirst for knowledge and truth, and nothing more," in forming "a circle for the purpose of testing the truth or falsity of the doctrine of Spiritualism." The circle had met at the home of Dr. Nash, "who has for some time been impressed with a full conviction of the divine mission of this much-abused, yet ancient mode of intercourse between the departed and their friends in the earth-sphere." The new investigators included schoolteacher Henry Newcome, Navy clerk Delaware West, and carpenter James Green. Herbert Milton Nash practiced botanic medicine. Woodward was their

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belonged to John Chase. *Modern American Spiritualism,* 230; Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 111; Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 29–32,

medium, and through him they received many manifestations and messages, including one from the spirit of Henry Clay predicting the results (erroneously, as it happened) of an upcoming election. A request from adjacent Norfolk for instructions for the formation of circles the following April demonstrates continuing interest in the area. Beginning in August, a yellow fever epidemic would claim James and Richard Woodward, Thomas Keating, Richard Dove and his wife, Henry Newsome's teenage daughter, and around two thousand other lives. Dr. Nash would join "the corps of physicians that practiced during that terrible epidemic."[312] Living through the pestilence would bring new converts, stunned and grieving, to Spiritualism.

The next issue featured a long letter from Frances Hyer, who had been traveling around New York state hobnobbing with other Spiritualists and attending their circles. The closure on her letter was a lofty, "Yours in the bonds which unite all who are engaged in the dissemination of Truth." Two weeks later there was a note from an Army officer in Texas, sharing a letter from a friend who had made a pact with a young lady that whichever died first would return and confirm or deny the truth of Spiritualism. The friend had received a communication through a medium in St. Louis purporting to come from the spirit of the young lady, and on returning to New Orleans received a letter confirming the truth of her death. "Such kind of tests," noted the correspondent, "have become so common, that to a believer, they have lost their interest." In that issue there are hints that people were not approaching the Society's gift of free access for sincere

[312] "Correspondence," *Christian Spiritualist* (September 2, 1854), 3; "The Spirits in Virginia," *Christian Spiritualist* (January 1855); "The Yellow Fever in Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia, 1855, as Reported in the *Daily Dispatch* of Richmond, Virginia, http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/va/yellow-fever/yftoc.html (accessed May 2, 2009); *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography,* Volume IV, ed. Lyon Gardiner Tyler (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1915), 431.

seekers in the spirit intended. An announcement of the imminent arrival of Miss Catherine Fox remarked that they would soon be posting the times of circles and "The only '*exaction*' will be good manner, and courteous respect for the feelings and opinions of those present."[313]

The following week, a letter from Georgia thanked medium John Shoebridge Williams for his advice and reported on the successes of the local circle's séances. Spirits of loved ones had communicated, spirits kept time to the music of a violin, and a table waltzed at the request of the medium. Local interest and excitement was considerable, divided between a faction that thought them demented and "in close communion with Satan" and another that suspected the Spiritualists had "adopted this as a mode for humbugging them." The circle continued investigating because the reality of spirit communication, "*if true,* is of the first magnitude in importance to the well-being of mortal men; and if *not true,* should certainly be known to the world." Believers often continued to couch their explanation of what they were doing as a search for the truth, even though like the Lexington circle they were also inclined to state flatly, "We know what we know." The letter was signed by F. J. Robinson, Secretary of Lexington Spirit Circle, giving hope to the Society in New York that their efforts might be leading to a network of like-minded Spiritualist organizations. Francis J. Robinson was a dentist, born in Wilkes County, Georgia and the owner of four slaves and two slave houses in 1860.

[313] "Correspondence: Our Social Pic-Nic," *Christian Spiritualist* (September 9, 1854), 3; "Correspondence and Spirit Communications," *Christian Spiritualist* (September 23, 1854), 2; "Movements of Mediums" *Christian Spiritualist* (September 23, 1854), 3.

He was also a Mason, a Republican and a Unionist, and would be harassed by the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction.[314]

The earnest and optimistic articles and letters continued apace into the winter of 1854. In November the *Christian Spiritualist* learned from a correspondent in Baltimore that "the ghosts mustered their forces so strongly" at the yearly meeting of Hicksite Quakers there that "it was found necessary to appoint a Committee of investigation on the subject." The editors deemed this news "very important" because it offered a case in point in the battle between orthodoxy and spiritual progress in a denomination claiming the need to follow one's own inner light. "The Hicksite Friends . . . have ever been progressive, reformatory and measurably consistent followers of the '*light within*'." It was only natural to "find the Hicksite Friends coming into '*rapport*' with the new manifestations; while the Orthodox are still quarreling about the ancient 'land-marks'."[315]

Offerings for the remainder of 1854 included items from New Orleans and St. Louis, receipts from Arkansas and New Orleans, a mildly titillating story about a nude female ghost in Nashville, and a long piece about Spiritualism in France translated from the *Journal du Magnetisme.*

January brought the *Christian Spiritualist* an opportunity to comment on an item from the *Mobile Weekly News* that criticized a Spiritualist lecturer in Baltimore for "the blasphemous declaration that he was in Spiritual communication with Jesus Christ, and that he expected soon to give the result of his interview." The *Christian Spiritualist* pointed out that it had long been "the belief of the Christian world, that the 'Holy Ghost,'

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[314] "Correspondence," *Christian Spiritualist* (September 30, 1854), 3; *Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, *Georgia,* Volume I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 870–877.

[315] "The Spirits among the Quakers," *Christian Spiritualist* (November 11, 1854), 2.

'the third person of the Trinity,' would come in answer to prayer" and that anyone who had ever "heard an orthodox prayer, or attended an orthodox conference meeting" could attest that "the desire for Spiritual union is commonly expressed" by "the most fervid invocation for the 'Holy Ghost' to come 'into these cold hearts of ours.'" The editors observed, perhaps with tongue in cheek, that if it were impious for man to seek "close communion" with Christ the churches were to blame for the encouragement of hymns with messages such as, "'Jesus. lover of my soul, let me to your *bosom* fly,' which certainly implies a possibility for 'close communion,' much more intimate and material than anything we have ever heard among Spiritualists." Claiming moral superiority for their movement and the medium who communed with Christ, they reminded readers that "Spiritualism in general and the philosophy of mediumship in particular, teach the impossibility of such communion without *great purity* and Spiritual harmony on the part of the medium" and rejoiced that one of their own had achieved so noble and uplifting a new phase of mediumship.[316]

Responding to a reader critical of points of unorthodoxy appearing in the *Christian Spiritualist,* another reader suggested that he "compare the most rational portion of modern christianity and modern Spiritualism, and you will find that we believe more of the Bible than you do. We have faith to heal the sick by the laying on of hands, and it is done. Yours (the church) have no faith in what you claim as your lawful heritage, and you cannot do it."[317] The *Christian Spiritualist* was no longer able to tiptoe around the objections of orthodoxy, nor to avoid stepping on its toes.

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[316] "Spiritualism and Profanation," *Christian Spiritualist* (January 15, 1855), 2.

[317] "To Logan Sleeper of St. Louis," *Christian Spiritualist* (January 27, 1855), 3.

In early February, Rev. Jesse Babcock Ferguson of Nashville contributed an examination of some Biblical evidence for spirit communication. "To the honest objector, we would offer a suggestion. Spiritual Communication is a divine institution or appointment, or the foundation of every Religion in this land is baseless. The Bible is a collection of Spiritual communications, made through human angels, extending over a history of thousands of years." Nor had these angel messages ceased in the time of the apostolic church. If Spiritualism's claims "be true, Spiritual Communications must be the result of *Eternal Law:* the Law of God, respecting the unfolding and perfection of mind." Ferguson was sincere in his Christian beliefs and had become the focus of controversy because of his public avowal of his certainty of the reality of spirit communication. His story ties together many elements of the unfolding of Spiritualism in the South: mesmerism, Christianity, slavery, Shakers, healing through spirit guidance and power, the importance of charismatic leadership, the influence of home mediums on the men who spoke publicly for the cause, the objections of the orthodox, and the continuing role of the northern Spiritualist press.

CHAPTER SIX

1855–1860: Spiritualism in Southern Cities

The petition failed, but it had called attention to a nationwide interest in communicating with spirits that continued to grow and spread. Before this study—with the notable exception of New Orleans's Creoles of color—only southern white men of stature and means, and occasionally their wives, were widely known to have been involved in antebellum Spiritualism. Most of what can be gleaned about other Spiritualist activity in the South after the petition comes from stories and letters in the *Christian Spiritualist*, the *Spiritual Telegraph,* and a third publication that debuted April 11, 1857, Boston's *Banner of Light*.[318] Some information comes from histories of the movement, some from archives, and bits and pieces from other sources. With hindsight, it is possible to assess the networks of kinship and commerce that linked many of the people who were involved in antebellum Spiritualism to each other, to religion, and to the South's "peculiar institution" and to understand where they would cast their lots in the coming Civil War.

The years between the petition and the Civil War were a time of growing interest and receptivity for Spiritualism in the South. Interest in spirit communication appeared across the region, although most southerners who tried the spirits continued to feel isolated. The stories that follow in this chapter and the next are mostly those of people

[318] *Banner of Light* 1:1 (April 11, 1857).

whose lives and beliefs have had no place in previous histories. Individually, they are unique combinations of a number of themes that run through the history of Spiritualism in the South. Some of them stayed put, others were part of the era's restless mobility. Most, because their names were found in Spiritualist newspapers, give insights into the influence of northern publications—Spiritualist and secular—on southern readers. Those who were discovered in archives left letters and journals. Many of the stories are of journeys of faith, of efforts to make the right choices from a perplexing menu of belief options. All, by virtue of being southern stories, must be considered as potentially intermingling the beliefs of the whites, blacks and others who borrowed, often unconsciously, from each other. Running through almost all of them is the tenuousness of life in a time when disease was rampant and mysterious, best explained to most people as the workings of Divine Providence. Taken as a whole, they are a reminder that these individuals were shaped by choice and circumstance and that belief for them was sometimes shared but ultimately a very personal matter.

Merchants such as Nathan Folger of New Orleans did business with purveyors in the North and customers in the South. Godfrey Barnsley and Glendy Burke were part of the web of cotton commerce that reached from plantations to southern seaports to the mills of New England and the British Isles. William Gilmore Simms was tied to the publishing industry in New York and James Henry Hammond was a politician. So were their fellow South Carolinians James Hamilton, Jr., and Waddy Thompson and Texan Ebenezer Allen. Allen and Paul Bremond were energetic internal improvers, as was Thomas Butler King. All were Spiritualists. Most of them were also planters, which mean they owned large numbers of slaves. And many of them believed they could contact the

spirits through their own mediumistic powers. When they came together, it was usually in cities where business and politics were transacted.

Cities brought together enough people to create space for pursuit of nonconformist ideas that would have faced greater scrutiny in smaller communities. The energy and immediacy of progress was heightened in urban centers, and there was enough interest and income potential to draw professional Spiritualist mediums and lecturers. This chapter will focus almost entirely on the Spiritualistic opportunities afforded by cities and the activities and attitudes of southern city dwellers, many of whom are making their debut here as subjects of historical interest. The stories of the individuals who make up the chapter demonstrate how information passed between families and communities, how many voices were part of the conversation about the spirit world, and how much they availed themselves of the ease of travel by water. News and people crisscrossed the Atlantic, traveled along the Atlantic seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico, made their way up and down the Mississippi River and its tributaries, and came ashore at every landing.

The Atlantic Seaboard: Baltimore

All of the 1854 Maryland petitioners lived in Carroll County, and none seem to have publicly pursued an interest in Spiritualism. Most of the activity in Maryland after 1854 centered on Baltimore, the northernmost Atlantic seaport in the South, where Washington Danskin and his wife were the leading lights of organized Spiritualism. He was born in 1813 in Maryland, and apparently lived in Baltimore all his life. Danskins were among the early Catholic settlers of the area, but Danskin's mother divorced his

father in 1820, so if a Roman Catholic would have been excommunicated. Washington Danskin's first wife obtained a divorce from him in 1838. He married permanently in 1839, and in 1841 was listed as a subscriber for a Protestant Episcopal family prayer book and *Book of Common Prayer*.[319]

Danskin was a well-to-do haberdasher, and he seems never to have fathered a child. He found plenty of time to write, and kept the Spiritualist press supplied with lengthy missives on the doings in Baltimore. He wrote glowingly of an 1856 visit by medium Cora Hatch. Her youth and beauty, combined with the purity of sentiments expressed in her trance lectures, made her perhaps the most successful of the female Spiritualist lecturers in the 1850s, but she never went any farther South than Baltimore and St. Louis. She had delivered ten lectures in Baltimore, "and held private circles for the elucidation of philosophical questions, some two or three times a week. The manifestations given through her are well calculated to convince the most skeptical." She was among the first to adopt the technique of allowing the audience to propose the topic of her lecture from time to time, and made a great success in Baltimore of the potentially contentious subject of "The antiquity of the world, as proved by the discoveries of Geology; its consistency with Biblical history." She was equally impressive in private circles. "One evening there was assembled a party of twelve of the most distinguished men of out State, for the express purpose of propounding such questions as would be

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[319] Thomas Peterman, *Catholics in Colonial Delmarva* (Devon, Pa.: Cooke Publishing Company, 1996), 294; "Session Laws, 1819" http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000638/html/am638--92.html (accessed March 14, 2007); "Session Laws, 1838" http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000598/html/am598--513.html (accessed March 14, 2007); *The Family Prayer Book, or, The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: Published by Alexander V. Blake, 1841), 801.

beyond the capacity of the medium to respond to, and thereby dissipate the idea of any human agency in the matter." It went without saying that such wisdom and erudition as made up Cora Hatch's lectures must come from a source other than the young woman herself. As usually was the case after a successful visit by a professional Spiritualist, the press, the clergy and individuals were "roused from their lethargy." Newspapers, instead of their usual silence or verbal smirks, Danskin claimed, saw "the rapidity with which a belief in its truth is spreading," and assumed "a more decent tone." The clergy, who had recently found the subject unworthy of notice, were "now fulminating anathemas against it from the pulpits of all the various sects." People who had mocked the idea of messages from the dead "begin to think there may be something in it," and "many of another class gather around the domestic hearth, and hold sweet converse with the loved ones who dwell in brighter climes."[320]

Danskin published his own book in 1858, *How and Why I Became a Spiritualist.* Worldly success had failed to "satisfy the interior longings of the immortal spirit." He yearned intensely for "knowledge of the superior, or after-life" and found no satisfaction in the "crude ideas which were advanced with so much dogmatic confidence from the pulpit," finding them "deficient in their power to illustrate the character of the Wise and Loving Father." Danskin described mankind in earth life as a "tantalizing burlesque, an abortive failure to produce a noble structure which had resulted in hopeless failure on the part of the Great Designer of the Universe." Man, created in God's image, was a poor shadow of his Maker. Only by "progressive unfoldment through the eternal ages" would man be able to "throw off the dull habiliments of the lower life" and realize the perfection

[320] "Mrs. Cora Hatch in Baltimore," *Spiritual Telegraph* (January 24, 1857).

for which God had designed his creatures. Danskin was not surprised when news came that "dwellers in the home of purity and peace, had opened channels of communication with the mortals of earth," for to his mind "it seemed the much needed link in the chain of the Divine economy." He declined a first invitation to join a circle, issued in "a spirit of levity," because "Spirit-intercourse, whether true or false, was not, could not be, to any rightly constituted mind, a subject suitable for jest."[321]

In subsequent conversations Danskin's friend evinced a more appropriate attitude, and soon the Danskins were sitting with the friend and his wife and receiving messages by calling out the alphabet and waiting for raps. When his friend's wife, a Catholic, was enjoined by her confessor to abandon the practice at once, her husband also gave it up. Danskin, bitterly disappointed, prayed earnestly that "some avenue might be opened" for him to continue communing with the spirit world. He became a writing medium, and soon received word that a young medium who was a Quaker had learned of his interest and offered to help him resume his communion with spirit friends. Once they became Spiritualists, the Danskins were wholly committed to spirit communication. He sent long letters to the *Banner of Light* about the mediums who came to Baltimore. When medium Warren Chase described his 1860 visit to Baltimore for the *Herald of Progress,* he singled out Mrs. Danskin as one of the city's best mediums, "whose circumstances place her above the necessity of using her powers for pay or pleasure" and through whom "many citizens of Baltimore have returned after death and given the most perfect and unmistakeable evidence of identity that could be given through her feeble power; and I

[321] Washington A. Danskin, *How and Why I Became a Spiritualist* (Boston and New York: B. Marsh; S.T. Munson, 1858); Wash. A. Danskin, *How and Why I Became A Spiritualist. Fourth Edition, with an Appendix, Giving an Authentic Statement of that Wonderful Phenomenon Known as the Solid Iron Ring Manifestation* (Baltimore: Published and for sale by the author, 1869), 7.

am told by Mr. Danskin, that this has been of almost daily occurrence for years." Chase also reported that the Spiritualists had engaged a hall for regular meetings.[322]

Danskin wrote a few months later, giving an enthusiastic description of Baltimore mediums. Mrs. Morrel, the only "public medium" in town, had been giving successful tests for the past three years. Benjamin S. Benson, owner of an iron foundry, had for several years been relieving suffering by "the simple laying on of his hands." Many families had private circles. Danskin had been pleased with Warren Chase's lectures, and Baltimore dentist Dr. William Pratt, "who possesses a highly cultivated and beautifully attuned mental organism," had been their next speaker, followed by a short series of lectures by Danskin himself. They had been favored with one lecture by Thomas Gales Forster, but the "most effective discourse of the season" had been by Dr. T. L. Nichols, engaged by the Catholic benevolent association and advertised as "A Great Lecture on Spiritualism" in all the papers for more than a week. His audience was made up almost completely of skeptics. "Much to the consternation of the mass of his hearers," wrote Danskin, "and the amusement of a few, the Doctor distinctly and earnestly reiterated that fact which we have so frequently presented, and they have so determinedly rejected—that 'spirits can, and do, commune with mortals.' The effect you may imagine."[323]

Francis H. Smith of Baltimore wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph* in early 1856. "The cause is spreading here far more than is generally supposed. In many a quiet family when the tea equipage is removed the dial is introduced, to hold social converse with our

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[322] Danskin, *How and Why,* 9–15; "Baltimore," *Herald of Progress* (March 24, 1860), 5.

[323] It was Thomas Low Nichols who would write a biography of Jesse Babcock Ferguson, *Supramundane Facts in the Life of Rev. Jesse Babcock Ferguson, A.M., LL.D., Including Twenty Years' Observation of Preternatural Phenomena* (London: Published for the Proprietor of the Spiritual Lyceum, 1865). Nichols had earlier penned a sympathetic biography of the Davenport brothers; "Spiritual Progress in Baltimore," *Herald of Progress* (June 9, 1860), 3.

Spirit-friends. But of this the world knows not." The dial, a round device with letters around its circumference, was invented to make spirit communication more efficient. Smith declared it needed his "swiftest pen to record the communication" that came through the medium.[324] He had been exploring the subject since visiting a friend in Washington in 1854. Smith later wrote more fully about his introduction to spirit communion in a book, *My Experience, or Foot-prints of a Presbyterian to Spiritualism* (1860). A neighbor had stopped in to invite them to a circle after tea. Once again alone with his friend, Smith said he was not interested and considered it "downright blasphemy." Smith's friend had seen things which, though he was a materialist and believed "that when a man dies he shall not live again," defied any explanation but the "spiritual hypothesis," and said he would value Smith's evaluation of the "marvels." The séance participants were an army major, his wife and fourteen-year-old daughter, the medium. They took their seats at a small table, "with hands resting gently thereon," and the table immediately began to move. "The alphabet being called, sentences were spelled out, the proper letters being indicated by the tipping of the table." "I was confounded." One day not long after, he came upon a copy of *The Sacred Circle*—a short-lived

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[324] "Spiritualism in Baltimore," *Spiritual Telegraph* (February 9, 1856), 2. Smith included a description of the dial he had written for the *Banner of Light* when he visited Boston in 1858 in his book, and expressed surprise that it was unknown there. Francis H. Smith, *My Experience, or Foot-prints of a Presbyterian to Spiritualism* (Baltimore, 1860), 49–50: "Imagine the face of a clock, with its minute hand, but, instead of the figures, you have the letters of the alphabet. Around its axis is wound a cord, one end of which is attached to a spring within the frame; the other is made fast to a chair, or other object in the room. The tipping of the table draws the cord and causes the had to revolve, pointing to the letters, forming words and sentences.

Let two persons be seated before the dial, with the hands gently resting upon the table, careful to use no physical force whatever. If within half an hour no motion is perceived, let one of the sitters five place to some else, until the whole family have tried; but the probability is, you will see the hand revolve, it may be without any spelling; this may require two or three sittings. At first the hand will merely make its circuit slowly on the dial, apparently to no purpose. Be not discouraged—in another sitting there will be more motion, vibrating rapidly from side to side. This, we are told by the spirits, is for development, and when this occurs, you may be sure there is a medium at the table, and your patience is rewarded. . . ."

periodical "devoted to the elucidation and defense of the Spiritual Faith" edited by Judge John Worth Edmonds and others—and he "read it with astonishment." "[H]ere was a work written by no ordinary minds, and with an earnest sincerity which none could doubt."[325]

Smith had read the works of Judge Edmonds and Andrew Jackson Davis, subscribed to the *Christian Spiritualist* and *Spiritual Telegraph,* indeed read everything he could find on the subject. He found it was "no easy matter to rub out the sectarian prejudices which thirty years' membership of the Presbyterian Church had engendered." The cold formalism of his faith, with its creeds and catechisms he had memorized as "equal in authority and proceeding from the Bible," he could not find in Scripture. What he found was the "pure and holy religion taught by the Saviour" that was "almost overwhelmed and lost sight of in the sectarianism of the day." Smith said it was "the truth" he was in search of, and it was; but he wanted a truth that touched his heart, a truth that elicited emotion. As he read, he no longer feared the "god of wrath and indignation" of the Presbyterians, "but rejoiced in a Loving Father, ever ready to hear the penitent's prayer; whether that prayer came from the spirit in its tenement of clay, or from the spirit-home." Smith embraced the concepts of universal salvation and eternal progression. "Intellectually I became a Spiritualist. . . but I needed something more; I wanted a personal test from the loved ones above, without which, no one, I think, can be a full believer." He found entrée to a small private circle, and received a message from "my son, whose form had lain in the grave more than twenty years. More followed. I was

[325] "Address to the Reader," *The Sacred Circle,* v. 1 (New York: Partridge & Brittan, Publishers, 1855), 1; Francis H. Smith, *My Experience, or Foot-prints of a Presbyterian to Spiritualism* (Baltimore, 1860), 9.

deeply moved; until, at length, the pent-up feelings found vent in tears."[326] Smith, like Jesse Ferguson and others seeking something Calvinism could not give them, found in Spiritualism in the mid-1850s a religion of the heart, a religion of love that could meet the specific needs and desires of each individual who made contact with the spirit world.

The Atlantic Seaboard: Norfolk/Portsmouth

Virginia had contributed only two signatures to the 1854 petition, but there was significant interest in the Norfolk and Portsmouth area. The Spiritualists who can be identified in the port towns of Norfolk and Portsmouth in the mid-1850s were a diverse group: representatives of the Episcopalian Virginia aristocracy; middling tradesmen and seamen; and a southerner who became a radicalized Christian reformer, imbibed the "isms" of New England and came home to put them into practice.

Of the band of inquirers in Norfolk who shared their 1854 experiences with other readers of the *Christian Spiritualist,* several were carried off in the August, September and October 1855 outbreak of yellow fever. Others who had begun to investigate spiritual phenomena lost family, friends or their own lives. Editor Richard T. Holstead of the Norfolk *Argus* had sent money for the *Christian Spiritualist* just a few months before the disease silenced his harrowing reports to the Richmond *Dispatch* on the progress of the epidemic. Holstead had studied law at William and Mary and wrote poetry under the pseudonym Quilp with titles such as "I Hear Thy Voice" and "A Child's Burial."[327]

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[326] *My Experience*, 7–12.

[327] Lon Wagner, "The Fever: A Story in 14 Parts," *The Virginian-Pilot* (originally published July 10–23, 2005), 21, www.portsmouthva.gov/history/fever/thefever.pdf (accessed May 2, 2009); William S. Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity, Including Portsmouth and the Adjacent Counties, During a Period of Two Hundred Years. Also, Sketches of Williamsburg, Hampton,*

For twenty years before the Civil War, there was annually "at least one major yellow fever epidemic in some southern maritime city. New Orleans, Mobile, Pensacola, Savannah, Charleston, and Norfolk were ravaged with varying frequency" during the 1840s and 1850s, "as were numerous inland towns in their shadows," observed the historian Margaret Humphreys. "It was an indictment of southern civilization that a disease which had been conquered in the North was not only becoming more common but also deadlier and more widespread in the 1850s." Humphreys pointed out that "it was in the seaport and inland commercial cities and towns of the South where yellow fever flourished."[328] The rivers were avenues of commerce, migration and information but also carried disease.

Many residents left town when yellow fever appeared in Norfolk. Others, like Holstead, felt obligated to remain at their posts. Among those who stayed, the mortality was staggering. "Some idea of the destructiveness of this pestilence may be formed in comparing it with the great plague in London," explained a resident who had lived through the epidemic. "In that plague, one in seventeen died; here, one in THREE." Whole families succumbed, leaving "old and venerated mansions" vacant for months. All business came to a halt but treating the sick and burying the dead.[329] In the wake of this scourge, some survivors turned to the consolations of spirit communion.

Suffolk, Smithfield, and other Places, with Descriptions of Some of the Principal Objects of Interest in Eastern Virginia (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1858), 352, 353.

[328] Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999 [c. 1992]), 47–48.

[329] William S. Forrest, *The Great Pestilence in Virginia; Being An Historical Account of the Origin, General Character, and Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk and Portsmouth in 1855, Together with Sketches of some of the Victims, Incidents of the Scourge, etc.* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), 2–4.

Yellow fever was mysterious, and it seemed to some to embody Divine retribution of Biblical proportions. No one knew how it was transmitted. "Some contend that the disease was of local origin; some, that it was imported and introduced by the ill-fated steamer Ben Franklin; while others regard it as a scourge, or a pestilential visitation, specially sent by the allwise and just Ruler. . . ."[330] When the disease appeared, most chose to flee. By one estimate thirteen thousand people—two-thirds of the residents—weathered the summer in more salubrious locations. By the third week of September, over half the resident physicians had sickened and died. Doctors and nurses came from New Orleans, Charleston, Mobile, Savannah and other places to offer their services. There was no food for sale. There were not enough coffins, so corpses had "putrefied in the open air, been put into rough and unsightly boxes, or buried, by heaps, in pits; and the impurity of the infected air has emitted a corpse-like stench." Grass grew in the streets. "How priceless did true religion seem, how inestimably valuable, true faith in Christ in that period of terror," sighed William S. Forrest, who struggled to balance Christian acceptance of the will of a just and all-wise Providence with the imperatives of understanding how the disease was introduced and spread, and how it might have been prevented from entering in the first place. Forrest, whose prose was laced with reverent reflections and submissive humility, imagined death as the release of the spirit from the body. Describing the final moments of Episcopal Rev. William M. Jackson, he said, "At the still hour of midnight this good man closed his eyes in death, and his freed spirit took its flight to the land of eternal rest; and to-day, at noon, his remains were conveyed to the cold grave." In the chaos, mistakes in burying were common and survivors in many cases

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[330] *Great Pestilence in Virginia,* 6, 115–116, 123, 161, 53, 95, 104, 84

were never able to determine where their loved ones had been interred. The rituals of mourning helped bring a semblance of order to dealing with death, and being denied the consolation of visiting the graves of the victims must have been difficult for the stunned survivors once the epidemic was past. No one knew why, but only a hard freeze would stop yellow fever. It was not until the first week of November that, "like a resurrection of the dead," crowds moved through the streets and marketplaces to the accompaniment of the bells of steamboats and other sounds of normalcy and commerce returning.[331]

By spring of the following year, the survivors were still processing the trauma as they moved on with their lives. Sallie, the thirteen-year-old daughter of Navy Captain William S. Whittle, had become a writing medium and was penning comforting messages from her mother and brother, and from their pastor, Rev. William Jackson, claiming they were "happy and in Heaven." Sallie Whittle, like Sarah Morgan, was born in 1842 and found room within her Episcopal faith for spirit communion. Authenticating Sallie's newly-discovered mediumship, her late pastor selected Sallie as his conduit from the next world to those left behind in this. Another who communicated through Sallie was Captain Samuel Barron's wife Imogene. Mrs. Barron, among the first to die of yellow fever in the close-knit community of Navy officers' families, had been in her day "the most brilliant of the Southern belles at Ballston spa." Rev. Jackson had officiated at her funeral. The Barrons had buried an infant daughter in 1849. In August, their teenage daughter Lizzie had joined her mother and sister in the Barron family plot at Cedar Grove Cemetery. Lizzie's siblings had been sent away for their own safety when she fell ill, and she had been cared for at the abandoned home of their friends the Thompsons until she died. Mary Thompson admitted that the messages Sallie Whittle received were in handwriting

[331] Ibid., 6, 115–116, 123, 161, 53, 95, 104, 84, 116, 209.

identical to that of the deceased but could not decide whether the supernatural forces responsible were good or evil. Samuel Barron welcomed messages from the spirits of Imogene and Lizzie. Even skeptical Mary Thompson was comforted by the spirit communications.[332] It was not uncommon to turn to thoughts of the afterlife in times of loss, but Sallie's mediumship helped her little community process a cataclysm that had upended their ways of dealing with death and grief.

Death at its best for nineteenth-century Christians was a gentle transition, but the yellow fever epidemic took all control of the process out of families' hands. A good death involved little pain, a profession of faith, and tender farewells to family at the bedside. The rituals of preparing and sitting up with the body, receiving condolences, a dignified funeral and a solemn burial lent the small comfort of structure and predictability to times of bereavement. The survivors of the 1855 yellow fever epidemic in Norfolk and Portsmouth were denied all these, and many never had the closure of visiting the victims' graves. The consolations of religion were a struggle for most believers in any time of terrible loss, but after an upheaval such as that pestilence it would have been difficult to believe it was a just and loving God who had taken so many of the good and useful and innocent in such a horrible way. The spirits—even the spirit of their beloved pastor—assured some of those left behind that all was well. However cruel the partings had seemed, their departed were "happy and in Heaven." Barron and Whittle each owned two slaves in 1850, and each would serve in the Confederate navy.

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[332] Jennifer Davis McDaid, "'Sadness to Our Circle': Grace Whittle's Account of the 1855 Norfolk Yellow Fever Epidemic" (1997), www.usgwarchives.net/va/yellow-fever/whittle.html (accessed December 16, 2008); *Great Pestilence in Virginia,* 264;; "Elmwood & Cedar Grove Cemeteries," ftp.rootsweb.ancestry.com/pub/usgenweb/va/norfolkcity/cemeteries/elmwoodcedargrove/elmcgcem-a-bate.txt (accessed May 3, 2009).

Sallie Whittle and her circle were not the only survivors of the epidemic who sought contact with the spirit world. In February and March of 1856 the *Spiritual Telegraph* received two letters from someone in Norfolk who used the initials W. H. I. and wanted to talk about manifestations in which parts of spirits visibly materialized. The virtual Spiritualist print community was at that point more stable than the writer's actual one, and he discussed a letter from Henry Force of Orange County, Texas about a black hand that had appeared during a séance there. The Norfolk writer thought the hand belonged to the spirit of a negro who "was in closer affinity with the 'emanations' in the room, than some of the departed white relatives; hence a black instead of a white hand," and also suggested that blacks, like whites, continue to make spiritual progress in the afterlife. The letter also hinted at a spiritual affinity between the living whites in the circle and the dead black. W. H. I.'s analysis was a marked departure from usual mentions of African Americans in antebellum Spiritualist publications, which were messages in stereotypically heavy dialect for the regular columns of spirit communications through the papers' resident mediums. Force's own description of his slaves' reactions had employed phonetic spelling to emphasize their patois and differentiate them from Force and his white family, as we will see in the next chapter. The Norfolk writer was also on the leading edge of discussion of materialization manifestations, claiming that "any number of healthy persons may, by frequently meeting in a small room sufficiently tight, present the Spirits with the required 'elements' and conditions for the formation of hands, faces, etc."[333] Were Norfolk residents in private circles conjuring parts of spirit bodies?

[333] "Powers of Spirits," *Spiritual Telegraph* (February 30, 1856), 3.

Sallie Whittle and her friends and family were not alone in their seeking, but probably were not known to or aware of others in their community who communed with spirits. People in the port towns of Norfolk and Portsmouth continued to seek news from the spirit world in small, private circles. It is clear that Spiritualism was not widely discussed in public, even in the wake of the community's shattering losses, but there is evidence that small groups quietly came together to try the spirits. Sallie Whittle's circle was private. Letters to Spiritualist publications were often signed with initials, not full names, and even assiduous research cannot connect these initials with real names. Sometimes, though, there is a solid match in the census. G. Richard B. is one of them.

In November, G. R. B. (G. Richard Bailey) wrote from Portsmouth to thank the *Spiritual Telegraph* for calling his "attention to the fact that mortals can communicate with Spirits of a more elevated sphere, and receive instructions appertaining to their well-being here as well as hereafter." Bailey was a bosun's mate in the United States Navy, remote from the doings of officers and their families. Apparently the spiritual activities of the Whittles and Barrons were not known to him, for he asserted that little was known of Spiritualism there and "Its believers, I will assure you, can be quickly counted, numbering only four persons." Bailey lamented that Portsmouth "never had the benefit of a lecture from any source upon the subject. The day has not yet broken in Virginia, but I trust that the time is not far distant when Spiritualism will be a power felt at the South, enlightening the people, giving them a higher conception of God the Father of all men."[334]

[334] "Aspirations for Light," *Spiritual Telegraph* (November 1, 1856), 213.

Others agreed. Bernard Fauth, a Portsmouth grocer, wrote in February 1857 to alert the *Spiritual Telegraph* that there were many people there who would like to investigate "the phenomena of Spiritualism" and requesting a good test medium. He also asked that "Mediums, Lecturers and Spiritualists who may pass through" call on him.[335] Fauth had come to Virginia from Alsace. He married in 1846 and the couple welcomed a daughter the following year. His wife died in 1848, and their daughter in 1850. Fauth had remarried in 1853 and his wife was pregnant. Philip Fauth, perhaps a brother, was an apothecary who had died in the yellow fever epidemic. Bernard Fauth was a prospering and active member of his community. In 1856 he was one of the incorporators of The Portsmouth Library and Literary Association. Having buried so many and facing the start of a new family, Fauth sought light from the spirit world. He and his wife would have a baby girl in August. As a lieutenant in the Confederate signal corps, Fauth would die in 1864.[336] Not everyone in the port cities who investigated Spiritualism in Norfolk and Portsmouth in the antebellum years would become a supporter of the cause of southern independence. Like all port towns in the South, its population came from diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

Southern-born William H. Lambdin would not fight for the Confederacy. He wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph* in June 1856 describing an 1854 séance at the home of

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[335] "To Mediums, Lecturers and Believers," *Spiritual Telegraph* (February 7, 1857), 1.

[336] "Elmwood & Cedar Grove Cemeteries"; "The Yellow Fever in Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia, 1855, as Reported in the *Daily Dispatch* of Richmond, Virginia, http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/va/yellow-fever/yftoc.html (accessed May 2, 2009); *Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, Passed in 1855–6, in the Eightieth Year of the Commonwealth* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1856), 288; John W. H. Porter, *A Record of Events in Norfolk County, Virginia: from April 19th, 1861, to May 10th, 1862, with a History of the Soldiers and Sailors of Norfolk County, Norfolk City and Portsmouth Who Served in the Confederate States Army or Navy* (Portsmouth, Va.: W. A. Fiske, 1892), 44; "Elmwood & Cedar Grove Cemeteries," ftp.rootsweb.ancestry.com/pub/usgenweb/va/norfolkcity/cemeteries/elmwoodcedargrove/elmcgcem-a-bate.txt (accessed May 3, 2009).

Mrs. Hayden, a professional medium in Boston, during which he had received a message by raps. Born in Maryland, Lambdin's early years are obscure. He had been a founding member of Adin Ballou's Hopedale Community in 1842. Ballou, a Universalist minister, dubbed his system "Practical Christianity" and with his followers purchased land in Worcester County, Massachusetts and set about creating a self-supporting agricultural and industrial community he described as "a systematic attempt to establish an order of Human Society based upon the sublime ideas of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man as taught and illustrated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ." The community's members were expected to value "Temperance, abolitionism, woman's rights, millenarianism, spiritualism, education, and other strivings to remake the world." It is not clear when or why Lambdin left Hopedale and returned to the South, but he put Hopedale's principles into action by becoming part of what by the 1840s was known as the Underground Railroad. A strange incident in 1850, in which "Wm. H. Lambdin, captain and owner of the schooner General Jackson, of Wilmington, Delaware" was accused of attempting to sell three free negroes, led to Captain Lambdin's arrest. Perhaps the stunt was a red herring, meant to establish his reputation as an advocate of slavery. In any case, Captain Lambdin appears to have been active in the Hampton Roads organization that helped runaway slaves escape to freedom. Either he had personal resources that allowed him to purchase sailing vessels or men of substance were supporting his operations. Lambdin's letter appeared in the *Spiritual Telegraph* while he was on trial in Norfolk for "carrying off slaves" as captain of the schooner *Mary Elizabeth,* and at the age of twenty-seven he was sentenced to serve two to three years.[337]

The 1860 census enumerated him in the state penitentiary at Richmond. Lambdin, though outside the southern mainstream, did situate his activism in a Christian framework. He would resurface as an active Spiritualist author and lecturer after the Civil War. He serves as a reminder that there were interstices in southern cities that created space for people who embraced a wide range of beliefs and agendas out of harmony with southern behavioral norms, and that when their activities became too public there were reprisals.

The Atlantic Seaboard: Wilmington, North Carolina

Wilmington and vicinity also had Spiritualists from a variety of backgrounds. The first North Carolinian to sign the 1854 petition had been young Reuben Pettiford, an illiterate free black born along the coast. The following year an interesting letter to the *Banner of Light* from the state's major seaport, Wilmington, probably came from a person of color. It is not clear who N. E. Keyes was, but like Pettiford he or she was probably part of a family that had been free since the mid-1700s. Several Keys would serve in the U. S. Colored Troops in the Civil War. Most who appear on the 1860 North Carolina census lived in a coastal county and had limited literacy, so perhaps the letter was penned by a friend. In clear and polite prose, Keyes took "the liberty to acknowledge the presence of Spiritualism in this vicinity." Although its scope was limited, mediums

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[337] Letter, Wm. H. Lambdin of Norfolk, Va.. *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 7, 1856), 47; "1880 The Banner of Light (Boston) List of Spiritualist Lecturers," http://www.spirithistory.com/invent.html (accessed c. 2006); Adin Ballou, *History of the Hopedale Community from Its Inception to Its Virtual Submergence in the Hopedale Parish,* ed. William S. Heywood (Lowell, Mass.: Thompson & Hill, 1897), vi; Edward K. Spann, *Hopedale, from Commune to Company Town, 1840–1920* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), xiii; Alan Pierce, *The Underground Railroad* (Edina, Minn.: ABDO Publishing Company, 2005), 6; Sheldon Christopher Collins, "Lambden Connection," *The Tidewater Connection: The Underground Railroad at Hampton Roads,* http://sola.nsu.edu/historywebsite/passages/sheldon/Lambden.htm (accessed c. 2006); see also William A Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 284; *Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia for the Session of 1857–58* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1857), 132; "Virginia Governors Executive Papers–Henry Wise," 5, www.pwcvabooks.com/documents/Govwisepartial.pdf (accessed August 5, 2007).

were becoming more developed. "This place," the letter continued, "is favored with a circle of black people, who are pure-minded persons and seekers after truth, and receive communications of an elevated character, some of which are from Swedenborg." Keyes stressed that these people were as pure, and as capable of receiving "communications of an elevated character," as any other circle of seekers. Being a person of color did not preclude elevated thoughts and spiritual aspirations. Keyes went on to point out that there had not yet been any lecturers on the subject, but one would be "liberally and gratefully received by many of the most intelligent and respectable people of this community." Lapsing into prose characteristic of evangelical revivals, Keyes closed by saying that if a speaking and healing medium would come, "I have no doubt that a glorious harvest would be the result of their labors." A final hint about the writer's status, if not race, is the closure, "Yours, respectfully."[338] Most letters to the *Spiritual Telegraph* ended with an expression of thanks or brotherhood or solidarity in the cause of truth and progress, rather than respect.

Two women from Smithville, just down the Cape Fear River from Wilmington, shared their experiences with the *Spiritual Telegraph.* Books written by eminent converts to Spiritualism had helped them in their search for spirit communion. Theresy J. Certain, a sea captain's wife and devout Episcopalian, read the first volume of Judge John Edmonds's influential work on Spiritualism twice before deciding that, "if the communication between departed Spirits and the inhabitants of earth was a reality, I should like to know it." Mrs. Certain had been an Episcopalian for twenty years, and

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[338] Paul Heinegg, *Free African Americans of North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina from the Colonial Period to About 1820,* Volume II (Baltimore: Clearfield Company, 2005), 730, 731; "Beaufort County Soldiers who Served in the U. S. Colored Troops Formed in North Carolina," http://www.rootsweb.com/~ncbeafor/boncusct.htm (accessed January 11, 2009); "Spiritualism in North Carolina," *Spiritual Telegraph* (March 24, 1855), 2.

"tried to walk worthy of my calling," so she made it the subject of her prayers "and to my astonishment I became influenced to write." She reported receiving many communications and being influenced by the spirits to pray, sing, play music, beat to music, and dance. Under spirit influence, Mrs. Certain had also written in the "French, Spanish, Italian, Chinese and the Indian language" and executed astronomical drawings. "Persons say that I am magnetized," she said, meaning under the influence of animal magnetism. "If I am," she claimed, "it is by some omnipotent or unseen power. I never attended a Circle before this Winter, and that was a small one." Mrs. Certain made it clear that her Spiritualism was not popular with most of her neighbors, and using the vocabulary of Christian faith claimed, " I am amply paid for all persecution as I enjoy that pure and sweet peace and comfort which I never enjoyed before. I am happy under any circumstances. All I desire is to do something for the great cause of Spiritualism."[339]

Sarah Galloway, wife of pilot and light ship keeper John Wesley Galloway, may have been part of Theresy Certain's small Smithville circle. Mr. Galloway's name points to a Methodist upbringing. Mrs. Galloway wrote that there were many Spiritualists in Wilmington and that she was a medium. After her daughter and a servant girl died in an accident, Mrs. Galloway had found consolation in reading *The Healing of the Nations* (1855), published by the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge. It was a book of spirit messages received by medium Charles Linton and endorsed by Wisconsin Senator Nathaniel Tallmadge. Theresy Certain was a speaking, writing and drawing medium. Sarah Galloway became a medium for physical manifestations. "We have had the dining-table walk all over the room, and one night it was broken by a gentleman who

[339] "Case of Mediumship in North Carolina," *Spiritual Telegraph* (March 21, 1857), 375.

tried to hold it down. I saw my friend carried around the table seemingly as light as a feather, then carried back and seated on the lounge." Then again, "My hands were influenced to take the accordeon, and I was taken up, chair and all, and whirled around, presenting the accordeon to every one in the room." Thus, claimed the *Spiritual Telegraph,* "she has been convinced, her stricken heart has been relieved, and she has been greatly benefited." Mrs. Galloway requested instructions for holding séances, and was told to meet regularly with earnest seekers of truth, wait patiently for results, and be neither too grave nor too cheerful. "Method and order should be observed in the circle, as necessary conditions of good communications. Discussion should be avoided, and the Spirits will gratify the desires of the circle so far as it may be for their good." Mrs. Galloway's husband would organize Captain Galloway's Coast Guard Company for local defense in the Civil War, and in August 1864, after running the blockade and landing in Hamilton, Bermuda, would contract yellow fever and die there.[340]

Samuel A. Cannon of Wilmington sent money to the *Spiritual Telegraph* in 1856. A Connecticut native who had come south and married into a local family, Cannon had buried his wife Sarah in 1854. She belonged to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Cannon had begun operating a steam saw mill with Sarah's brothers in 1839, advancing the capital to be worked off by his partners. By 1850 he was a clerk in Wilmington, and owned six slaves. His brother-in-law Thomas S. Pickett owned twenty-eight. Cannon contributed to the American Colonization Society in 1851. In 1860 Cannon was farming with seventeen slaves; his brother-in-law owned thirty-seven—and apparently was not a

[340] James Sprunt, *Chronicles of the Cape Fear River, 1660–1916* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards & Broughton Printing Co., 1916), 681; "'S. ------E. Y.'—Smithville, Brunskwick Co., N. Carolina," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 2, 1857), 6; Jim McNeil, *Masters of the Shoals: Tales of the Cape Fear Pilots who Ran the Union Blockade* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2003), 55.

beloved master. At the end of the Civil War, the Picketts were living with Cannon. All the family but Mrs. Pickett had retired when someone knocked at the door and a voice assured her that it was, "Friends, no one to hurt you." She called to Mr. Pickett to open the door, and when he did someone shot him. Cannon ran to get help and two blacks entered the house and threatened Mrs. Pickett with an axe and a large pistol, crying "Kill her, Kill her." One of them struck the Picketts' daughter Caroline in the head with a shotgun, and Mr. Cannon's step daughter also received a blow to the head. Several shots were fired at Mrs. Cannon, who escaped by "crawling under the house and remaining until these inhuman wretches had gone."[341] There is no record of the family seeking contact with the spirit of Thomas Pickett. Samuel Cannon may have first become curious about Spiritualism because some of the leading businessmen in Wilmington had taken an interest in spirit communication.

Levi Austin Hart and John C. McRae were among Wilmington's earliest subscribers to the *Spiritual Telegraph*. Hart, like Cannon, had come from Connecticut. Hart's wife had died of consumption in 1853, and when he remarried in 1854 the ceremony was performed by Rev. M. B. Grier, a Presbyterian. Hart had built up a successful iron works. John C. McRae was a prosperous merchant, a widower whose wife Sallie had died in 1849. When the medium George Redman arrived in Wilmington in 1859, he found "the pioneer of our cause in that section, Colonel John McRae, waiting my reception." Redman was overwhelmed by interest in his circles. Those who "could

[341] "Marriage and Death Notices from the Wilmington, North Carolina Tri-Weekly Commercial," *Clarendon Courier: Publication of the Old New Hanover Genealogical Society* 9:2 (Summer 1997), 27; *The African Repository,* Volume XXVII (Washington: C. Alexander, Printer, 1851), 159; "Our Ancestors of South Hampton Roads," "Horrible Tragedy Near Wilmington," (January 16, 1866) http://digginforkin.tripod.com/SHRds/d223.html (accessed May 27, 2009).

not obtain entrance, contented themselves by gazing through the windows, and applying their auricular appendages to the crevices in the doors." Over the course of a week, Redman saw about five hundred people, and "only two left me in the least skeptical concerning the phenomena of modern Spiritualism." A phrenologist who was lecturing and drawing large crowds each night announced that if Redman could tell him where he was on the night his wife died, he would "announce himself a Spiritualist at his next public lecture." Redman amazed the phrenologist, penning a message that said, "My Dear Husband, You were lying on the bed by my side when I left you for the spirit-world. Thy young wife, Julia." The visit to Wilmington was a resounding success, and though pressed to stay longer Redman had to be off to his next stop in Macon, Georgia.[342]

When Emma Hardinge toured the South in 1860, Wilmington was her final stop. It seems John McRae had traveled to the Northeast at some point to investigate Spiritualism. Hardinge's letter to the *Banner of Light* reminded Samuel Brittan the he would remember "Col. McRae, who represents Spiritualism here." Wilmington remained a profitable stop for a good Spiritualist lecturer. "Private hospitality of the warmest kind," Hardinge gushed, "and public appreciation equally lavish, have sent me on my way rejoicing."[343] Indeed she might rejoice. Everywhere she stopped in the South she was entertained in the finest homes and paid well for her efforts. But beneath the polish and elegance and gracious hospitality, it was after all the antebellum South.

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[342] "Letters of Disfellowship," *Herald of Progress* (March 31, 1860), 4; *Clarendon Courier,* 24; *Minutes of the Presbytery of Fayetteville at Their Ninety-Seventh Sessions, Held at Mt. Horeb Church, Bladen County, N. C. October 10th, & 11th, 1861,* 3, http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/horeb/horeb.html (accessed March 30, 2010); "John MacRae (1806–1883) brother of General Alexander MacRae (Wilmington NC)," http://boards.nbc.ancestry.com/thread.aspx?mv=flat&m=53&p=surnames.macrae (accessed August 12, 2007); *Modern American Spiritualism,* 433.

[343] "Spiritualism in the South," *Banner of Light* (February 11, 1860), 7.

The McRae clan were prosperous, socially prominent and given to free thought. John C. McRae was a brother of General Alexander McRae, president of the Wilmington and Manchester Railroad. This is probably the brother who joined John in his explorations of Spiritualism, and may have been the Alexander McRae who had published *The Liberalist*, *and Wilmington Reporter* from 1827 to 1830. That paper was founded by Universalist minister Jacob Frieze. Hosea Ballou and Abner Kneeland had asked him to go to Wilmington in 1826, where he preached for local Universalists. He also traveled to rural societies in that part of the state and in 1827 evangelized in South Carolina, organized the Southern Convention of Universalists and started *The Liberalist.* It was "a semi-monthly paper, devoted to the cause of Universalism." In 1828 Frieze went back to Rhode Island and Alexander McRae took his place as editor. McRae was described as "a young, tall, manly figure, of rare personal beauty, and a man of taste and talents . . . his manners are stately, but nevertheless friendly." He declared that "Universalists in this State, with but few exceptions, believe in no punishment after death; and none, that I know of, believe in the trinity," but without Frieze's leadership the conference and the paper faltered. In 1835, Alexander McRae traveled with a friend to Texas as agents of the Wilmington Emigrating Society, but did not settle there. At the same time, he and his brother John and Levi A. Hart were among the Wilmington citizens who invested in the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad; Alexander McRae became its third president. Alexander McRae had buried three wives and fathered many sons.[344] He

[344] Gaylord P. Albaugh, "Review of *The Religious Press in the South Atlantic States, 1802–1865: An Annotated Bibliography with Historical Introduction and Notes* by Henry Smith Stroupe," *Church History* 26:2 (June 1857), 201; *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography,* s. v. "Jacob Frieze," http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/jacobfrieze.html (accessed April 1, 2010); "'Progress of Universalism in North and South Carolina' (1827), reprinted in *Universalist Magazine* 11 August 1827, from the contemporary newspaper *The Liberalist* (Wilmington, N. C.)," http://universalistchurch.net/universalist-history/progress-of-universalism-in-north-and-south-carolina-

owned the woman known as the Queen of Mondigo who had her own room and privileged status in his household.

John C. McRae was ten years younger than his brother, and he and Alexander were business partners. John C. was the first mayor of Wilmington and did his part in civic affairs, but probably always felt he lived in his older brother's shadow. Alexander was the railroad president and head of the local branches of the Masons and Odd Fellows. Alexander was a militia general, John C. a colonel. John C. McRae did, however, assume leadership of the local Spiritualists. Despite the fact that he owned twenty-four slaves in 1850, Emma Hardinge Britten claimed in her autobiography, written at the end of her life, that McRae was "Amongst those who most warmly sympathized with me in my loathing of slavery," and that just before the Civil War he "nobly, gallantly manumitted a large plantation full of his slaves."[345] The 1860 census in fact shows no slaves in his name in New Hanover County. The McRaes appear again in the next chapter's discussion of whites and slave mediums.

The Atlantic Seaboard: Charleston, South Carolina

Most of the South Carolinians whose Spiritualism left traces in the records were tied to the plantation economy but spent all or part of the year in urban centers such as

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1827/ (accessed March 31, 2010); "Minutes of the Southern Convention of Universalists," *The Christian Telescope and Universalist Miscellany* III:1 (August 1826 to February 1827), 151; Mrs. Ann Royall, *Mrs. Royall's Southern Tour, or Second Series of the Black Book* (Washington, 1830), 158; Thomas Whittemore, *The Modern History of Universalism: From the Era of the Reformation to the Present Time* (Boston: Published by the Author, 1830), 441; *Travels in the Old South: The Ante-bellum South, 1825–1860,* Volume III, ed. Thomas Dionysius Clark (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 57; James Sprunt, *Tales and Traditions of the Lower Cape Fear* (Wilmington, N.C.: LeGwin Brothers, Printers, 1896), 111–112; Alvaretta Kenan Register, *The Kenan Family and Some Allied Families of the Compiler and Publisher* (1967), 18.

[345] Emma Hardinge Britten and Margaret Wilkinson, *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten* (London: J. Heywood, 1900), 145.

Charleston or Columbia. William Gilmore Simms and James Henry Hammond are the best known, but Elizabeth and Eugene Genovese identified others. Edmund Ruffin attended a dinner party in 1857 and afterward noted that the group had discussed many things, including mesmerism and Spiritualism, and that Charleston *Courier* editor Richard Yeadon was a believer in both. Former South Carolina Governor Benjamin Franklin Perry wrote that Chancellor George Dargan not only believed in "spirit rappings, mesmerism, psychology, clairvoyance, etc., etc.," but "was a very efficient and powerful agent in these occult sciences." Perry had seen Dargan "put a servant at the hotel in Columbia to sleep with a waiter of dishes in his hands by simply looking at him." Dargan was "a respected legal scholar and an ardent nullifier who bragged he had never set foot out of South Carolina." Perry remembered him as tall and handsome, and "as pure a man as ever lived." Dargan had at his home a negro boy who was an excellent medium,[346] probably one of the hundred slaves he owned in 1850.

Inland Waterways: Wheeling, Virginia on the Ohio River

Wheeling's Spiritualists had little in common with the aristocratic Carolinian slaveholders who communicated with the spirit world. The city's most energetic pre-war Spiritualist, erstwhile Methodist John B. Wolff, moved downriver to Moundsville in 1855. In Wheeling that year, James Barnes, George W. Robbins, Dennis Savery and Ralph Marsh sent money to the *Christian Spiritualist*. Barnes and Robbins were transplanted New Englanders. Barnes's father had come to Wheeling from Massachusetts

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[346] *Mind of the Master Class,* 598; Benjamin Franklin Perry, *Reminiscences of Public Men, with Speeches and Addresses,* Volume II (Greenville, S.C.: Shannon & Co., Printers, 1889), 63–67.

in 1845 with a partner and leased a glass works. Wheeling, with its location on the Ohio River and proximity to deposits of cheap coal to power industry, was poised to grow. "The only great towns of the West and South at that time were Cincinnati, St. Louis and New Orleans. Not a mile of railroad west of the Allegheny mountains was built."[347] When the elder Barnes died of typhoid fever in 1849, James Barnes inherited his father's share of the prospering business. George W. Robbins, also from Massachusetts, worked as a glass cutter. Ralph Marsh was a laborer; he and his wife married in England but their children were all born in Virginia. Dennis Savery is harder to trace. We know nothing of their religious predilections. From Wheeling, the Ohio River flows southwest to the Mississippi.

Inland Waterways: Nashville, Tennessee

Nashville is on the Cumberland River. Riverboats moved goods and people west to the Mississippi and thence up the Ohio to Cincinnati and Wheeling, up the Mississippi to St. Louis and beyond, or down the Mississippi towards New Orleans. The city was the home of Jesse Babcock Ferguson, whose name was synonymous with Spiritualism in antebellum Tennessee. The chapter on Ferguson introduced the many Nashville residents who joined him in exploring mysteries of Spiritualism, but many others in the state were also drawn to spirit communication. An early letter from a woman in Mississippi to the *Spiritual Telegraph* recalled a childhood experience in Tennessee that combined elements of Indian lore, African folklore and Modern Spiritualism. As a child outside Nashville, the correspondent had amused herself digging in a mound of earth and come across a

[347] "Glass: South Wheeling Glass Works," *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* (Sept. 14, 1886), http://wheeling.weirton.lib.wv.us/history/bus/hobbs.htm (accessed December 14, 2008).

human skull. She ran for her father, and he found a total of sixteen skulls, "all bearing apparently the impression of the same axe." That night she went back to the mound, and saw a ball of light rise from the ground and float in the air. The girl "called an old negro man who professed the ability to talk with the Spirits" and through him was told she would one day learn the story of the skulls. The girl grew up and married a Mr. Stump, apparently in Mississippi, and told her husband the tale. He claimed his father had killed the Indians in self defense and described the mound and its exact location. Since that revelation, Mrs. Stump had consulted a rapping medium and learned the ball of light she had seen was the spirit of her father-in-law. A white child who had known a slave who spoke with spirits was prepared to believe in the possibilities of Modern Spiritualism, as were the blacks who had lived with such a person in their community. As Catherine L. Albanese explained, the story of American metaphysical religion "features, especially, the religious worlds that people made together and often, without consciously taking note of it, with each other's property."[348]

The Mississippi River Corridor: St. Louis

As the gateway to the West and a commercial hub on the border between North and South, St. Louis supported a vibrant Spiritualist community. Most of the leaders of St. Louis Spiritualism were not slaveholders in the last years before the Civil War. The taint of the Kansas border wars and the slave labor that dominated the city's levee had enhanced the allure of Chicago to northern capitalists, and many had transferred their interests to the growing railroad hub on the shores of Lake Michigan. Northern-born

[348] "Digest of Correspondence," *Telegraph Papers* (1854), 284; *Republic of Mind and Spirit,* 17–18.

residents of St. Louis believed that until slavery was got rid of, their city could not compete economically with Chicago.[349]

The St. Louis Spiritualists were well organized; they rented a hall by the year and engaged a steady succession of speakers. A. Miltenberger and Peter Bland, who had been early members of the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, were active promoters of Spiritualism. Miltenberger was the man whose name was most associated with the cause in that city, the most frequent correspondent of the Spiritualist press. He had written to the *Spiritual Telegraph* in 1855 when the national newspapers were awash in suggestions that Spiritualists advocated free love. Miltenberger stressed that while "personally acquainted with over three hundred Spiritualists (who confess themselves as such) in this city, . . . I have yet to learn of the first one who approves the principles of Free-Love in any sense." He wrote in 1856 to share messages received by the Od Force Circle, and a few months later about some mediums who had been induced to come to St. Louis to create a spirit room like Koons's in Ohio. Miltenberger had attended every performance since they opened more than two weeks earlier, "only satisfied after receiving and reviewing all the evidence of all my senses—seeing, hearing and feeling." The room would accommodate thirty people, and was such a success that "we intend to develop mediums of our own, and keep the room as a *permanent institution* in this city." When the Spiritualists engaged a hall for the year in 1858, A. Miltenberger was the contact person, as he was when Emma Hardinge lectured in St. Louis in 1859 and 1860. Daguerrean artist and petition signer J. J. Outley was the contact when John Mansfield came to St. Louis. Miltenberger sent long updates on Spiritualist events and organization

[349] Jeffery S. Adler, *Yankee Merchants and the Making of the Urban West: The Rise and Fall of Antebellum St. Louis* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 129–147.

in St. Louis to the *Banner of Light.* The fall 1860 lecture series began with "the Rev. J. B. Ferguson, of Nashville, Tenn., who with improved health and inspiring influences exceeded all his previous efforts in this city, and gave great satisfaction to his numerous friends."[350] Organized Spiritualism would continue to thrive in St. Louis until disrupted by the Civil War.

Figure 11. Steamboats on the Mississippi River.

The Mississippi River Corridor: Memphis, Tennessee

Professional medium Thomas Gales Forster and Dr. Erasmus Taylor Rose, Marcus Winchester's old friend, left St. Louis together on the steamer *Falls City* in 1858.

[350] "How the Matter Stands in St. Louis," *Spiritual Telegraph* (October 6, 1855), 3; "Dr. Robinson's Revelations," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 10, 1856), 15; "Physical Manifestations," *Spiritual Telegraph* (September 6, 1856); "Movements of Mediums," *Spiritual Telegraph* (January 16, 1858), 6; "Miss Hardinge's Movements," *Spiritual Telegraph* (October 29, 1859), 11; "Movements of Mediums," *Spiritual Telegraph* (October 27, 1860), 7; "Correspondence," *Banner of Light* (February 11, 1860), 7; "Lectures in St. Louis," *Banner of Light* (November 3, 1860), 6.

The family of Marcus Brutus Winchester may have begun Spiritualist activity in Memphis, and widow Lucy Lenore Winchester was conduit to the spirit world for local men of wealth and power until her death in 1860. Forster was on his way to New Orleans, where he would inspire Glendy Burke to investigate Spiritualism. Rose got off at Memphis. "He resides near Randolph, Tennessee, above Memphis," Forster wrote in a letter to the *Banner of Light,* "and is the only Spiritualist in his neighborhood. He is an able and brave defender of the truth, as it has been committed to him." A nephew of President James Madison and a son of the Old Dominion, Rose had come west with his parents. His brother James Madison Rose died at the Alamo. In 1841 Erasmus Rose transferred his membership to Calvary Episcopal Church in Memphis and was married there in 1845, but there is a record of Brother Erasmus Rose being disciplined in April 1846 by the Browns Creek Primitive Baptist Church, northeast of Memphis in Haywood County, for drinking ardent spirits to excess. By the time he and Jesse Ferguson came together at Mrs. Winchester's, Rose's brother Hugh had died in 1856, and in 1857 Rose helped "Y. A. Carr, Medium," a physician who was attending séances with Samuel Watson, to publish a book.[351]

In Memphis, Methodist minister Samuel Watson was communing with the spirits of his dead wife and children through a slave medium, and quietly investigating spiritual

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[351] "Editorial Correspondence," *Banner of Light* (February 27, 1858), 4; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Rose, James M. (1805–1836)," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/frocb.html (accessed April 1, 2010); "Calvary Episcopal Church Register, Book I, 1839–1842," *"Ansearchin'" News* 16:3 (July–September 1969), 126; "The Curlin Family and the Browns Creek Baptist Church, Haywood County, Tennessee, 1836–1879," http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/tn/haywood/church/browns.txt (accessed August 3, 2006); C. Thomas Chapman, "Descendants of Ambrose Madison, the Grandfather of President James Madison, Jr.," 36, www.jamesmadisonfamily.com/docs/AmbroseMadison.pdf (accessed April 1, 2010); Spirit of the Wisdom Sphere, through Y. A. Carr, M. D., Medium, *A Philosophical History of the Origin and Development of Vegetable and Animal Life, and of the Human Mind, with an Explanation of the Mode of the Mind's Connection with the Spirit World* (Memphis, Tenn.: Published for the Proprietor, 1857).

phenomena with a group of doctors and clergymen. Dr. Y. A. Carr and Arthur K. Taylor seem to have been the only members of Watson's group who regularly consulted the widow of Marcus Winchester. James Chadwick, who had been at Mrs. Winchester's when Jesse Ferguson visited, was an insurance agent.[352] He arranged Emma Hardinge's visit to Memphis in early 1860.[353] By the end of the 1850s the major cities of the South had become profitable stopping places for professional mediums.

Emma Hardinge remembered being welcomed cordially in Memphis in 1860, and that large audiences attended her sabbath lectures, but that there were "frequent and unmistakable signs of hostility." The Memphis *Inquirer,* "a professed organ of the Presbyterian party," accused her of being a "New England abolitionist" and belonging to the "free love party." Clergymen, she said, incited local "toughs" to threaten to "lynch all parties concerned" if she delivered a planned benefit lecture for a local orphanage. During that lecture, someone hurled a rock through a window, breaking the glass and narrowly missing her. A letter to the *Inquirer* opined that if the citizens could not support orphan asylums without importing "infidel lecturers from the North" they might be well advised to "let them slide."[354] Emma Hardinge never returned to Memphis, but it was to be the center of the Christian Spiritualist movement in the South in the 1870s.

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[352] *W. H. Rainey & Co.'s Memphis City Directory, and General Business Advertiser, for 1855 & '6* (Memphis: D. O. Dooley & Co., 1855), 61.

[353] "Miss Hardinge's Movements," *Spiritual Telegraph* (November 19, 1859), 359.

[354] *Modern American Spiritualism*, 414.

The Mississippi River Corridor: Vicksburg, Mississippi

Vicksburg historian Gordon Cotton has found a cluster of Spiritualists there, none of them among the fourteen who had signed the 1854 petition. Absalom Pettit was born in western Virginia in 1798, and arrived in Mississippi around 1818. He worked as an overseer and was one of the fortunate men who married into the planter class in the early days of the cotton frontier. His bride, Rebecca Covington, brought to the marriage "an estate plus a full complement of slaves," and Pettit became a planter near Vicksburg. Their third child, born on their fourth wedding anniversary, died in infancy. Rebecca died giving birth to their fourth child. With three young children, Pettit remarried less than a year latter. The year 1833 was a hard one. His second wife died two weeks after the birth of their second child. A week later his seven-year-old son Alexander died, and a few months after that his nine-year-old daughter. Within a year, Pettit married again and his third wife soon bore the first of at least a dozen children by him. In 1838, Absalom Pettit was accepted on trial as a preacher in the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and became a member for life of the American and Foreign Bible Society with a gift of thirty dollars or more. Pettit was discontinued from the Memphis Circuit at his own request in 1840. Like many other serious seekers of his time, he studied and read and came to his own conclusions. He also wrote pamphlets on religious subjects. His curiosity, religiosity and personal needs had opened him to the promises of spirit communication. One source described him as "very liberal in his views, so much so that he was at one time tried by his church for the free utterance of his views, but was acquitted." Pettit had become a member of Antioch Baptist Church and was licensed to

preach, but the congregation withdrew its support when Pettit "persisted in claiming to be a medium for a deceased relative."[355]

Gordon Cotton discovered others who investigated Spiritualism in Vicksburg and environs. They were attorneys J. W. M. Harris,[356] James Moore and William L. Sharkey, Jr., and physician's wife Emma Balfour. She had experimented with her minister and several others in 1852. James Moore, a young attorney from North Carolina, had moved to Friar's Point by 1860. Sharkey lived with his eponymous uncle, an eminent jurist and Whig politician, in 1850. By 1860, the young Vicksburg lawyer had a wife and infant son, and would soon be a Confederate quartermaster.

The Mississippi River Corridor: Natchez, Mississippi

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[355] Gordon Cotton, "Young lawyer communed with the spirits, his diary says," Vicksburg *Post* (October 3, 1999). Copy of article furnished by Mr. Cotton; Michael Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: the Natchez District, 1860 80* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 10; "The Pettit's [sic]," http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=:1736097&id=I97087722 (accessed March 26 2010); *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1829–1839* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 603; *First Annual Report of the American and Foreign Bible Society, Presented April 28th, 1838, with an Appendix, Containing Extracts of Correspondence, &c. Together with a List of Auxiliary Societies, Life Directors, and Members* (New York: Printed by John Gray, 1838), 35, 49; Rev. John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, Volume II (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908), 441; *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, Embracing an Authentic and Comprehensive Account of the Chief Events in the History of the State and a Record of the Lives of Many of the Most Worthy and Illustrious Families and Individuals,* Volume II (Chicago: Goodspeed Brothers, 1891), 598; Gordon Cotton, "Young lawyer communed with the spirits, his diary says," Vicksburg *Post* (October 3, 1999). Copy of article furnished by Mr. Cotton. See also Gordon Cotton, *Antioch: The First Baptist Church in Warren County, Mississippi* (Vicksburg: Gordon A. Cotton, 1997), 75.

[356] Moore mentions meeting in "Mr. Harris' law office," suggesting he might refer to the senior partner in Harris & Harris, James W. M. Harris rather than his younger brother Nathaniel. Gordon Cotton, "Young lawyer communed with the spirits, his diary says," Vicksburg *Post* (October 3, 1999). Copy of article furnished by Mr. Cotton. That J. W. M. Harris was the man of greater substance is also suggested by the 1860 census, on which he has a wife and children and claims assets in excess of $30,000. Nathaniel is unmarried, in the same household, and lists no assets. Both Harris brothers would go on to prominence. "J. W. M. Harris served as a Mississippi Circuit Judge beginning in 1860, while N. H. Harris was a Confederate Brigadier General, and then president of the Mississippi Valley and Ship Island Railroad in the 1870s." Elizabeth Lee Thompson, "Reconstructing the Practice: The Effects of Expanded Federal Judicial Power on Postbellum Lawyers," *The American Journal of Legal History* 43:3 (July 1999), 315.

Natchez native Thomas Neibert and the remnants of his family relocated to New Orleans in the mid-1850s, but others in Natchez kept interest in spirit communion alive there. The March 1855 *Christian Spiritualist* listed receipts from Mrs. Eliza Scott and Richard Angell of Waterproof, Louisiana, Samuel Goodrich of Baton Rouge, and Mrs. W. H. Watkins of Natchez that would send the *Christian Spiritualist* to Methodists deep in the cotton South who were related by birth, marriage and religion. Eliza Scott and Honora Angell of Waterproof were sisters of Samuel Goodrich. Mrs. Watkins was the wife of Methodist clergyman William H. Watkins, who had been a leader in the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1845. The son of an early settler of Mississippi, William H. Watkins was "a slender, compact man," born there in 1815. William Watkins chose Methodism over his father's decidedly Baptist preferences, studied for the ministry, and was admitted on trial—along with Richard Angell—to the Mississippi Conference in 1838. For a number of years he was the president of Centenary College in Louisiana, and then served in the New Orleans Conference. There he met and married Elizabeth Jones Johnson, the widow of a ship captain; they moved together to Natchez. Mrs. Watkins, like her husband, was a devout Methodist. In 1860 they would own nine of the one thousand five hundred twelve slaves in the city of Natchez, and in 1861 Mrs. Watkins would serve as president of the Natchez Ladies Military Aid Society.[357]

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[357] D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 247; "Death Notices from the Nashville Christian Advocate, January–July, 1881," http://www.tngenweb.org/records/tn_wide/obits/nca/nca7-04.htm (accessed November 28, 2008); *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1829–1839*, 516; *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, Embracing an Authentic and Comprehensive Account of the Chief Events in the History of the State and a Record of the Lives of Many of the Most Worthy and Illustrious Families and Individuals,* Volume II (Chicago: Goodspeed Brothers, 1891), 987–988; "Ladies Military Aid Society," Natchez *Daily Courier* (June 19, 1861), 1, http://www.uttyler.edu/vbetts/natchez_courier.htm (accessed December 14, 2008).

The Mississippi River Corridor: Waterproof, Louisiana

Twenty-five miles upriver in Tensas Parish, Louisiana, the rich alluvial land was, when protected by levees, ideally suited to cotton production. The Scott and Angell families lived in the wryly-named settlement of Waterproof in 1854. Elizabeth Scott's father, Samuel Goodrich, Sr., had brought his family to Mississippi from New York. Elizabeth had married John Scott, a native of South Carolina, and her sister Honora wed British immigrant Richard Angell. Elizabeth's husband John was a planter on the 1850 census, and in the next household lived her brother John Fox Goodrich, also a planter, and their father Samuel. John Scott and John Goodrich each owned thirty-six slaves. Robert Angell was born in London in 1804 and studied medicine with his uncle, who was surgeon to King George I. Why he left England is not clear, but he was practicing medicine in Mississippi when he and William H. Watkins became Methodist preachers in 1838. His devotion to his family and his practice seem to have made itinerancy untenable, and he declined a transfer to the Alabama conference and was declared superannuated that year at the age of thirty-four. Angell moved in and out of the Methodist clergy and within the community of southern homeopaths, exposed to but leaving no evidence of becoming a part of the Swedenborgianism common among homeopaths or the Spiritualism embraced by much of his extended family. He was one of several homeopathic physicians who worked throughout the outbreak 1853 yellow fever outbreak in New Orleans; another was Swedenborgian William Henry Holcombe. The disease wiped out sixty-five hundred of the forty thousand residents of the city. The fatigue and horror of that episode sent Angell on an extended visit with his sister's family in Tensas

parish, Louisiana, and that family's thoughts turned to those who had gone to the spirit land. Angell would have had many opportunities for conversation and investigation of both Swedenborgianism and Spiritualism, and would have seen a steady stream of items on the subjects in the press. Angell settled in New Orleans and practiced medicine until his death in 1879, and apparently had the confidence of many in the American community. A note dated "New Orleans Sep 20 1874" in Spiritualist Sarah Norton Chilton's store of cures and remedies reads, "Dr. Angell and family have lived in New Orleans I believe and are 7 in number none have had yellow fever except himself. His directions when it is about is to take one drop of Belladonna at night and one drop of Ascontite in the morning; during the time the yellow fever is prevailing–He thinks it had something to do in protecting his family."[358] This file also includes a prescription by Dr. Holcombe for colic.

Natchez physician William Henry Holcombe went to Waterproof, in Tensas Parish, in the fall of 1855 to help treat yellow fever victims, and soon relocated there to replace a physician who had died from the disease. Holcombe and Angell point to the many strands of medical and spiritual thought that were available to healers, and how homeopathy helped to disseminate the idea that disease was spiritual in nature.

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[358] "A steamboat captain saw Abner Smalley stuck on a rise during high water and called out 'Well, Abner, I see you're waterproof.' Smalley gave the name to his land." Jeffrey Alan Owens, "Naming the Plantation: An Analytical Survey from Tensas Parish, Louisiana, " *Agricultural History* 68:4 (Autumn 1994), 60–61; *Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference,* 401; *The Kentucky State Register, for the Year 1847. Containing the Names and Residences of All the Judges and Clerks of Courts, Commonwealth Attorneys, Justices of the Peace, Sheriffs, Coroners, Notaries Public, Commissioners of Tax, Attorneys at Law, Physicians, and Principal Merchants; also, a National Register, and a Great Variety of General Information, Which Will Be Useful to Men of Business Particularly, and to Every Citizen of the State of Kentucky,* ed. Taliaferro B. Shaffner (Louisville: Published by Morton & Griswold, 1847), 107; John S. Haller, Jr., *The History of American Homeopathy: The Academic Years, 1820–1935* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Pharmaceutical Products Press, 2005), 101; Norton, Chilton and Dameron Papers, Series 3, folder 26 (Other Papers: Cures and remedies), SHC.

Homeopathy's understanding of disease and Swedenborgianism's spiritual beliefs are difficult to differentiate from those of many Spiritualists because they were so muddled in the minds of most people. Holcombe, like his father, was a graduate of the prestigious medical department of the University of Pennsylvania. The senior Holcombe was also a Methodist preacher. William Henry Holcombe's devoutly Christian beliefs were instilled by his family; he accepted the Methodist tenet of free grace, that all could be saved but not necessarily that all would be. As a Swedenborgian, he believed the second coming had already come to pass, but the reestablishment of heaven was taking place on a plane of which most people were aware. He reflected in his diary on the "anti-scriptural superstition" of the resurrection of the body, but believed in the "imperishable spiritual body" that experienced "a glorious deliverance and resurrection" from the material body at death, "ascending to higher spheres and leaving material things forever and ever."[359]

Holcombe's rejection of spirit communication is a reminder that Swedenborgians and Spiritualists, though both might believe Swedenborg had visited heaven and spoken with spirits and angels, were not in agreement about communion with the other side. Even Christian Spiritualists like Jesse Ferguson tended to focus less on Jesus Christ and more on man's direct relationship with God. Holcombe, though, understood that, "Evil spirits and devils hate . . . the Divinity of Jesus Christ and the sanctity of the Word, and deny or ignore them in their communications with men."[360] Christ was the vital center of Holcombe's New Church faith in a way He may not have been for many antebellum

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[359] "Louisiana Items," *Louisiana Courier* [New Orleans] (October 2, 1855), 2; Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-19th Century U. S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 334 ff. 138; William Henry Holcombe, *Yellow Fever and Its Homeopathic Treatment* (New York: William Radde, 1856), 53; William Henry Holcombe Diary, SHC, 116.

[360] William Henry Holcombe, *Our Children in Heaven* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1875), 200.

Christian Spiritualists. For Jesse Ferguson, Jesus functioned as a moral exemplar; he seldom mentioned Christ in any other role. Even so, both Holcombe and Ferguson believed themselves to be good Christians. Engagement with the world of spirits was a complicated thing. Certainty that it was possible only translated into certainty that it *should* be done for some Christians—the occasional Swedenborgian among them.

There was a network of New Church adherents in the South, just as there was of Spiritualists, who lived with a heightened awareness of the world of spirits if not in agreement about communicating with that world. Living near Richard Angell and his Spiritualist relatives in Waterproof in the 1850s were two Swedenborgian receivers. Dr. J. M. Lawrence was in Natchez by 1838, and remained there until moving to Waterproof in 1850. Dr. Lawrence was a physician, and thus in all likelihood practiced homeopathy. Wealthy planters with families and slaves to be cared for sometimes hired plantation physicians, and there were innumerable ailments to treat in the muggy environs of the Mississippi River. By 1860 Lawrence had moved his family to Shreveport. The other Swedenborgian in Waterproof was John P. Mason, a family man and merchant who would die of yellow fever in 1855.[361]

The Mississippi River Corridor: Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Samuel Uriah Goodrich of Baton Rouge had subscribed to the *Christian Spiritualist* at the same time as his sister Elizabeth Scott and his brother-in-law Richard Angell. Goodrich was a poor farmer, living an entirely different sort of life than his planter siblings. In 1844 he made a donation to the American Colonization Society

[361] "The Roxborough Post of the G.A.R.," http://www.gnibo.com/kirk+jones (accessed December 14, 2008).

through Rev. William Winans, a Methodist minister and ardent colonizationist. Winans and other early Louisiana and Mississippi proponents of the movement to resettle free blacks in Africa were either clergymen with concerns about their souls and welfare or businessmen and planters concerned about the stability of their holdings. They early discussed breaking with the national organization to distance themselves from any hint of abolitionism, and Winans, a former Quaker, himself set a ministerial example for southern Methodists; he owned thirty-five people in 1850. Goodrich was still too poor, but by 1860 he would own a thirteen-year-old girl. Perhaps he had received a small inheritance that allowed this luxury. Old Samuel Goodrich had died in Natchez in 1851, so the whole family had recently united in the experience of shared loss. Records show that Samuel Uriah Goodrich enlisted in the Confederate army, and that he and his wife died in the Methodist faith; they are buried in the Bethel Methodist Church Cemetery in East Baton Rouge.[362]

Also in Baton Rouge were young Sarah Morgan and her siblings and friends, learning to call the spirits as a trendy parlor amusement.

The Mississippi River Corridor: New Orleans, Louisiana

In New Orleans, there were many nodes of alternative understanding of the workings of mind and spirit. By 1850, more than one hundred thousand people lived there. There were distinct French and American sectors in the antebellum city. It is safe

[362] *The African Repository and Colonial Journal,* Volume 20, 1844 (Washington: C. Alexander, Printer, 1844), 32; Timothy F. Reilly, "The Louisiana Colonization Society and the Protestant Missionary, 1830–1860," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 43:4 (Autumn 2002), 436; "Bethel Methodist Church Cemetery, East Baton Rouge Parish, La.," files.usgwarchives.org/la/eastbatonrouge/cemeteries/bethmeth.txt (accessed December 14, 2008).

to speculate that everyone with a French surname was at least culturally Roman Catholic, though they had come for a variety of reasons and from different backgrounds. Early on, exiles from a succession of regimes in France settled in New Orleans. Between 1793 and 1810, refugees from plantations in Saint-Domingue (Haiti) came in droves. Their slaves brought with them "the beliefs and practices of Vodoun, which have had a marked influence on African American religious culture in New Orleans." Others continued to arrive from France, sometimes by way of Europe and the northeastern United States.[363]

Theophilous Anfoux was a French-born surgical dentist who continued to promote phrenology. In 1858, Anfoux hosted one of the Fowler brothers, who gave a course of lessons at Anfoux's and the Odd Fellows' Hall "to teach every member the exact location of all the Phrenological Organs; to give rules by which they may Examine Heads; judge of Temperament, and Read Character correctly." French immigrant Joseph Barthet's mesmeric society had begun experimenting with spirit communication in the early 1850s, and Barthet's name appears in an 1856 listing of remittances to *The Spiritual Telegraph.* He had been an early champion of the black Creole blacksmith and healing medium J. B. Valmour, who enjoyed "widespread interracial support" until "in 1858 authorities forced Valmour underground, accusing him of 'monkeyshines' and practicing the voodoo arts of 'gris-gris.'"[364] That there was ongoing contact among whites and people of color is well known. It is less clear how or if racial boundaries were crossed in

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[363] Catherine Lowman Wessinger, *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations Outside the Mainstream* (Champaign :University of Illinois Press, 1993), 155; Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 53–54.

[364] "How to Examine Heads—A Private Class in Practical Phrenology," *Daily Delta* (March 7, 1858, 5; "Private Class in Phrenology," *Daily Crescent* (March 8, 1858), 2; "Remittances," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 17, 1856), outside back cover; Shirley Elizabeth Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 154.

Spiritualist circles. Several white Spiritualists in the South mention black mediums, usually their slaves, but this project did not find any such relationships in New Orleans. They may have existed, but the experience and attitudes of Sarah Morgan, combined with what seems to have been an increasingly strident effort to suppress "monkeyshines" and "gris-gris" among the colored population, tell us that "respectable" white southerners of Anglo-American stock would not have wanted their names publicly connected to anything that smacked of African magic and superstition. This may be why white medium and healer James Wingard became increasingly popular.

In 1857 and 1858, Joseph Barthet edited *Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans,* and included spirit messages through both white mediums and mediums of color.[365] *Le Spiritualiste* was a forum for francophone Louisianans curious about the potential of minds embodied and disembodied. Bannon G. Thibodeaux was born on a Terrebonne Parish plantation, but studied law in Maryland and practiced in Louisiana until he was elected to Congress for two terms in the late 1840s. His sugar planting and manufacturing generated substantial revenue. An 1851 profile of Terrebonne Parish in *De Bow's Review* reported that Thibodeaux's parents had been the first permanent settlers in the area, and when his mother died in 1850 she left her children in "opulent circumstances." At the expiration of his second term in Congress, Thibodeaux "abandoned the profession of the law, and settled down quietly in his domestic circle, more congenial to his feelings than the boisterous sea of politics. He has a fine collection of scientific and literary works, the only library of consequence in the parish." Thibodeaux was a gentleman scholar, and one of the things he investigated was the spirit world. His name appears on a list of 1851

[365] "The Free Black Press: Freedom in French," http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/exhibits/creole/Institution/institution.html (accessed August 3, 2007).

receipts by the New Church Tract and Missionary Society. A letter to *Le Spiritualiste* in 1858 described a table-tipping he had attended at the unusual hour of 7:00 A.M.[366]

Like Jesse Ferguson in Nashville, Joseph Barthet named names. An 1858 report of a séance was appended, by permission, with the names of twenty-seven witnesses.[367] Most had French surnames. The two with surnames from the British Isles who can be identified were a collector born in Vermont who would have worked with customhouse personnel on a daily basis, and a ship captain who lived in Brooklyn. We can say with some certainty that three were born in Haiti, one in Martinique, two in France (three if we include Barthet), and three in Louisiana. Two were probably born in Germany. One of these would later marry Olympe Marc, who was there with her parents and sister. J. and J. B. Lamothe, goldsmiths, were both born in Haiti by 1800. J. B. Lamothe's daughter Heloise married into another New Orleans family that was intevestigating Spiritualism by 1855, the Cavarocs. Charles, Cora and Henriette Cavaroc had lost their father in 1852. The Cavarocs will enter this story again as subjects of a letter to Godfrey Barnsley about séance activity.

One of the most respected New Orleans figures to publicly investigate Spiritualism was thrice-widowed cotton factor and commission merchant Glendy Burke, who was also a leader in promoting construction of railroads. Besides all that, he was prominent in the New Church in New Orleans, "organizer of the public school system, and one of the founders of the University of Louisiana. As a member of the state

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[366] "Historical and Statistical Collections of Louisiana: Terrebonne," *De Bow's Review of the Southern and Western States* (December 1851), 605; "Treasurer's Report," *The New Church Repository and Monthly Review* (July 1851), 337; Letter, Bannon G. Thibodaux, Terrebonne, le 11 octobre 1858, *Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans,* v. II (1858), 275–276.

[367] "Manifestations Diverses," *Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans,* v. II (1858), 11–15.

legislature he was active in the cause of education for many years." That he should have attempted to contact the spirit world seems out of character with his devotion to the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, but Burke did so and wrote about it for the New Orleans *Sunday Delta.*[368]

Burke was led to investigate after attending public lectures by Spiritualist Thomas Gales Forster, which he found "remarkable alike for their erudition and eloquence." Burke claimed he had realized "positive evidence—which is far beyond faith—of the immortality of the soul and the immediate communication of departed spirits with us here on earth." Whatever one's thoughts on the Bible's teaching or denominational differences, "there can be no doubt that Spiritualism fully satisfies the minds on those points of all who will calmly and truthfully examine it." Burke had received manifestations in New Orleans, but sought "a test to remove doubts most likely to arise from the supposed influence of personal contiguity, or what is ascribed by some to thought-reading!" He sent a letter to an old friend in the spirit world through "spiritual postmaster" John Mansfield. When a reply came, Burke asked his friend John M. Chilton, an attorney, to open the reply and read it. As we shall see presently, Chilton's wife and her family and close friends were fascinated by spirit communication during and after the Civil War. The letter John Chilton opened included Burke's original letter with the seal unbroken. The reply from the spirit began, "God be praised that you have thought proper to seek this great pearl of priceless value. You have dared to be a man, to say to

[368] William W. Chenault and Robert C. Reinders, "The Northern-born Community of New Orleans in the 1850s," *The Journal of American History* 51:2 (September 1964), 238. On Burke's leadership and initiative, see Henry Rightor, *Standard History of New Orleans, Louisiana* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1900), 299; "Department of Internal Improvements. South-western Rail-road Convention at New-Orleans," *De Bow's Review of the Southern and Western States* (June 1851), 690; *New Church in the New World,* 176; "Another Test from Mr. Mansfield," *Banner of Light* (May 29, 1858), 3

the skeptical, and I may well add, infidel world, that, as for Glendy Burke, you dare investigate the subject of Spiritualism. . . .” Burke was so fully persuaded by this test that he submitted the text of both letters to the local press. His stated position was that it costs nothing to investigate, though he had to know Swedenborg had cautioned that evil spirits would try to trick men who sought communication with the other side. “Do not, therefore, denounce that of which you may be entirely ignorant.” was Burke’s policy. “Denounce it when you have found it worthy of your denunciation, after an impartial investigation, but not until then.” As an acknowledged New Church leader, he may have influenced others of his faith to try the spirits. Despite his personal experiences of spirit communication, Burke remained firmly attached to his Swedenborgian community of faith. During the Civil War, General Benjamin Butler would have him arrested for holding New Church meetings without having taken the oath of allegiance.

Spiritualists were just one group of purveyors in the marketplace of belief. Another, of course, was the New Church. New Orleans newspapers give an overview of how the spending public was encouraged to engage with issues of body and spirit on the eve of the Civil War. During the month of December 1859, Emma Hardinge was drawing large audiences to her trance lectures at Odd Fellows’ Hall. A notice in the Sunday paper on December 11 offered the services of a daguerrean who would “take the daguerreotypes of persons after death, thereby securing to a person his friend’s image forever.” Emma Hardinge’s lectures had gotten people talking, and on December 17 the *Delta* noted that she would be lecturing in the morning and evening, and they were “informed that those who have become interested in the subject, will soon have an opportunity of investigating the phenomena of Spiritualism, as Dr. Redmond [sic], the

somewhat noted test medium, has arrived in the city, and will soon give *seances.*" Nathan C. Folger & Son thought that "Every body should be well dressed during the Christmas holidays, and look well at least once a year," and at their establishment people could "accomplish this desideratum at a trifling cost." Soon after, "Dr. H. A. Benton, psychologist, magnetizer and medical electrician, of the Saratoga Springs Water Cure, N. Y.," took a suite of rooms and offered cures "for all curable diseases" and a course of lectures at Odd Fellows' Hall, where Emma Hardinge was to speak that evening with "the subject to be proposed by the audience. This will be an interesting occasion." The same issue advertised that Dr. Redman, "the eminent Test Medium, from New York, is convincing the multitude of the reality of communion with those loved and gone from earth. Those who would secure this golden opportunity, should visit him at once at his parlors." Madame la Blanche was also in town, offering her services as astrologer and clairvoyant. "Ladies and gentlemen who are desirous of knowing all about their little love matters and their sweethearts, should certainly call on Madame La Blanche. Business men often consult her, with great satisfaction to themselves, when they wish to engage in large speculations."[369] Trance speakers like Emma Hardinge wanted to distance themselves from fortune tellers and appeal to higher spiritual concerns, but in the minds of many they were all pipelines to the unknown. It is hardly surprising that businessmen such as Godfrey Barnsley saw no reason a spiritual medium should not put him in touch with both lost loved ones and the future of the cotton market.

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[369] "Another Test from Mr. Mansfield"; *New Church in the New World,* 176; "After Death," *Sunday Delta* (December 11, 1859), 5; "Spiritualistic," *Daily Delta* (December 17, 1859), 5; "Fashionable Clothing," *Sunday Delta* (December 25, 1859), 3; "Dr. H. A. Benton, psychologist, magnetizer and medical electrician," *Daily Delta* (December 27, 1859), 1; "Lecture on Spiritualism," *Daily Delta* (December 27, 1859), 1; "Spiritual Phenomena," *Daily Delta* (December 27, 1859), 5; "Amusements," 5, Ibid..

The Gulf Coast: Galveston, Texas

Railroad builder and Texas government official Ebenezer Allen was an enthusiastic correspondent of the *Spiritual Telegraph.* A May 1856 letter described the week-long visit during which Thomas Lake Harris gave three public lectures before large audiences in Galveston. "We have never before had among us a *professed preacher* of the doctrines of the *New Dispensation*," Allen explained. Most people had thought of Spiritualism merely as rappings, tables moving or sounds produced from musical instruments. Harris had linked spirit communion firmly to Christianity, had made them aware of "the great objects of Spiritualism—its influence in the harmonious development of the moral and intellectual faculties of men; the restless energy with which it proposes to inspire the common mind in its onward march of social and individual perfectibility; its elevated practical uses in inculcating a knowledge of God, of the immortality of the soul, of the resurrection of the body in all the strength and beauty of its glorious spiritual identity" as well as allowing "actual and social communion" with relatives and friends on the other side and "enforcing and illustrating the sublime truths of the Bible, the doctrines of Christianity, the precepts of Jesus. . . ." Harris's visit had aroused "many intelligent and cultivated minds heretofore indifferent, to a serious consideration of the claims of Spiritualism—its history, its facts, its practical bearings, its teachings, its philosophy and its truths." In late May a circle was presided over in a private home by a local medium who had recently returned from "a long sojourn in the vicinity of the residences of MESSRS. Koons and Tippie, where she had often attended the circles and witnessed the wonders of their *Spirit-rooms.* She had become developed as a speaking and pantomimic

medium." Three circles were held in the ensuing week, with surprising messages from the dead and visits through the medium from a spirit who did a Shaker dance for five minutes, a friend who had died of typhoid fever at military school in Kentucky, several whooping, dancing Indians, an Italian opera singer and others.[370] For a newly-developed home medium, the lady had quite a repertoire.

Soon after Thomas Lake Harris's visit, O. A. Runnels appeared on a list of remittances to the *Spiritual Telegraph.* Obedience Runnels and her husband were both Baptists. She was the wife of Hiram G. Runnels, a former state legislator and governor of Mississippi. As president of the Union Bank in 1838 he had caned the governor of Mississippi, Alexander G. McNutt, in the streets of Jackson and in 1840 fought a duel with a newspaper editor. Hiram Runnels moved to Texas in 1842 and become a planter on the Brazos River. He was a member of the 1845 Texas Constitutional Convention.[371] His death in 1857 left Obedience a wealthy widow who owned thirty slaves in 1860.

Ferdinand Sims also corresponded with the *Banner of Light* in 1860. Sims, born in 1809, was an attorney in Vicksburg in the 1830s. He met and married Sally McNutt of

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[370] "T. L. Harris in Texas," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 10, 1856), 15; "An Evening with the Spirits," *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 21, 1856), 62; "Circles in Galveston," *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 5, 1856), 75.

[371] Moses Thurston Runnels, *A Genealogy of Runnels and Reynolds Families in America: With Records and Brief Memorials of the Earliest Ancestors, so Far as Known, and of Many of Their Descendants Bearing the Same and Other Names* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, Printers, 1873), 284; "Hiram G. Runnels, Ninth Governor of Mississippi: 1833–1835," *Mississippi History Now,* s. v. "Hiram G. Runnels, Ninth Governor of Mississippi: 1833–1835," http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/articles/265/index.php?s=extra&id=115 (accessed January 10, 2010); Marshall Verniaud, "Obedience Smith," http://www.southamptoncivicclub.org/ob_smith.html (accessed January 10, 2010); *Handbook of Texas Online,* s. v. "Runnels, Hiram George (1796–1857)," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/fru14.html (accessed May 20, 2010); "Mississippi Governor Hiram George Reynolds," *National Governors Association,* http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.29fab9fb4add37305ddcbeeb501010a0/?vgnextoid=7661c486eaf81110VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD&vgnextchannel=e449a0ca9e3f1010VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD (accessed January 10, 2010).

Virginia while she was visiting her brother, Mississippi Governor Alexander McNutt. They had two children and removed to Galveston by 1850. Sims had a successful law practice there in the 1850s, and was involved in a real estate and collection firm. Sally had died in 1858. His only son would fight in Lee's army, surrender at Appomattox and walk home to Galveston. After the war, Ferdinand Sims became a physician and was still practicing in Galveston in 1872. Sims was a man of boundless curiosity. In 1867 he patented a device for sewing pages of books together.[372]

Sims gave Galveston attorney William Pitt Ballinger a list of recommended Spiritualist books. Among other distinctions, Ballinger was "one of the nation's most respected railroad lawyers." There is no evidence that Ballinger was a Spiritualist, but he was remembered as a "gentleman whose reading and reflections were unconfined by the limitations of his favorite science, but who touched life and thought at all points,"[373] and we know he lived and worked among men and women who actively sought communication with the world of spirits.

One of these Galvestonians was Rebecca Mary Bass Menard, fourth wife of Michel B. Menard, founder of Galveston. They married in 1849 and Menard adopted her daughters Clara and Helen in 1850. Menard had lost his first wife to cholera and his second to yellow fever. He built a Greek Revival mansion in 1838 that is the oldest

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[372] "To Correspondents," *Banner of Light* (July 7, 1860), 5; Marie Loraine Epps Anderson and John Quincy Anderson, *Epps: Allen, Bradford, Kernodle* (College Station, Tex.: M. L. Anderson, 1959), 9; Henrietta Hamilton McCormick, *Genealogies and Reminiscences* (Chicago: Published by the Author, 1897), 105, 107; Charles W. Hayes, *Galveston: History of the Island and the City,* Volume II (Austin, Tex.: Jenkins Garrett Press, 1974), 910; *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1867,* Volume II (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868), 992.

[373] Earl Wesley Fornell, *The Galveston Era: The Texas Crescent on the Eve of Secession* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976 c. 1961), 112; John Anthony Moretta, *William Pitt Ballinger: Texas Lawyer, Southern Statesman 1825–1888* (College Station: Texas A & M University, 2004), dust jacket; *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas*, 454.

residence in Galveston. His third wife lived in the house from 1843 until her death in 1847. At last, in 1850 Menard had a wife and children to share his beautiful home, including an infant son and heir. Tragedy struck the family again when Clara was killed in a fall down the stairs that broke her neck. Michel Menard died of cancer in 1856. It is not clear when Mrs. Menard began holding séances in her parlor.[374]

The Gulf Coast: Mobile, Alabama

In Mobile, Godfrey Barnsley's friend Edmund Sager had died in 1853 but others continued to try the spirits. The most notable was John Bowen, a wealthy merchant and prominent Mason, born in Massachusetts. His first wife had died in Mobile in 1849, but he was happily remarried. In 1860, prompted by a visit from medium George Redman, Alabama passed a law imposing a tax of $500 per day on "Spiritual Rappers." Emma Hardinge had to cancel her speaking engagement in Mobile because of the tax, but Bowen offered the use of his home and Hardinge spent "four most delightful hours in numerous company of real Alabamian Spiritualists and *spirits* in his house." Mobile attorney Augustus Requier memorialized his wife with an epitaph that reads, "Removed to the Spiritual world Jul. 29, 1859."[375] Although her tombstone suggests Spiritualism, Requier was not a Spiritualist but a Swedenborgian; though not as numerous as

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[374] "1838 Michel B. Menard House Visitor Information," http://www.galvestonhistory.org/1838_Michel_B_Menard_House.asp (accessed July 16, 2009); *Handbook of Texas Online* s. v. "Menard, Michel Branamour (1805–1856)," (accessed January 16, 2009); *Ghosts of Galveston: A Guide to Galveston's Haunted Places* by Rich Spethman (pamphlet in GHOSTS vertical file, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas): The Menard House, 1605 33rd Street; built 1838 (oldest home in Galveston). "Mrs. Menard once held seances in what is now the museum room."

[375] Montgomery, Alabama *Daily Confederation* (March 15, 1860), 2. Many thanks to Donna Cox Baker for finding and sharing this documentation; "Spiritualism in the South," *Banner of Light* (February 11, 1860), 7; "Old Church Street Cemetery, Mobile, Alabama," http://www.trackingyourroots.com/data/mobilecem3.htm (accessed April 16, 2007).

Spiritualists they were scattered across the South's religious landscape and shared with Spiritualists a belief in a progressive afterlife in an active world of spirits.

The urban South was more diverse and cosmopolitan than the rural and small-town South, and offered a much richer array of ways to approach the unknown and the sacred. City life facilitated the spread of information from person to person, and offered enough seekers to make worthwhile stops for professional Spiritualists. These visits, when successful, sparked renewed interest. A few antebellum southern cities had Spiritualists who organized to rent halls and engage speakers during the cooler months. In smaller cities, the arrangements for visits by professionals were made by individual Spiritualists.

Individuals became identified as Spiritualist leaders in their communities in part by reporting on local activities and visits of mediums and lecturers to their cities for the *Banner of Light, Spiritual Telegraph* and *Herald of Progress.* Men and women in the urban South continued to rely on these publications to keep them abreast of new developments in spirit communication, the movements of mediums, and current thought on the mechanics of spirit contact and descriptions of the spirit world.

Most southerners who wrote about it considered Spiritualism as a subject to be approached solemnly, even reverently. Except in New Orleans, almost all were white Protestants. They represented a variety of denominational backgrounds, but united in rejecting creeds and religious formalism. For Francis Smith, Spiritualism gave him a religion of the heart that was a welcome change from Calvinism.

Mediums in pre-war home circles seem to have most often been females, embodying heightened spirituality (and the passivity to be receptive) in an offshoot of

evangelical Christianity's relegation of spiritual welfare to women in the domestic sphere. Men such as Godfrey Barnsley and William Gilmore Simms, however, seem to have made a solitary pursuit of communicating with spirits. In the public sphere, professional trance speakers such as Cora Hatch and Emma Hardinge projected chaste purity and spoke with an eloquence and breadth of knowledge their public assumed had to come from wise men in the spirit spheres. Washington Danskin stressed the propriety of his wife's spirit chaperone, and Warren Chase the remarkable quality of the communications through her "feeble power."

Because urban density created ideal conditions for the spread of epidemic diseases, especially yellow fever, they became the site of massive loss of life in a relatively short time and created communities of grief in their wake. The survivors in Norfolk came together to seek assurance that their dead lived on in the world of spirits. Whatever other perspectives people brought to trying the spirits, it was always above all a confirmation of God's promise through Christ of life everlasting.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1855–1860: Investigation and Opposition

Most Spiritualist activity in the South was in cities, which offered a critical mass of people, access to progressive ideas and an element of anonymity. Cities afforded opportunities to organize, to visit traveling professional mediums and attend Spiritualist lectures. Some cities even supported local mediums of their own. This chapter looks at other aspects of southern Spiritualism and the beliefs it drew on. For people who lived outside cities, the Spiritualist press offered a virtual community of shared interest, a forum for discussion and disseminating information, and an opportunity to have questions answered. Some southerners found means and opportunity to travel, especially to professional mediums in the North, to try the spirits. One who did so was William Gilmore Simms of South Carolina. Others, both white and black, developed as "home mediums" all over the South. Most of the subjects of this study were Christians, but there were some southern Spiritualists who were not, such as William Emmette Coleman and James Wingard. As a religious matter, communicating with spirits was the focus of disapproving sermons by ministers who found proscriptions in the Bible or Scriptural evidence that it must be the work of evil spirits. Spiritualist newspapers in Macon and New Orleans were vehicles for protest against clerical repression of spirit communion. Many individuals, however, shared the belief that summoning spirits was an invitation to dark forces, and letters from William Duncan to his friend Godfrey Barnsley allow

readers to peek into their discussion of a spirit that was tormenting Barnsley. South Carolinian Joel C. Clayton visited and corresponded with Spiritualists in Texas, and leads the narrative to a cluster of mostly Methodist believers in Washington County on the Brazos; they in turn connect to other seekers in Texas and elsewhere. The chapter closes with a consideration of dishonest mediums and professional debunkers.

The Spiritualist Press as Virtual Community

William P. Neeld, whose brother James had signed the 1854 petition while visiting Samuel Pace in Purdy, Tennessee, wrote in 1859 that as far as he knew he was the *Spiritual Telegraph*'s only Lincoln County subscriber. One might suppose it was his brother who had exposed him to Spiritualism, but in fact the process was begun when he read a book on religion by phrenologist O. S. Fowler. Neeld had been a Methodist preacher then, but became a Universalist and a self-described "Spiritual Progressionist," believing that "fully the strongest argument that can be adduced from any source in favor of man's immortality is that from Spiritualism; and the most conclusive in favor of the *ultimate* holiness and happiness of all men, is to be derived from the doctrine of human progress." Like Jesse Ferguson's, Neeld's journey of faith led him away from the evangelicals' retributive deity toward a loving God who could only desire the "*ultimate* holiness and happiness of all mankind," and finally to spirit communion. Neeld quoted a passage from Fowler that had influenced his spiritual transformation:

> If we were sufficiently spiritualized, we might hold converse with Spirits of our departed friends, with angels, and with God! I believe they might become our guardian angels, to tell us all what we should do, and what to avoid. I believe we might talk with them as did Abraham, Moses and the prophets; and when our friends die, we need not be separated from them, though we live and they are dead. They are in a state more exalted than

> ours; but, if we were as spiritually minded as we are capable of being, we could still hold direct communion withy them, and they would become spiritual conductors, carrying a torch-light by which we could guide our erring footsteps into the pats of success, of holiness, of happiness.

Phrenologist Fowler published this the year before Andrew Jackson Davis's first book appeared. Fowler believed in ghosts, but that he could never see one because his organ of spirituality was too small. Neeld probably just wanted to communicate with the toddler he and his wife had lost in 1852 when a gate fell on her head, or his brother's wife who had gone to the spirit world in 1857 or their father who had died less than a year before Neeld wrote.[376]

In the late 1850s, Spiritualism was also popping up all over Virginia, and appealed to people across a broad spectrum of backgrounds and religious perspectives. Dr. May Burton wrote from the "center of the old Dominion" in 1857 to tell the *Spiritual Telegraph* that "a small band of ardent believers in modern Spiritualism has been formed." Burton was in the direct line of descent from the May Burton, Sr., who with May Burton, Jr., had amassed an estimated three thousand acres along the Rapidan River in the 1700s. Burton, Sr., was a lay reader in the Old Orange Anglican Church when there were not enough ordained clergymen to serve the king's subjects in Virginia, and Burton, Jr., had been an officer in the American Revolution. Dr. May Burton the Spiritualist was a grandson of Capt. May Burton of the Revolution. After graduating from the University

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[376] "Letter from a Clergyman," *Spiritual Telegraph* (July 23, 1859), 148; S. Fowler, *Religion; Natural and Revealed: or, the Natural Theology and Moral Bearings of Phrenology and Physiology Including the Doctrines and Duties Inculcated Thereby, Compared with Those Enjoined in the Scriptures. Together with the Phrenological Exposition of the Doctrines of a Future State; Materialism, Holiness, Sin, Rewards, Punishments, Depravity, A Change of Heart, Will, Foreordination, Fatalism, etc. etc.* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1846), 105; "Re: William Neeld/Nield in TN 1800s," http://genforum.genealogy.com/neeld/messages/228.html (accessed June 28, 2007); "Death Notices from the Western Weekly Review, Franklin, Tennessee 1852–1858," http://www.tngenweb.org/records/williamson/obits/wwr/wwr3-01.htm (accessed June 28, 2007).

of Virginia in 1842, he was an 1845 medical graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and married in 1847. He was living with his wife and infant son in the home of his parents in 1850. It was probably a comfortable life; his father was a "farmer," as Virginia planters often called themselves, with thirty-seven slaves. "I read the Telegraph," wrote Burton, enjoying his role as a local leader in progressive thinking, "and lend it out to my neighbors; it stirs up new thoughts, and seems to fill them with a sort of pleasant astonishment—saying 'it is too good to be true.' I hope to have the pleasure of sending you the names of some new subscribers before long." Spiritualism there had roused predictable opposition among the Baptists, "the prevailing religion in our midst," and some had even gone so far as to propose making reading a Spiritualist newspaper a matter for church discipline after the more liberal among them had perused "spiritual papers that were casually thrown in their way" and even attended private circles. The attempted suppression was vetoed, and some Baptists "continued to read, and the consideration of the subject seemed to find a pretty constant resting-place in their minds, and the result has been an open avowal of belief in Spiritualism by a few of as intelligent Baptists as any we have." We might infer that Burton was not himself a Baptist. Some of Burton's Baptist neighbors were carrying on the longstanding tradition of deciding for themselves what to believe. Burton did place his Spiritualist beliefs in a religious context: "May the Almighty God and his ministering angels speed the good cause."[377]

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[377] "The Cause in Virginia," *Spiritual Telegraph* (July 11, 1857), 87; Donald D. Covey, *Greene County, Virginia: A Brief History* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2007), 42, 83; Jeannete Holland Austin, *Virginia Bible Records* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 2008), 213. Benjamin Burton, the father of Dr. Burton, is listed as a son of Capt. Burton born in 1784. This fits the Benjamin Burton, 66, with whom Dr. May Burton was living in 1850; Joseph Van Holt Nash, *Students of the University of Virginia: A Semi-centennial Catalogue, with Brief Biographical Sketches* (Baltimore: Charles Harvey & Company, Publishers, 1878) http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=2004_Q1/uvaBook/tei/b006136417.xml;chunk.id=d22;toc.depth=1;toc.id=d22;brand=default;query=burton#1 (accessed April 30, 2010); "Medical Class Session 1844–

From Raleigh, the capital of North Carolina, came this request to readers of the *Banner of Light:* "An aged minister would be thankful to any one for any information respecting" a woman he had known years earlier and her current address. Joseph B. Hinton, born in 1788, may have thought he was nearing the end of his life with unfinished business. Hinton was "reared in the eastern part of the state . . . among the Methodists." He had studied and practiced medicine, and represented Beaufort County in the State Legislature. Dissatisfied with the Methodists, "he connected himself with the Baptists, amongst whom he labored several years." When a Christian Church was organized in Raleigh, Hinton found it more to his taste and joined. By 1847 he was pastor of the church. An 1860 meeting of the Southern Christian Conference reported all ministers in good standing except Hinton, who withdrew from the Conference that year. Whatever it was that occasioned his break with the Christians, a biographer was "disposed to look upon the affair as the freak of age."[378] Did Hinton turn to Spiritualism late in life? No other evidence has emerged.

A writer in Williamsburg, South Carolina, "considerably interested in the manifestations of Spiritualism for some three or four years, and being always ready and anxious to engage in the investigation of its reality and teachings," contacted the *Spiritual Telegraph* in 1856 for advice about a box, given to someone in the neighborhood by an elderly lady shortly before her death. The box began making noises, which gradually became louder and more frequent knockings. The *Telegraph* suggested that if a "sensitive

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1845, Matriculants," http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/students/med/catalogs/catmedmat1845.html (accessed May 5, 2009). Pierce N. Butler of Beaufort, South Carolina was in the same graduating class; Joan M. Dixon, *National Intelligencer Newspaper Abstracts, 1847* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2007), 562.

[378] "Anna Maria Baldwin," *Banner of Light* (September 22, 1860), 8; P. J. Kernodle, *Lives of Christian Ministers* (Richmond, Va.: The Central Publishing Company, 1909), 223–226.

person" could not after several tries establish communication, "let the box be taken to some well-developed medium and the Spirit interrogated in his or her presence."[379] Of course, had there been a well-developed medium in Williamsburg the writer probably would have pursued that course of action in the first place.

Traveling to Seek the Spirits

From the early days of the Fox sisters, Boston and especially New York offered access to professional mediums and for a time they were even a trendy attraction. Most southerners who left any evidence of their involvement in Spiritualism, or for that matter of anything at all, were men of prominence. The most discussed by historians are novelist William Gilmore Simms and his friend, the planter and politician James Henry Hammond. Simms traveled fairly regularly to New York to meet with his "favorite publisher," Justus Starr Redfield. Simms, in a letter of May 4, 1856, confided to Redfield that he had been "considerably impressed of late with the subject of Spiritualism." Simms had rejected the Old Testament as a religious authority and thought the New Testament, "however true & good & wise & pure in many things, a wonderfully corrupt narrative." He found Spiritualism, however, "as a philosophy is in more complete accordance with my own speculations, felt & pursued for 30 years, than any other system." But of course, he wanted to know first-hand, and "resolved to see and study the matter for myself when I can get a chance." Simms hoped to be in New York soon, and asked if Redfield would find him entrée to some circles, the "character of whose members is beyond suspicion." He also asked if Redfield had any Spiritualist reading material he could share. Simms had

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[379] "Mysterious Rappings," *Spiritual Telegraph* (September 6, 1856), 150.

by 1856 buried his first wife and four children. Two sons would die of yellow fever in 1858. The 1856 trip to New York included an introduction through Spiritualist publisher Charles Partridge to medium George Redman. Hammond had given Simms a list of questions to ask. When Simms found the opportunity, he came away "very much impressed on my own account, even when I asked nothing about myself[.]" Simms had sat holding Hammond's questions in his hand, thinking of them, and instead received through the medium "tidings of those (of my own blood) in waiting and desiring to be heard." Simms had been less successful in eliciting satisfactory answers to Hammond's queries, but Redman was planning a trip to the South in the spring, and Simms suggested Hammond invite him to his home, "even if you reward him highly." After his experiences in New York, Simms told Hammond that he was "egging on Redfield, my publisher and Partridge to procure me interviews with other mediums." Back at home in early 1857, Simms believed the spirits were with him. He wrote to Hammond that he had too much of a purely personal nature to put into letters, and "must keep it for a private interview when we may talk over the matter together." Taking a rational stance, and knowing imagination to be "my most active faculty," Simms realized he had to be chary of self delusion. Even so, he had almost concluded "that I am now personally *attended by representatives* from the spirit world; that my nights are regularly occupied, in part, by such visitors; that my dreams are shaped by them; my senses excited; and always under peculiar & unusual circumstances." Had he been asked a year earlier, he would have said such encounters "would have unmanned me," but "though I feel the awful solemnity of such communion, I have not a single fear." More detail, he told his friend, "When we meet!"[380]

Planter Robert MacKay of St. Mary Parish on Louisiana's southern coast read the *Spiritual Telegraph,* and traveled north to seek out mediums he had followed in its pages to help him establish contact with the spirit world. He and others affirmed in an August 1855 letter to the *Telegraph* that while at Koons's Spirit Room in Athens County, Ohio, MacKay had received a communication "purported to emanate from the departed wife of Dr. MacKay" and that "we distinctly saw and felt what we are compelled to believe was a hand created by a departed soul, and that said hand wrote before us a communication to a gentleman present, and presented the same to him. And we also declare that what we believe was a superhuman being, audibly conversed with us." MacKay appears on a list of remittances to the *Spiritual Telegraph* in 1856.[381]

Wiley B. Grayson of Franklin Parish, about twenty miles from Vicksburg, also read the *Spiritual Telegraph.* Grayson was born in Kentucky in 1807. By 1850 he had helped found the Boeuff Prairie Methodist Church, owned thirty-eight slaves, had built one of the finest plantation homes in northeastern Louisiana, and buried a wife and daughter. In July 1856, he called at the *Telegraph* office in New York. While there, Grayson was "acted upon by a Spirit who desired to write a message" and wrote a note saying the spirit was delighted Grayson had come to the city and requesting that he go to a medium. He went to several, including Katherine Fox. Using raps and calling out the alphabet, the message came: "Dear husband, our daughter is with me." Grayson's engagement with the world beyond the veil was more than the desire to connect with his

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[380] *The Simms Reader: Selections from the Writings of William Gilmore Simms,* Ed. John Caldwell Guilds (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 70–73, 491; *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms,* Vol. 3, col. and ed. Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell and T. C. Duncan Eaves (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1945), 469; David Aiken, "A Christian in Search of Religious Freedom," *Southern Quarterly* 41:2 (Winter 2003), 97.

[381] *The Telegraph Papers* IX (May, 1855–April, 1856), (New York: Charles Partridge's Spiritual Library, 1857), 122; "Remittances," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 17, 1856), outside back cover.

wife and daughter. Raised a Methodist, he probably believed his conversion had put him on the path to eternal salvation but that though the spirit was willing the flesh was weak. It was always possible to sin and fall from grace. In another sitting he asked his sister in the spirit world if there is "any redemption for those who die in their sins" and was told that "Their progression is slow."[382]

Most southerners who turned to Spiritualism were like Wiley Grayson, merging their Christianity with a heightened sense of the reality and accessibility of the world of spirits. Spiritualism's primary appeal was always consolation to the bereaved and "proof" of life after death. Mediums connected the living and the dead.

Homegrown Mediums, Black and White, in the Antebellum South

James T. Close of Alexandria, Virginia had first attended a séance in 1851 in Connecticut, and integrated Spiritualism into his existing Christian beliefs. Two of his sons died in 1857 while Close was away. He arrived home in time to see "the fair caskets which once contained the gems of my happiness, *laid* in the cold and silent tomb, at Joy Hill cemetery, while *they* mounted, as it were, on angels' wings to the high heaven above." Close spent the summer months with his relatives in the North, and received several messages from his sons through different mediums. Soon his wife and sister became "partially developed as writing mediums." Close described some of the convincing tests that had taken place, and reflected on the usefulness of spirit communication. "Is not this a consolation to the mourner, to know that there is a life beyond the grave, and that our friends who have long since left the earth-sphere can come

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[382] "Decisive Test Facts," *Spiritual Telegraph* (July 26, 1856), 101.

back and reveal their presence to us in numerous ways, and teach us the precepts of Christ, which have been obscured by the *musty creeds* of sectarianism for ages?" Close interpreted Spiritualist phenomena as the teachings of Christ "now being revealed to us through different gifts and demonstrations, like those spoken of in 1 Corinthians, 12th, 13th, and 14th chapters." He was grateful for "that heavenly band of ministering Spirits which are always near, to teach us poor mortals the road which leads to spiritual progression."[383] Spiritualism gave him consolation, but it also gave him the conviction that unseen presences were ever with him to guide him in his progress to being a good person in this life, and that they would warmly welcome him into the next.

None of the Mississippi signers of the 1854 petition reappear in public records of antebellum Spiritualism there, but a number of other Mississippians do. Samuel Saxon was steeped in religion of the heart. He was a Mason and a Methodist preacher in 1850, farming with little to show for it in the Mississippi Delta town of Friar's Point.[384] Born around 1798, Saxon had come to the plantation frontier with his wife and children from Kentucky in the 1820s. At Pisgah Methodist Church in Claiborne County, he and his brother Joshua were converted, received their early Methodistic training and were licensed to preach in their locality. The brothers moved inland to Madison County, "and gave the light of their example and ministry to the early settlers." Joshua stayed, but Samuel headed north and settled at Friar's Point, a refueling stop on the Mississippi River in the heart of cotton country. By 1850 Friar's Point was the county seat and a regular

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[383] "Spirit Communings," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 22, 1858), 32.

[384] *Proceedings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the State of Mississippi, of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, at the Grand Annual Communication, Held at the Masonic Hall in the City of Natchez, February 4, A. D. 1850,—A. L. 5850* (Fayette, Miss.: Henry M. Youngblood, Printer, 1850), 215.

stop for steam packets to take on wood and passengers and news. Samuel Saxon was skeptical about Spiritualism, but his "incredulity was completely neutralized by communications which he received from his two Spirit-sons" in 1854. The spirits at Friar's Point gave "much good advice of a religious nature."[385]

To Saxon's fellow Mason Robert C. Friar, who wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph* about the spiritual activity in his town, Spiritualism had proved additional value by convincing his servants that the spirits were aware of all they did. Of the one thousand three hundred ninety-eight slaves in Coahoma County in 1850, Friar owned nine. "They firmly believe that the least variance from correct deportment will be detected, and they have become more correct in everything; and for their own gratification I suffer them to form a circle and converse with their departed Spirit-friends and relatives. They take great interest in it." With its utility and enhancement of religion well established, Spiritualism had overcome most initial opposition and "many of the best minds" in Friar's Point were "already on the side of progress." Friar had purchased property in Coahoma County in 1837 and donated the land for the village that would bear his name. He was pleased that a medium had developed in his family "through whose instrumentality not only his whole household has been convinced, but multitudes of others, who are constantly thronging the house."[386] Friar and Saxon were about the same age. By the 1860 census, both were gone.

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[385] Rev. John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, Volume II (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908), 216; Elmo Howell, *Mississippi Back Roads: Notes on Literature and History* (Memphis, Tenn.: E. H Howell, 1998), 103–104; "Mr. R. C. Friar, of Friar's Point, Couhoma County, Mississippi," *Telegraph Papers* V (May 1–August 1, 1854), 26.

[386] *Telegraph Papers* V, 26.

The 1850s were good years for the whites of the Mississippi Delta. In that decade the slave population quadrupled and the value of farm land tripled in Coahoma County. The county supported three newspapers, and printer Benjamin B. Rhodes probably was working for one of them when he wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph* in 1857. People wanted tests, experiments with results, and Rhodes had one to share. On a summer day in 1856 he and his friend J. N. Jackson were sitting on a pecan log, reading the *Spiritual Telegraph*. Jackson had recently taken an interest in Spiritualism. "Upon his expressing a strong desire to be the recipient of a test that would set aside all doubt as to its source, I said to him that if I died first, I would endeavor to find a means of proving to him my identity." Jackson died soon after. "In the providence of God, he has gone before me to the eternal world," said Rhodes, claiming no one else knew of their conversation and he had forgotten about it when he hosted a circle in his home the previous Tuesday. Rhodes did not say which of the sitters was the medium. His friend's spirit rapped out his initials at the circle, and then, "Do you remember promising me that if you died first, you would communicate to me?" When asked to rap out the location where this had taken place, the spirit rapped, "Pecan log." Rhodes said the answers to other questions he and his wife Marcalette posed were also correct. Although Jackson had been "more than the common order of men in moral worth and intellectual capacity," Rhodes could not regret that Jackson had died, because "Spiritualists do not regard death as the king of terrors, but only in the sense of the second birth, we see no more reasons to mourn over the operations of a natural law, in changing a mortal into an immortal, than we do in sorrowing over the development of the fœtus in the mother's womb."[387] These Christians

[387] 1850 Slave Schedules: 1,398; 1860: 5,185; James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press,

may not have truly overcome their fear of death, but Spiritualism and the proofs of everlasting life it provided allowed them to say with more assurance that they had.

In Memphis, Methodist minister Samuel Watson was communing with the spirits of his dead wife and children through a slave medium, and quietly investigating spiritual phenomena with a group of doctors and clergymen.

The niece of a Louisiana Methodist preacher in St. Mary Parish developed as a "powerful personating medium" and in May 1857 A. E. D. of Brashear City (now Morgan City) wrote to the *Spiritual Telegraph* about the turmoil occasioned by the manifestations through this lady "of high standing" who had been "a pious member of the Methodist Church for some ten years," and had been a total unbeliever in spirit manifestations until she developed as a medium. The minister had witnessed some of the manifestations, and declared them "calculated to deceive even the very elect!" The writer claimed "the faith of some of the most bigoted Methodists, has been shaken" because those who knew the medium had to admit she was not deceiving. "Thus," he said, "are the spiritual phenomena making constant inroads into the ranks of skeptics and popular religionists, compelling attention and assent wherever they go, and gradually working out the event of their destined universal recognition."[388] To a true believer such as A. E. D., Spiritualism was the Manifest Destiny of faith.

South Carolina's Chancellor George Dargan had a medium who was a young male slave. Wilmington, North Carolina resident John C. McRae and his brother Alexander also relied on slaves to help them communicate with the spirits. Alexander

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1992), 30; Elmo Howell, *Mississippi Back Roads: Notes on Literature and History* (Memphis, Tenn.: E. H Howell, 1998), 104;

[388] "A Spiritual Visitation in a Southern Town," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 23, 1857), 29.

was probably the brother who shared John C. McRae's interest in Spiritualism. Adjoining the kitchen of Alexander's home was a wooden room that was the exclusive province of a slave called the "Queen of Mondigo," who "received special privileges" in the household.[389] Whether she earned her title and favored status through sexual favors or African magic—or a combination of the two—this slave woman must have exerted an interesting influence over the family. She may well have been his home medium.

Emma Hardinge Britten described an intimate relationship between Colonel John McRae and his slaves, and remembered visiting with him "several of the negroes' houses on his plantation, where I found many excellent mediums." It was one of these who had initially converted McRae to his unshakeable belief in spirit communication, delivering a spoken message from McRae's son who had died of yellow fever in New Orleans. A year after his son's death, Colonel McRae was planning a trip to New Orleans to erect a monument at his resting place. Through the slave medium, McRae's spirit son claimed his body was not where it had been interred, but had been removed and cremated and a woman placed in his crypt. McRae had gone to New Orleans and had the tomb opened, saying he wished to have the body buried on his estate in North Carolina, and indeed found the recently interred body of a woman.[390] McRae's reliance on slaves for contact with his dead wife and son, and his trust in their guilelessness, would have given them considerable leverage. It is not hard to imagine an enslaved medium channeling messages from the spirit world instructing the master to ameliorate the condition of or even liberate

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[389] Susan Taylor Block, *Cape Fear Lost* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999), 29.

[390] Emma Hardinge Britten and Margaret Wilkinson, *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten* (London: J. Heywood, 1900), 145–147.

his human property. McRae was a firm believer in Spiritualism, and will enter our story again soon.

Anna Matilda Page King, Home Medium

East of Mobile, Anna Matilda Page King was alone with her children and slaves in early June of 1856 at Retreat, their cotton plantation on St. Simons Island, Georgia. She wrote to her peripatetic husband, Thomas Butler King, and asked him to consult experts in New York for her on an important question while he was there on business. "If [you] have time and think there is no harm," she wrote, "I wish you would go the Fox's & enquire if spirits are permitted to tell us of the future in this world. Do not think me *silly* but we have received some very strange and some pleasant communications."[391] Most people tended to be drawn to Spiritualism episodically, in times of grief and emotional distress. Anna Matilda Page King took her parlor séances beyond communion with the dead, and attempted to use them to meet other deep and unsatisfied yearnings as well.

Anna Matilda Page was raised in the antebellum plantation world described by Catherine Clinton and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, both of whom quote from her letters, and worked at being as devout, dutiful and deferential as a woman of her time and class was brought up to be. She was born in 1798, the only child of a wealthy Sea Island planter. Letters from her father, sojourning in Newport, Rhode Island, gave young Anna detailed instructions on running the plantation in his absence. As a sought-after belle and the only heir of a wealthy cotton and rice planter, she chose Thomas Butler King, a handsome

[391] Letter, Anna M. King to Thomas Butler King, June 5, 1856, King Family Papers, SHC.

young lawyer from Massachusetts who had come south to seek his fortune. They married in 1824. Her wedded life can hardly have been all she had hoped it would be. Thomas Butler King was a public figure, active in Whig politics and a vigorous promoter of internal improvements such as canals and railroads. His wife and family stayed behind on the plantation while he pursued his career. Mrs. King was left by her husband, as she had often been by her father, to manage Retreat in his absence. That she was a competent manager seems to have done little to bolster her sense of her own worth. Historian Catherine Clinton said this: "[P]lantation mistresses often felt unrecognized and emotionally unfulfilled. Expected almost from birth to set aside personal considerations and delay gratification, many women of the South nurtured suppressed desires that bred anxiety, vague anticipation, and an ever-increasing sense of alienation."[392]

Like many a husband who married a wealthy plantation heiress and took control of her fortune, Thomas Butler King had lost most of that wealth. In 1842, debts resulting from "crop failures, economic downturns, and extensive investments in land, enslaved workers, and the development of the nearby port town of Brunswick" led to the seizure of all but the family home, Retreat Plantation, by King's creditors. Anna's father, who died a few years after her marriage, had had the foresight to leave Retreat and its fifty slaves in trust for her. She spent the rest of her life struggling to keep the plantation solvent and feed the family, while writing letters to her absent husband telling him what a great and visionary man he was, and how utterly dependent she and their nine children were on him. The family's only hope of having adequate resources to do more than just keep body

[392] Catherine Clinton. *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 164.

and soul together lay in one of Thomas Butler King's business schemes restoring the family's fortunes.[393]

Her dissatisfaction with her husband's long absences and infrequent communication combined with her isolation and responsibilities—and her acceptance of the antebellum conventions that defined a woman less on her own merits than as she passively and graciously reflected the status of the men on whom she was dependent—to nervous anxiety that often erupted in unseemly outbursts of temper. Mrs. King focused her fears on her husband. The mails were slow and somewhat unreliable; she never knew if or when her letters would reach him. Worse, she sometimes waited as long as a month between letters from him, trying to keep her concerns (and annoyance) at bay. She fretted about his health and worried that he was working too hard. "*Remember my husband*," she admonished him, "you have a devoted wife & nine affectionate children to live for. . . . It is true Gods! Mercy has preserved you through countless dangers. Still to a certain extent man is a free agent—& we should not tempt Providence by going knowingly into danger[.]" His wife knew how much depended on his survival and success. But she also must have felt the disappointment and frustration of not only being unable to travel and share her husband's contact with the world, but not even being kept informed of where and how he was. Thomas Butler King's letters use the same language and express the same love of home and family as her own: "My heart seems to melt away in thanks to our heavenly Father for the blessing of health which we are all permitted to enjoy. . . . What a dear old place it is–How many of the dearest recollections of life are associated with it." But Mrs. King's outbursts undoubtedly contributed to making life at Retreat, as the

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[393] Anna Matilda Page King, *Anna: The Letters of Anna Matilda Page King of St. Simons Island, Georgia, 1817–1859,* ed. Melanie Pavich-Lindsay (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 15–19.

historian Stephen Berry put it, "More Alluring at a Distance" to Thomas Butler King.[394] Her father had named his island plantation Retreat, but to Mrs. King it was a retreat from which she could not escape, and which afforded her no respite from the burdens of her responsibilities.

Prayer was the outlet women such as Anna Matilda Page King were brought up to fall back on in times of sorrow and anxiety, and her surviving letters are full of pious sentiments. The Kings were Episcopalians, members of Christ Church on St. Simons Island, and rest today in its cemetery. Pray as she might, her faith did not offer her all she needed. Peace and contentment eluded her. As it did for so many people in the 1850s, Spiritualism allowed Mrs. King to reach beyond what the faith she was raised in could do toward what she really needed. For her, a séance in the parlor was an enterprise frowned on by the clergy and one she only undertook with her husband's approval.

In 1853, Thomas Butler King had finally returned from four years in California but was soon off again, traveling to major cities to promote his scheme for a transcontinental railroad across Texas. Although his wife and children could never again afford to travel, King seems to have denied himself little when he was in a city that offered comforts and amusements. It is quite likely that Thomas Butler King was introduced to the Foxes and séances by business associates on one of his trips to New York. While it is not clear when or how Anna Matilda Page King first learned about to

[394] Thomas Butler King, Austin, 10th Augt '56, to Lord King, King Family Papers, SHC; Stephen Berry, "More Alluring at a Distance: Absentee Patriarchy and the Thomas Butler King Family," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 81:4 (1997), 863-896.

Spiritualism, or where, by April of 1856, she had purchased a table specifically for the purpose of communicating with spirits in her own parlor.[395]

Mrs. King was isolated, anxious, lonely and seldom received letters to allay her fears. Besides the family and the plantation, she had little in common with her husband after three decades of marriage. Her eager embrace of Spiritualism and remarks in her letters suggest that this offered her something of the world outside Retreat Plantation that she hoped they could share. She was careful to broach the subject of her experiments by saying, "As you are not skeptical on the subject of table tipping I will tell you some of our late experience."[396]

She wanted to believe but admitted some uncertainty about the veracity of the messages she received. "They all tell us God disapproves of our so doing. & I mean to try again."[397] Mrs. King was not unaware of the possible explanations for the manifestations through her little table, but was determined to press on. It mattered little to her who disapproved, so long as her husband took an interest in her mediumship and it gave her something interesting to share with him. Even at the time, though, Michael Farraday had demonstrated that the tips were a result of involuntary muscular action. Whether consciously or not, Mrs. King was sending herself messages from somewhere in the needs and desires of her own psyche. What she needed most was reassurance that her husband was well and cared for her, and that her life would improve. Table tipping

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[395] Letter, Anna M. King, July 14, 1856, to Thomas Butler King, King Family Papers, SHC.

[396] Letter, Anna Matilda Page King, June 2, 1856, to Thomas Butler King en route to Austin, Ibid.

[397] Note on partial sheet, "This message is from William Page King to his brother T. Butler King given on the night of 26th June 1856," Ibid.

brought the exciting and worldly experience of the séance to her own parlor and after all those years provided something new to write to her husband about.

Like those of most seekers, many of her communications purported to come from departed relatives. They were replete with references to Christian ideals, the only frame of reference she had for explaining the afterlife. A message in June from a child who had died exhorted his brother, ". . . dearest Butler pray to God!" Some communications were quite elaborate, describing visits to other planets that suggested the influence of popular Spiritualist lore that spun similar tales. She also recorded some séances that reflect an awareness of the comparison of transmission of spirit messages through the air to the transmission of telegraph messages through wires. A few Spiritualist circles had even made efforts to communicate with each other through this "spirit telegraph." Some of the most ambitious of Mrs. King's spirit messages are those in response to questions about her husband's travels and the results of a political convention he was attending. Her spirits' reports apparently were inaccurate and did not receive encouragement or approbation from her husband, and as the summer wore on he may have been reminding her of warnings in the press that consulting the spirits could lead to illness or insanity. In late summer the children had what appears to have been an outbreak of pinkeye. In October she wrote, "My dearly beloved husband . . . . I assure you that neither Georgia or Virginias eyes have been hurt by their love of table tippings. The latter lost faith some time ago & I have made up my mind to give it up as bad spirits have been more numerous than good ones latterly." Her table tipping had not succeeded in forging a new connection with him, nor was it a source of the approval she so longed for from him. Even her daughter Virginia, her nearest companion, had "lost faith." Virginia's doubts,

Mrs. King's failures as a medium, her husband's concerns and hints of disapproval, and her internalization of all of these produced ever less positive experiences with the spirit world. Her mediumistic adventure came to a close, and life at Retreat went on as it always had. As Georgia wrote to her brother as that summer was winding down, ". . . we certainly have many blessings here–these beautiful moon light nights, and sweet sea breezes–our lovely little porch–all this is very lovely–but we lead a dreamy sort of life one day glides by so much like its fellow that I look back thru a long vista of years–and I cannot distinguish one from the other. . . ."[398] Mrs. King died in 1859.

Texas Home Mediums and Antebellum Spiritualists

An 1856 letter to the *Spiritual Telegraph* from Henry Force of Orange County, Texas drew replies from Texan Ebenezer Allen and others, including W. H. I. of Norfolk, Virginia. It was Force's wife who had been the presiding medium at their home circle when an apparition of a black hand appeared. Force wrote that his wife was a writing medium, as was his uneducated slave Goff. Most of Goff's letters were illegible, but Mrs. Force believed that "by perseverence he will eventually get something readable from the Spirit-land." One evening Mrs. Force and her sister had joined Goff, who was attempting to write. Taking the pen, she found that her arm became so agitated that she could not hold it still. Then, by the side of her white hand, "appeared a black hand, just like a negroe's hand!" The ladies screamed and ran out of the room, and Goff's wife exclaimed, "Bress God, what dat!" When the ladies returned and Mrs. Force again took up the pen,

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[398] "William Page King to his brother T. Butler King," Ibid; Letter, Anna M. King, Retreat 8th October 1856, to Thomas Butler King, Metropolitan Hotel, New York, Ibid; Letter, Georgia King, Retreat August 14th 1856, to Lord King, Ibid.

the black hand reappeared. The ladies were more frightened than ever, and Goff put the table away and would permit no more writing that evening. "Now," wrote Force, "I want your opinion as to what such a singular manifestation was for, or what could it mean?" The editors suggested it was the hand of a negro spirit with which the medium had come *en rapport,* probably a "mere *manifestation,* meaning nothing in particular." A letter from Ebenezer Allen the following August suggests he had sought out the Force family, for he demonstrates a greater knowledge of the Forces and their situation. Spiritualism had appeared in their isolated region spontaneously. "Mrs. Force was unexpectedly acted upon by mysterious powers, and she became (at what precise date I am not informed) a medium of superior capacities." Allen included samples of her work as a writing medium, and related a story of Mrs. Force awakening in the night to go to the bedside of a neighbor's favorite servant and cure a painful attack of rheumatism. Force and a partner operated a mail packet on the Neches and Sabine.[399] On forays up the Sabine they probably encountered men who had signed the 1854 petition, including Capt. John Clements. A journey from Galveston across fifty miles of the Gulf and upriver to visit the Forces would have been a simple matter for Ebenezer Allen.

Joel H. Clayton of Clayton's Mills in Pickens County, South Carolina also traveled. He had relatives in Texas and apparently first explored the mysteries of spirit communication while on an extended visit in 1855, and began writing to the *Spiritual Telegraph* two years later. While in Texas, Clayton had seen in a dream a beautiful seal

[399] "Apparition of a Black Hand," *Spiritual Telegraph* (February 2, 1856), 3; "Spiritualism in Texas," *Spiritual Telegraph* (August 2, 1856), 110; W. T. Block, "The Neches River Cotton Steamboats"; W. T. Block, *A History of Jefferson County, Texas*, http://www.wtblock.com/WtblockJr/History%20of%20Jefferson%20County/chapter%207.htm (accessed July 11, 2007)

that the spirits promised to give him; it was in the hands of a medium the spirits called Myrtella. The next time Clayton saw the medium, she was influenced by a spirit "at the dinner table and saw the seal herself." In a narrative evocative of Andrew Jackson Davis's quest for the magic staff, Clayton continued, "Afterward my guardian Spirit, Mary C., informed me that I was to possess this seal, when finished by my progression so as to deserve it." He claimed the seal was also seen by a Mrs. Allen of Houston, "a splendid seeing medium," and Mrs. M. E. Hammond, wife of a judge who lived near Chappell Hill. Her husband, Arthur A. Hammond, was an incorporator and trustee of the Chappell Hill Female College in 1856 when the Chappell Hill Male and Female Institute, established by the Methodist Texas Conference in 1852, became two separate Methodist institutions. The Chappell Hill area attracted wealthy southern planters, and its bottomlands yielded good crops of cotton. Soon the town had become "a center of wealth and privilege" in Texas, its status enhanced by its fine educational institutions.[400]

Back in South Carolina, having heard nothing of his splendid seal for two years, Clayton consulted a local writing medium and learned that in a short time he would have a letter from the medium "Myrtella" in Texas, which he did.[401]

The previous summer, as Clayton lay dangerously ill in South Carolina, Mrs. Hammond in Texas had "a vision, in which she saw me about sinking into my coffin," and when he began to get well she saw him "having the appearance of recovering from sickness." It was his conviction that "Nature's telegraphs are more wonderful and

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[400] *The Laws of Texas 1822–1897,* 186–187; Stephen Chicoine, "'. . . Willing Never to Go in Another Fight': The Civil War Correspondence of Rufus King Felder of Chappell Hill," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 106:4 (April 2003), 576.

[401] "The Seal," *Spiritual Telegraph* (January 9, 1858), 6.

expeditious than those of man, and no doubt will eventually replace them."[402] Spiritualism had been making small inroads in Pickens County; a writing medium had developed and many circles had mediums who were partially developed.

It is not clear what ties Joel H. Clayton had to Texas and the Chappell Hill community, but he continued to receive information from the Hammonds on the activities of Spiritualists there. Her gifts had allowed Mrs. Hammond to tell a stranger his contemplated suicide was a "sinful temptation" to which he must not succumb, and to communicate a message to another stranger from his late wife advising him not to fight a duel he was planning but had discussed with no living soul. Spirits had also guided her in protecting a "wealthy and noted Spiritualist" who was visiting Chappell Hill from being fleeced by a professional medium Clayton dubbed "Misdirection." Clayton himself was busy at the time, under the influence of spirits, preparing a manuscript for the press. In February 1858 a notice in the *Spiritual Telegraph* said Clayton was calling it *A Book for the Benefit of All Sects* and it treated "various themes of theology, spiritual philosophy, morals and social life." Clayton appeared in published listings of Spiritualist lecturers for 1858, 1859 and 1860. He issued a prospectus for a weekly paper to be called the *Cross Anchor Progressionist,* offering local news, poetry, philosophy "and all things of importance that may be learned of Spirit-Intercourse—all for the purpose of unfolding to its readers the splendid principles of the Great Law of Progression." Apparently there was not enough local interest in upstate South Carolina to support the paper, and in October 1859 the *Spiritual Telegraph* noted Clayton's new venture, to be called the *Carolina Progressionist,* planned to offer news, philosophy, literature and developments in the "splendid principles of Progression and Pneumatology." Progression was the watchword

[402] "Spiritual Facts at the South," *Spiritual Telegraph* (February 6, 1858), 336.

of the age and to Spiritualists connoted the eternal development and perfection of the spirit. Pneumatology is a big word, with Latin roots, for the study of spirits and spiritual phenomena. George Bush, Universalist-turned-Spiritualist professor of Hebrew at New York University, edited an 1834 translation of the German Pietist Johan Heinrich Jung-Stilling's *Theory of Pneumatology* for release in 1854 by J. S. Redfield, William Gilmore Simms's friend and publisher. Jung-Stilling's book and *The Seeress of Prevorst* were the two most influential books in a body of literature on spirits and apparitions circulating in Europe and America in the early nineteenth century, and Redfield's edition introduced the term pneumatology to a new generation of readers. Clayton's *Carolina Progressionist* soon joined countless other efforts in the archives of the spirit world, and he was editing *The Presage* in Hendersonville, North Carolina in mid-1860. *The Spiritual Telegraph* had been supplanted by Andrew Jackson Davis's *Herald of Progress,* and in March of that year "J. H. C." of South Carolina asked, "Do you think the Spiritual manifestations will increase, or have there been enough already for the New Dispensation?" Davis predicted the manifestations would come and go for years, until at some unspecified time in the future "a flood of light will glow over the world sweeping like a deluge every crumbling institution from the surface of men's minds." Clayton was engaging with the spiritual manifestations from a religious perspective, looking for signposts to the millennium, and Davis's reply did not satisfy him. In answer to another letter from Clayton, Davis accused him of "complaining because we do not expound the Bible anew, in the light of our spiritual principles. If he reads the Herald of Progress one year, we think he will, at the end of that time, complain less and thank us more." By the time that was printed, Clayton was dead. He died of dysentery on August 4, 1860.[403]

Texans had introduced Joel Clayton to spirit communion. It had come early to Texas, and would flourish there after it had become dormant in most of the rest of the South. We know from letters to the Spiritualist press written by Joel Clayton and Ebenezer Allen that believers in various locations within the state were aware of, visited, and provided other Spiritualists introductions to each other.

Charles Bellinger Stewart of Montgomery, Texas leads to another scattered network of Spiritualists. Born in Charleston, South Carolina, he moved to Brazoria, Texas in 1830 and opened an apothecary shop. By 1849 he had obtained a license to practice medicine, married, had five children and buried his first wife. He had been a delegate to the Texas independence convention, was the first signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence and designed the state flag and seal. In 1837 he had moved to Montgomery County, where he established a medical practice, opened a drugstore and set up a "sun bath" clinic. Stewart represented Montgomery County at the Constitutional Convention of 1845; in the First, Fourth, and Fourteenth legislatures of the Republic and at the 1846 annexation convention. In 1857 he was listed as an agent to receive subscriptions for the *Spiritual Telegraph.*[404] He owned three slaves in 1850 and ten by

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[403] Ibid; "Another Spirit Production," *Spiritual Telegraph* (February 27, 1858), 359; *The Spiritualist Register* (1858); *The Spiritualist Register* (1859) http://www.spirithistory.com/59regist.html (accessed July 2, 2006); *Fourth Annual Spiritual Register* (1860) http://www.spirithistory.com/60regist.html (accessed July 2, 2006); "Prospectus of the Cross Anchor Progressionist," Cross Anchor, South Carolina, March 12, 1859, Narcissa Clayton Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, *Theory of Pneumatology; In Reply to the Question, What Ought to Be Believed or Disbelieved Concerning Presentiments, Visions, and Apparitions According to Nature, Reason, and Scripture,* trans. Samuel Jackson, Ed. George Bush (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1854); R. Laurence Moore, "Spiritualism and Science: Reflections on the First Decade of the Spirit Rappings," *American Quarterly* 24:4 (October 1972), 479; The *Carolina Progressionist* does not appear to exist in any earthly archival collections; "Questions and Answers," *Herald of Progress* (March 10, 1860), 1; "Whisperings," *Herald of Progress* (August 25, 1860), 1; "Henderson County NcArchives Obituaries: Clayton, Joel H., August 4, 1860," http://files.usgwarchives.net/nc/henderson/obits/c/clayton166nob.txt (accessed May 31, 2006).

1860, but they do not account for the bulk of his declared worth of $750,000 on the 1860 census.

After more than a year of correspondence with Charles B. Stewart, nurseryman and publisher Thomas Affleck of Washington, Mississippi wrote to New York publishers Fowler and Wells. A Presbyterian, Affleck had studied agriculture at the University of Edinburgh before coming to America. He established one of the first southern nurseries and published the *Southern Rural Almanac and Plantation Garden Calendar* continuously from 1845 to the 1860s. No firm connection between Affleck and the Texas Spiritualist Ramsay B. Hannay has yet been established, but both were born in Scotland and Affleck's mother was a Hannay. In 1856 Hannay wrote to Robert Dale Owen's *Millennial Gazette* about spiritual circles in Texas. Hannay later claimed that in 1856, "before I could write from spirit impressions," he had sat with a woman in Texas who wrote out messages from old friends of his, "some of whom had died in the West Indies, and whom I had forgotten." The medium saw spirits, and described Hannay's father and how he had died in Scotland. His father's communication was two pages long in a "perfect fac-simile of his handwriting," and foretold the results of a meeting in London with a relative that took place a dozen years later.[405]

Hannay's friend and Washington County neighbor Gideon Lincecum was a physician, philosopher and naturalist who came to Texas from Mississippi in 1848; he

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[404] "Charles Bellinger Stewart: An Inventory of Papers at the Texas State Archives, 1833–1924," http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/tslac/40041/40041-P.html (accessed April 10, 2007); *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Stewart, Charles Bellinger Tate (1806–1885)," http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/SS/fst53.html (accessed April 10, 2007); *Spiritual Telegraph* (April 4, 1857), 2.

[405] "Spiritualism in Texas and Mexico—A letter Addressed to Robert Owen by R. B. Hannay, of Cyprus Top, Harris Co., Texas," *Robert Owen's Millennial Gazette,* Volume I (1856), 212; "Correspondence," *The Spiritual Magazine* [London] (May 1869), 240.

corresponded with noted scientists and was published in a variety of journals. Lincecum shared Hannay's interest in Spiritualism, although one twentieth-century biographer insisted that in their eight-year correspondence Hannay "was never able to convince Lincecum of the seriousness of spiritualism." Lincecum subscribed to the *Spiritual Telegraph,* but did so in his wife's name.[406]

Another Spiritualist friend of Lincecum's was Johan Reinert Reierson who sailed from Norway in 1843 in a small party of ten settlers. His father was a deacon. A "youthful indiscretion" forced Reierson to leave the university, and he supported himself for several years in Copenhagen as a translator. While there, he married. Returning to Norway, he was a publisher and started the first temperance society in Christianand. On his first trip to Texas in 1843 he met Sam Houston, who was very interested in having Norwegian emigrants come to Texas. One of the Reiersons' daughters died on the voyage to America in 1845. Their son Carl died in 1846, and Mrs. Reierson in 1851 giving birth to their eighth child.[407] The Reiersons were Lutherans, and no other published reference to his interest in Spiritualism has come to light.

Besides Lincecum, Hannay and the Hammonds, antebellum Washington County was home to a number of others who were or would become Spiritualists. Hammond's brother Mason, Dr. John W. Lockhart, was one of Sam Houston's closest friends.

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[406] *Handbook of Texas Online,* s. v. "Lincecum, Gideon (1793–1874),"http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/LL/fli3.html (accessed April 12, 2010); Lois Wood Burkhalter, *Gideon Lincecum, 1793–1874: A Biography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 117; Gideon Lincecum, *Gideon Lincecum's Sword: Civil War Letters from the Texas Home Front,* ed. Jerry Brian Lincecum, Edward Hake Phillips and Peggy A. Redshaw (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 25.

[407] Burkhalter, *Gideon Lincecum,* 66; Rasmus Björn Andersson, *The First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration, (1821–1840) Its Causes and Results with an Introduction on the Services Rendered by the Scandinavians to the World and to America* (Madison, WI: Published by the author, 1896), 370–377.

Lockhart's first wife was the sister of another Mason who was Chappell Hill's first mayor, John Crockett Wallis. According to his daughter, Dr. Lockhart from boyhood "had a firm belief in Spirit return." His family had moved to Washington, on the Brazos River and near major roads, when he was sixteen. Two years later the town became the capital of the Republic of Texas. Lockhart was educated at Tulane and the Louisville Medical College, but acquired property and become one of Chappell Hill's most prominent planters.[408]

Another notable antebellum Washington County Spiritualist was Richard Rodgers Peebles, who settled there after receiving a degree from the Ohio Medical College in Cincinnati and served as a physician during the struggle for Texas independence from Mexico. He married Mary Ann Calvit Groce, mistress of Pleasant Hill plantation, in 1843. She was the widow of Jared Groce, "planter, public official, and the wealthiest settler in Stephen F. Austin's colony." This was cotton country, and Peebles maintained a lucrative medical practice as physician to neighboring planters and their enslaved laborers. He was also a partner in a Galveston cotton factoring and brokerage firm and was instrumental in persuading Ebenezer Allen's Houston and Central Texas Railway to lay track near the property he would develop as the town of Hempstead, donating land for the right of way and becoming a stockholder. Peebles then helped organize the Washington County Railroad, and by 1860 was among the wealthiest men in the state.[409]

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[408] Stephen Chicoine, *Confederates of Chappell Hill, Texas: Prosperity, Civil War and Decline* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, Inc., Publishers, 2005), 7, 82, 9; Jonnie Lockhart Wallis, *Sixty Years on the Brazos: The Life and Letters of Dr. John Washington Lockhart* (Los Angeles: privately printed, 1930), 30; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Washington-on-the-Brazos, Texas," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/hvw10.html (accessed April 1, 2010).

[409] *Handbook of Texas Online*, s. v. "Groce, Jared Ellison (1782–1839)," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/GG/fgr70.html (accessed January 28, 2004); *Handbook*

This area on the Brazos was a nexus of Spiritualism in Texas for decades. Others living in or linked to Washington County before the Civil War would be publicly connected to Spiritualism in the future. Dr. and Mrs. William Halsey lived in Chappell Hill before and after the war; he was president of the Methodists' Soule University. John S. Norton was the fiancé of a Methodist Chappell Hill teacher. Dr. Gregor C. McGregor would be active in Spiritualist organizations in the 1880s. Jane Stamps was the wife of John Stamps, an early Austin Colony settler and a member of the Eighth Congress of the Republic who worked as a railroad contractor before the Civil War; the widow Stamps would write to a Spiritualist newspaper in 1874. The most prominent was Henry Landes, born in 1844 in Kentucky. His family settled in Washington County in 1851, and after the war he went into business in Galveston with John Crockett Wallis. Landes married a daughter of John W. Lockhart, and after her death married her sister. He would become mayor of Galveston and the leader of organized Spiritualism there. Washington County was a locus of Spiritualist energy, but people from all across the state were writing to Spiritualist newspapers in the late 1850s.

Leroy Alonzo Griffith lived north of Houston in Montgomery County. Griffith was born in New York and came to Texas in 1829 with his parents, who were settlers in Austin's second colony. One of his brothers married the only child to survive the battle at the Alamo. Griffith apparently filtered his Christianity through Transcendentalism or Andrew Jackson Davis's harmonial philosophy, and had concluded that what the writers of the Bible called the "Holy Ghost" was the all-pervading principle "given off from the Great Fount of Wisdom, love and intelligence" but that men in that ancient time "could

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of Texas Online, s. v. "Peebles, Richard Rodgers," http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/PP/fpe10.html (accessed January 28, 2004).

not comprehend a God unless they resolved him into a human shape. They could not well look beyond their surroundings into the universe pervaded by this Omnipresent Spirit."[410] Griffith was one of many southerners trying to find a way to reconcile Spiritualism with their Bibles.

Twenty-seven-year-old stock raiser Charles F. O'Brien was not among them. He wrote in 1860 from Pleasanton, thirty-five miles south of San Antonio, "nearly on the borders of civilization" but not beyond the reach of Methodist camp meetings. O'Brien had recently attended one, and "after patient observation" was forced to conclude the excitement was "unaided by the influence of Jesus" but rather was induced through the agency of "six large, healthy, stout-lunged ministers, who represent a strong positive battery; being all united in sympathy and purpose, naturally exercised a strong controlling power. The audience being, as they were, disunited, exercising no will-power, were negative, and thereby the weaker vessels became receptive, and easily excited." O'Brien relished the opportunity to expose the obvious contradictions in the Bible. "God's immutable principles alone are the only infallible creations, while everything that bears the impress or workmanship of man, must necessarily be more or less fallible." O'Brien, who also corresponded with the *Herald of Progress,* told the *Banner of Light* three Spiritualist papers reached Pleasanton and were "all doing a good work. Seed through their influence is being planted, that will sooner or later germinate and grow." He signed himself, "Everybody's brother, Charles F. O'Brien."[411]

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[410] "History of the Griffith Homesite and Cemetery" (1980 historical marker), http://www.rootsweb.com/~txmcghs/griffith.htm (accessed February 9, 2007); "The Soul and Its Manifestations," *Spiritual Telegraph* (July 5, 1856), 79.

[411] "Whisperings," *Herald of Progress* (June 2, 1860), 2; (September 15, 1860), 1; (October 27, 1860), 1; "Matters in Texas," *Banner of Light* (December 22, 1860), 6.

Non-Christian Spiritualists

Spiritualism for some people was not an enhancement to Christianity but offered open-ended possibilities for individual interpretation of the meaning of spiritual growth and progress. For example, sixteen-year-old William Emmette Coleman of Richmond, Virginia became a "radical non-Christian Spiritualist" in 1859. Born in Albemarle County and raised by a widowed mother who owned no slaves, he became an abolitionist. "At the same time he became an advocate of universal suffrage, prison reform, peace and temperance reforms, total separation of church and state, etc." We tend to think of this coterie of reform movements as the province of post-Awakening northeastern Christians, but Coleman defies this categorization. One source described Coleman as Richmond's "first Republican," and he would serve in a variety of posts in Virginia's Reconstruction government. Coleman probably managed to live without incident in Richmond for so long because he worked outside the mainstream, in the theatrical community, and was not a political activist before the war. He later settled in San Francisco. An autodidact, Coleman wrote and lectured on "Evolution, Darwinism, Spectrum Analysis," "higher spiritualism," and "mythology, philology, archaeology, and kindred subjects."[412] He will reappear in this narrative as a correspondent of Christian Spiritualist Samuel Watson in the 1870s.

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[412] Samuel Porter Putnam, *400 Years of Freethought,* (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1894), 706–707; Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition, 1848–1876* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 115; *Herringshaw's American Statesman and Public Official Yearbook: 1907–1908. A Record of the Lives of the United States Executive, United States Senators, Congressmen, Jurists, Army and Naval and Federal Officials in Every Capacity, Governors, Executive Officers and Other State Officials, Senators and Representatives, Judges and Officers of the State Supreme, Circuit and District Courts, Members of Boards and Commissions, Trustees, Judges, Mayors, Aldermen, Attorneys, and Other State, County and City Officials in Every Capacity,* ed. Thomas William Herringshaw (Chicago: American Publishers' Association, 1907), 164–165.

Another non-religious Spiritualist was white New Orleans healer James Wingard. His story also demonstrates that interest in phrenology, magnetism and spirit communication frequently overlapped or intertwined. He was mentioned in the *Christian Spiritualist* in a story it picked up in 1854 from the *American Phrenological Journal.* Wingard had mesmerized his clairvoyant sister-in-law, who visualized a crime on the levee in which a man was being robbed and murdered, described the perpetrators and gave information about their movements that led to their capture. A year later, Wingard wrote to the *Christian Spiritualist* saying he was a believer in the "Harmonial Philosophy" but was not "too bigoted or prejudiced to appreciate the 'Christian Spiritualist' because it entertains views diametrically opposed to my own." The editors applauded Wingard's "disposition to co-operate and harmonize with us in the labors for progress and mental illumination" and exercise tolerance in areas where they differed. James Constantine Wingard was born about 1820 in Ohio and became a steamboat pilot. He married in New Orleans in 1840. Evidence indicates that in 1843 as pilot of the steamboat *De Soto* he caused an accident that destroyed another vessel. In January 1847 the resulting lawsuit reached the United States Supreme Court. In February, James Wingard, Jr., died two days after his fifth birthday. Wingard went to California in 1850, no doubt headed for the goldfields, but returned to New Orleans a year later. Spiritualist Emma Hardinge described Wingard as a "noted medium" of the Crescent City, "sometimes called Captain Wingard, from his having been a Mississippi boatman." She characterized him as uneducated, "a plain, simple, straightforward man, in the humblest walks of life," who was able to write perfectly in oriental and classical languages when under spirit influence. Joseph Barthet had written about these communications, and about

Wingard's ability to draw when entranced. All this was done in "almost total darkness, on paper which had been previously examined and found not to contain any marks." Before the Civil War, theses writings were "carefully preserved, and occasionally exhibited" by Dr. E. C. Hyde,[413] whose domestic arrangements with a free woman of color would have made him a social pariah to many whites. Wingard apparently chose to focus on healing mediumship, and listed himself as a physician on the 1860 census.

Faith-based Disapproval

Opposition to Spiritualism from the pulpit and the denominational press was unremitting. Clergymen did not welcome religious innovators and new dispensations, and many of them—in agreement with strict Swedenborgians—were convinced it was the work of evil spirits or even of Satan himself.

The subject of Spiritualism was still very much on Godfrey Barnsley's mind in 1855. His son George wrote playfully in June about "the table rising" and requested his father to "please ask it how I will get through at Commencement, and Examination." Barnsley was already seeing the dark side of spirit communication. That summer, he wrote to Judge Edmonds, asking politely if the judge had "ever demanded in the holy name of God in whose presence we all are, both in the flesh and out of it, whether the

[413] "Psychological Facts; Curious Mesmeric Revelations," *Christian Spiritualist* (November 11, 1854), 4; "The Right Spirit," *Christian Spiritualist* (September 16, 1855), 3; "New Orleans Marriage Index," *Daily Picayune* 1837–1857, http://nutrias.org/~nopl/info/louinfo/newsmarr/newsmarw.htm (accessed November 3, 2007); "U. S. Supreme Court: Waring v. Clarke , 46 U.S. 441 (1847)," http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=46&invol=441 (accessed April 3, 2010); New Orleans Death Index," *Daily Picayune* 1837–1857, http://nutrias.org/~nopl/info/louinfo/deaths/deathwi.htm (accessed November 3, 2007); "New Orleans, Louisiana Ship & Wagon Train Passengers for California 1850," *Daily Picayune,* http://www.pt5dome.com/timespic1850.html (accessed November 3, 2007); "Immigrant Ships Arriving at the Port of New Orleans January 1 thru [sic] July 7, 1851," http://www.sos.louisiana.gov/ARCHIVES/gen/shippassenger.txt (accessed November 3, 2007); *Modern American Spiritualism,* 425.

spirits who represent themselves as those of Swedenborg and Bacon are truly so–if you have not permit me earnestly to request of you to do so in the most solemn manner adjuring them in the name of the Supreme Ruler of the universe to tell you the truth and nothing but the truth." Barnsley was wresting with the religious meaning of his experiences with spirits, and the possibility of being misled by lying spirits. "If Spiritualism be of God and sanctioned by him," he reasoned, "there can be no harm in asking in his name for a solemn assurance of the identity of His instruments for its propagation–if otherwise there cannot be a doubt of its being sinful." Barnsley was offended by Judge Edmonds's reply that "You have a very poor opinion of my fitness for the work in which I have engaged if you suppose that I have overlooked so obvious a suggestion as that which you make to me. You must judge for yourself as to the 'identity of the instruments' used in this work. I do not mean to judge for you. I judge for myself, upon such evidence as is afforded to me."[414] The judge was a busy man. Godfrey Barnsley was deeply troubled, and in need of help.

Replying to a letter from Barnsley, his old friend and confidante William Duncan explained that while he was "by no means disposed to doubt the physical manifestations" Barnsley reported, it was how they were effected that was problematic. Duncan could not believe that a spirit could read a person's every thought: "That is the province of deity." His conclusion: "I am very much inclined to think with You–that these spiritual manifestations are an effort on the part of the arch Enemy, (who sought by his temptation of the Saviour, to destroy the hope in Christ for the Salvation of a lost world,) to crush the

[414] Letter, George Barnsley, Oglethorpe University, Talmage Ga., June 23, 1855, to G. W. Barnsley, Godfrey W. Barnsley Papers, Box 3, 1855 Jan–July, Duke; Draft of copy of letter, Godfrey Barnsley, Woodlands near Kingston Cass Co Geo, July 8, 1855, to Hon. Judge Edmunds, New York, Ibid.; Letter, J. W. Edmonds, Glenns Falls, N.Y., July 22, 1855, to Godfrey Barnsley, Ibid.

religion of Christ - & thus to gain compete control of this world." Duncan counseled prayer and the reading of God's Word. Within weeks, Barnsley was dreaming of his own funeral. In November, Duncan wrote a chatty letter. Barnsley's daughters were staying with the Duncans in Savannah; they had attended weddings and he had taken them to the theater. At the end, Duncan added a note: "Let me know if Your friend yet adheres to you or if You have been able to cast him off." At Christmas, the Barnsley girls were still with the Duncans, and their brother George was there as well. "It grieves me to find You are still annoyed in the old way," Duncan wrote. "Resist every importunity to Communicate–which You say You have done since, I saw you at Milledgeville–Your safety lies in non-intercourse–And here once for all believe me–that I can consider the manifestations called spiritual in no other light than from Spirits–but I am satisfied notwithstanding their 'moral teachings' that they are evil spirits." Duncan was certain that "Spiritualism is a delusion–a delusion in which the Arch Enemy of God & man is the mover & his imps are employed to carry out his plans." Again he advised "Prayer, sweet, honest, persevering, believing prayer to God will bring deliverance."[415]

Barnsley, though, could not resist the spirits. His papers contain receipts for subscriptions to the *Banner of Light,* New Orleans *Sunday Delta,* and the *New England Spiritualist,* a short-lived Boston publication. William Duncan wrote to Barnsley in 1857 about Leah and Kate Fox's examination by a committee of distinguished professors from Harvard, including Louis Agassiz, "which resulted in a total failure & discomfiture of the

[415] Letter, William Duncan, Savannah, September 10, 1855, to Godfrey Barnsley, Woodlands, Godfrey W. Barnsley Papers, Box 3, 1855 Jan–July [+], Duke; Letter, William Duncan, Savannah, October 31, 1855, to Godfrey Barnsley, Woodlands, Ibid.; Letter, William Duncan, Savannah, November 24, 1855, to Godfrey Barnsley, Ibid.; Letter, William Duncan, Savannah, December 25, 1855, to Godfrey Barnsley, Ibid.

spiritualists–The committee condemn the whole thing as immoral - & calculated to do much harm." Barnsley sent him a paper with an article refuting the committee's findings.[416]

In the summer of 1858 Barnsley wrote to Duncan, asking if he thought about Spiritualism any more. Duncan replied that he "seldom or ever" did, unless it came up in conversation or the press. "By the bye," he added, "I saw in a paper Yesterday, that one of the Misses Fox, the celebrated media has renounced Spiritualism as of the devil, & has become a Roman Catholic! Don't think me bigoted, if I say–that is very much like out of the frying pan into the fire. The delusion makes no head here and I think is gradually dying in the north." Margaret Fox had not renounced Spiritualism, but had joined the Roman Catholic Church despite the disapproval of her Methodist family. The New York *Herald* assumed her actions were a recantation of Spiritualism, and said so, but Horace Greeley of the *Tribune,* who had attended Margaret's baptism, claimed she had "never dreamed of saying or implying that any of her family were guilty of fraud or deception in the matter of the 'Rappings.'" People believed what they chose to believe about it. Duncan was much more interested in the laying of the transatlantic telegraph cable. "How stupendous," he effused, "England & the United States placed in daily–hourly–communication! The effects–who can estimate!–I am lost in amazement & wonder - & when I attempt to form some opinion of the effect, on our business, I fail to arrive at any conclusion." The cable promised to revolutionize communication and commerce, providing instantly the information that otherwise would have taken weeks to cross the Atlantic—and obviating the need for mediumistic mental telegraphy on the subject.

[416] *Talking to the Dead,* 190–191; Letter, W. Duncan, July 10, 1857, to Godfrey Barnsley, Godfrey W. Barnsley Papers, Box 4, Papers, Jul-Aug 1857, Duke.

Unfortunately, the cable failed after less than a month. A reliable connection would not be operational until 1866.[417] Barnsley continued to read Spiritualist publications for the rest of his life.

The northern Spiritualist press treated it as quite a coup when a noted southerner publicly identified with the cause, particularly when it was a man of the cloth. L. F. W. Andrews, born in North Carolina in 1802, was the son of a Presbyterian divine and publisher who educated his son for the ministry. Lewis Feuilleteau Wilson Andrews received a classical education and earned a degree as Doctor of Medicine at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. He practiced in Ohio and Pennsylvania, and became a convert to Universalism in 1830 while spending the summer in Augusta, Kentucky practicing dentistry. He entered the Universalist ministry, and after 1833 he also published and taught. Andrews was an advocate of botanical rather than allopathic medicine, and in the mid-1840s was professor of chemistry and botany at the short-lived Alabama Medical Institute in Wetumpka. As editor of the Universalist *Southern Herald* in Montgomery, Andrews joined other southern Universalists in denying "that there was any connection at all between Universalism and abolitionism."[418]

By 1858 he was editing the Macon *Georgia Citizen.* The *Spiritual Telegraph* cited an item from the *Georgia Citizen* in which Andrews described a circle at which they sang

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[417] Letter to G. Barnsley, Esq., August 18, 1858, Godfrey W. Barnsley Papers, Box 4, Papers, Jul-Dec 1858, Duke; David Chapin, *Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Antebellum Culture of Curiosity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 206; Letter to G. Barnsley, Esq., August 17, 1858, Barnsley Papers, Box 4, Papers, Jul-Dec 1858, Duke; Lionel Carter, Deborah Bartlett-McNeil, Stephen Drew, Graham Marle, Lonnie Hagadorn and Nigel Irvine, *Submarine Cables and the Oceans: Connecting the World* (Cambridge, UK: The United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 2010), 13.

[418] John S. Haller, Jr., *Kindly Medicine: Physio-Medicalism in America, 1836–1911* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), 48; Ann Lee Bressler, *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770–1880* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 87.

a hymn and raps kept time, and on request furniture moved or became immovable. What Andrews found most persuasive were the "extraordinary manifestations" through the writing medium, Mrs. H., a "wealthy, pious lady, of irreproachable character" who wrote in different handwriting each time a message was communicated through her, and always "*with a bandage closely pressed over her eyes.*" People Andrews trusted shared information related to them by individuals "entitled to the most implicit belief" which inclined him to think "there can be no question that the Spirits of the departed are permitted to hold communion with the inhabitants of earth." He also told of a cure prescribed by spirits for a young woman crippled with rheumatism which "entirely restored" her. Within a month, the *Spiritual Telegraph* reported that Andrews was under attack by some of "his brethren of the Southern Press" who "by dint of jeers, sneers, grimaces, and pious ejaculations, have endeavored to conform him to their Procustean bedstead." The *Spiritual Telegraph* encouraged Andrews to "stick close to the facts of spiritual manifestations, and they will undoubtedly take good care of him, and see him safely through the whole controversy."[419]

Andrews promptly began a second newspaper in Macon, the *Christian Spiritualist,* and Macon became the center of Spiritualist activity in antebellum Georgia. Andrews and his wife opened their home to medium Emma Hardinge during her visit in 1860, and she gushed to the *Banner of Light* that "there is much medium power in that place, and more Spiritualism than suits the *professional* shepherds of Macon souls." The South in 1860 was a lucrative if limited market for professional Spiritualists. Emma Hardinge left Macon "laden with a beautiful little casket, the gift of my most generous

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[419] "From a Spiritualist in Macon, Ga.," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 22, 1858), 38; "An Editor in Hot Water," *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 12, 1858), 6.

entertainers, Dr. and Mrs. Andrews, with a fresh golden lining fresh from the open purses and yet more open hearts of the whole Society, " but hastened to add that "far dearer than all, the tears and blessings of such friends as determined me not to go to any heaven, Christian or heathen, unless it is to be re-united to them." When L. F. W. Andrews died, the official Universalist obituary notice did not mention that he had been a Spiritualist, but said that he had "passed quietly and without pain to the world of spirits."[420]

While Hardinge was speaking in Georgia as the guest of Rev. and Mrs. Andrews, the *Herald of Progress* announced that Methodist Bishop H. H. Kavanaugh and "the Rev. Dr. Hawks, Episcopal, have attended and manifested much interest in the lectures of Miss Hardinge." There is no firm evidence that Bishop Kavanaugh was a Spiritualist, but he was assigned to Waterproof, Louisiana in 1857 and would have known Spiritualist Elizabeth Scott and Swedenborgian William Henry Holcombe. He probably also knew Methodist minister William H. Watkins and his wife who had subscribed to the *Christian Spiritualist*; they lived just down the river in Natchez. Born in Kentucky about 1802, as a young Methodist minister Hubbard Hinde Kavanaugh had served in Louisville in 1829 with Littleton Fowler, the brother of Wiley P. Fowler who would be a founding member of the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge in 1854 and a lifelong Spiritualist and Methodist. Kavanaugh would support the Confederacy as a chaplain. Minister and physician Benjamin Taylor Kavanaugh, his brother, would be a Confederate surgeon and after the Civil War a teacher at Soule University in Chappell Hill, Texas.[421] Methodists,

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[420] "Rev. Lewis Feuilleteau Wilson Andrews, M. D.," *The Universalist Register: Containing the Statistics of the Church, with an Almanac for 1875* (Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1875), 116–118.

[421] "Persons and Events," *Herald of Progress* (March 3, 1860), 3; "Early Methodist Circuit Riders and Those Who Followed Them to the 'Washitaw' Area and to Monroe, Louisiana,"

Spiritualists and Swedenborgians moved in and out of each other's lives in the nineteenth-century South.

Another of the very few antebellum southern Spiritualist newspapers was Joseph Barthet's *Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans,* which printed "communications between spirits of the dead and New Orleans mediums." Historian Caryn Cossé Bell studied the "messages revealed by these mediums, some of whom like Constant Reynes were Creoles of color, were critical of the conservative Catholic clergy of New Orleans and endorsed abolitionist publications." *Le Spiritualiste* did have white, slaveholding readers; perhaps they tolerated the reformist agenda of Barthet and his friends because it was presented in French and the monthly was also a good source of information about the basics of Spiritualism, reports of spirit communication, and news and "articles from spiritualists in the North and in France."[422] The Catholic Church frowned on Spiritualism, but many Catholics in south Louisiana embraced it anyway.

In addition to the ongoing disapprobation of denominational clergymen, at least one individual Christian publicly expressed opposition to Spiritualism. George Carrico of New Orleans wrote fevered letters to both the *Spiritual Telegraph* and the *Christian Spiritualist.* The *Spiritual Telegraph* acknowledged hearing from Carrico, calling him a "violent opposer" of Spiritualism. When after three letters the *Christian Spiritualist* still declined to "be the organ of his controversial issues with Universalists, Infidels, &c. &c." the editors received a fourth, and then a fifth letter that threatened exposure if they did

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http://www.centenary.edu/library/archives/part3.html (accessed November 23, 2008); "Jottings from the Old Journal of Littleton Fowler," 73; *Library of Southern Literature,* ed. Edwin Anderson, Joel Chandler Harris, Charles William Kent and Lucian Lamar Knight (Atlanta, Ga.: The Martin and Holt Company, 1907), 232.

[422] "The Free Black Press: Freedom in French"; *Revolution, Romanticism,* 209.

not immediately publish his first letter. Soon Carrico managed to get the New Orleans *Daily Crescent* to print his letter to the editor of the *Christian Spiritualist* and his denunciation of the *Spiritual Telegraph* for refusing to publish him. The *Christian Spiritualist* finished its discussion of the episode by excerpting the end of one of Carrico's letters:

> P. S.—I omitted to request of you the publication (an immediate one) of my last letter to you, which request I make in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and master for ever—blessed be his name—by his faithful servant,
> George Carrico.
> And it is also my duty to inform you that a denial of my request, in his name, will be punished with instant death. You have your choice.
> Answer by telegraph. G. C.

Newspapers were fond of pointing to cases of people who had come unhinged because of their involvement with Spiritualism, but Carrico's case is a reminder that in the name of Jesus Christ someone might threaten to do violence *against* Spiritualists because their beliefs were at odds with his own. George Carrico was a native of New Orleans, and apparently at the time he engaged in this epistolary frenzy was employed as a clerk by the wealthy Spiritualist clothing merchant Nathan C. Folger. An 1838 city directory lists the clothing store of Opdyke & Carrico across the street from the space Folger occupied in the 1850s, so perhaps there were other tensions and frustrations beneath the surface of Carrico's denunciation of Spiritualism—embodied in his immediate sphere by Nathan C. Folger.[423] By 1860, Carrico was in the employ of the city police.

[423] "George Carrico of New Orleans," *Spiritual Telegraph* (April 14, 1855), 2; "Mr. George Carrico," *Christian Spiritualist* (May 26, 1855), 2; *Cohen's New Orleans Directory for 1855: including Jefferson City, Gretna, Carrollton, Algiers and McDonogh* (New Orleans: Printed at the Office of the Picayune, 1855), 89; "1838 New Orleans City Directory Excerpts," http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/la/orleans/history/directory/1838nocd.txt (accessed August 3, 2007).

Exposing Fraud

Private and public Spiritualist manifestations almost from the start had had an entirely different character. Privately, families and friends gathered around a table with a "home medium," either summoning the spirits for amusement or attempting to contact dead loved ones. Public Spiritualism had its genesis in the sort of theatrical mesmerism Andrew Jackson Davis performed in the 1840s, and its official start when the Fox sisters began demonstrating the raps for paying audiences. Professional mediums found a ready market among people wanting "tests" and contact with their dead, and almost from the start there were accusations of fraud. One reason many people wanted nothing to do with Spiritualism was their fear of being conned and made to look foolish. Female mediums such as Cora Hatch and Emma Hardinge, with the brains and ability, turned to delivering uplifting trance lectures from the spirits as a safer way to earn a living. A small group of former mediums found it more profitable to reinvent themselves as debunkers, demonstrating how the professional Spiritualists—both onstage and in séances for hire—created their illusions. As early as the mid-eighteen hundreds, catalogues offering magical apparatus to performers offered "anti-Spiritualistic devices," to demonstrate how mediums made bells ring, tables rise and hands rap. "Luminous Material Ghosts and Forms," and "Magic Slates" were available, as well as prepackaged acts such as "Etherialization" that would allow a medium "to produce any number of spirit forms, in the perfect dark, which have the appearance of a fine, misty, luminous vapor . . . fading away, producing a weird and wonderful effect." "Spiritualism" had quickly grown to include stage magic cloaked in the rhetoric of spirit influence. Even Jonathan Koons, who operated the seminal "spirit room" people flocked to in the early 1850s, had kept a dish

of phosphorus solution "for the spirits to dip their hands in." The Davenport brothers began their act in the 1850s, in which they were tightly bound to seats and shut up in a large cabinet with musical instruments suspended. The lights were lowered, and the audience heard the instruments being played. When the doors were opened, the "Davenport brothers sat calmly, hands and feet tied in place."[424] Even after these and others were exposed as tricksters, many people remained confirmed Spiritualists. They took the position that exposing fraudulent mediums did not disprove genuine spirit communication.

During the secon half of the 1850s the major cities of the South had become profitable stopping places for professional mediums. When trance lecturer Emma Hardinge boarded a steamboat for Memphis in early 1860, she had left George Redman in New Orleans with that lucrative market hungry for a test medium, and Godfrey Barnsley wrote enthusiastically to his son George after a sitting: "There is an excellent medium here G. Redman and I took Lucien to him–his rooms are constantly filled and he is reaping a rich harvest by coming here–it is certainly most astonishing & convincing." Barnsley pronounced himself "quite convinced. Your mother says she wants to develop me as a medium and when I have time shall try to form a circle."[425]

Hardinge and Redman found being professional Spiritualists profitable in the years before the war. Martin Van Buren Bly was a medium who found he could turn his talents to more remunerative use by exposing the tricks employed by other mediums. He

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[424] Fred Nadis, *Wonder Shows: Performing Science, Magic, and Religion in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 120, 116; *Spiritualism, a Popular History*, 138.

[425] Letter, Godfrey Barnsley, New Orleans, January 14, 1860 to George Barnsley, George S. Barnsley Papers #1521, Series 1.2, folder 6 1856–1860, SHC.

appeared in New Orleans and quietly learned the names of some of Redman's wealthier clients, then called on them to explain how they had been duped. At the end of February the *Crescent* reported that Dr. Redman's cheating was first discovered by '"a well-known Spiritualist of this city." This was Nathan C. Folger. "The gentleman in question," declared the *Daily Delta,* "as soon as he became aware that Dr. Redman had swindled him, went to him with a friend, and detected him so clearly that the Doctor was obliged to own up, and was glad to hand back all of the money which the citizen in question and his immediate friends had given him." That had been the previous Saturday, "and a few hours after, Dr. Redman had taken down his sign and left in a carriage with a hastily packed trunk for parts unknown." Dr. Bly engaged the Odd Fellows' Hall for a week to give lectures and demonstrations "of the manner in which Dr. Redman operates, which will satisfy the most ardent believer that he was one of the grandest swindlers who ever hoisted a shingle in this vicinity."[426] This experience did not diminish Folger's belief in Spiritualism—or Barnsley's—but probably contributed to mounting suspicion and ill feelings toward northerners.

Nathan C. Folger of New Orleans had family ties in New York and New England, but was firmly planted in Louisiana. Nathan C. Folger & Son's advertising called "'the attention of Traders to their immense assortment' of more than 4,000 blue suits, as well as drawers, undershirts, and socks to be worn by male slaves at their sale." The firm was "located in the midst of the city's slave-trading district, at the corner of Magazine and

[426] '"Dr. Martin Van Buren Bly and the 'Times'," *The Spiritual Magazine* [London] (January 1861), 29; *Great Discussion of Modern Spiritualism, between Prof. J. Stanley Grimes and Leo Miller, Esq. at the Melodeon, Boston, Every Evening During the Second Week in March, 1860* (Boston: Berry, Colby, & Company, 1860), 129; "Local Intelligence. Grand Expose of Spiritual Manifestations. Intense Excitement among the Spiritualists. Dr. Redman, the Celebrated Medium, Left for Parts Unknown. Some Account of His Doings, etc.," *Daily Delta* (February 28, 1860), 7.

Gravier."[427] Like Godfrey Barnsley, Folger apparently did not consider proof of mediumistic fraud enough to disprove Spiritualism. It was probably Nathan Folger to whom John M. Chilton's widow Sarah would refer in 1875 when she wrote, "When I go to New Orleans perhaps I may meet some good genteel spiritualist who will help me–Mr. Folger has been a medium for years."[428]

All over the South, all sorts of people hoped to communicate with the spirits of the dead in the years before the Civil War. Urban southerners' experiences in home circles were much like those of their rural counterparts, but city life offered diversity and expanded opportunities for fellowship, exploration and education. Despite sectional tensions over the spread or containment of slavery and the mounting stridence of the discourse on both sides, many southerners felt free to take or leave what they pleased in the marketplace of "isms." Spiritualism's continuing and highly publicized connection to adherents of abolition and free love did make it impossible for some white people to separate it from northern attempts to foist unwelcome changes on the South, but many southerners supported social reforms such as temperance that they thought would benefit themselves and their society. Spiritualists in the New Orleans community of Creoles of color, with their white francophone friends, used spirit communication to propound "the harmonial concepts of Charles Fourier and Andrew Jackson Davis" and social equality.[429] To most white southerners, though, Spiritualism was not inconsistent with slavery. White

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[427] Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 156.

[428] Letter to Mrs. L. N. Brown, New Orleans, December 12, 1875, Norton, Chilton, and Dameron Family Papers, Series 1, folder 11, SHC.

[429] *Revolution, Romanticism*, 209.

evangelical denominations were alert to spiritual gifts among slaves and possibly free blacks as well; in the early days of revivals and camp meetings their emotional response to the message of salvation marked them as more spiritual than most whites.

The denunciations of Spiritualism from the pulpit in every denomination were a reality, but so was the striving of individuals in and out of those denominations for something more and better than tired creeds and platitudes. Some Spiritualists engaged in debate with critics; most quietly ignored them. Spiritualism probably enjoyed greatest success as a domestic religion. Home circles most often sought comfort from lost loved ones, assurance the dead were waiting for the living to join them in the eternal joys of the spirit world.

Most who tried the spirits sought solace in times of bereavement. Some were drawn to the new and the marvelous, trying to keep up with the latest amusements. Some were certain some natural force such as electricity could explain the phenomena. Individuals fashioned their beliefs from the faith of their fathers and their own reading of Scripture and the news of the day. Those in the South, black and white, urban and rural, were also influenced by the beliefs and traditions of those with whom they lived in that strange and doomed world they had made together.

Spiritualist papers with a national readership were an important forum. The role of the Spiritualist press, northern and southern, in creating virtual community was probably most valued by those who lived outside large cities, allowing them a means for forging connections and obtaining information, but urban southerners used them in the same way. Southern Spiritualists did create their own publications, but were unable to sustain them. In Macon, L. F. W. Andrews cast Spiritualism in a Universalist mold in his

Christian Spiritualist. South Carolina's Joel Clayton could find few who were interested in his progressionist publication. *Le Spiritualiste* appealed almost exclusively to French-speaking south Louisiana readers, and survived for two years purveying a mixture of information and political reform.

A few Spiritualists like William Emmette Coleman and James Wingard were firmly non-Christian, but William Laning's support of the Underground Railroad and a collection of reforms was at heart Christian in nature. Laning's actions were intolerable to southerners, signifying the invasion of the South by northern abolitionist ideas even if Laning was a native Marylander. The tensions between the North and the South over slavery would receive a thorough airing in letters to the Spiritualist press.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Impending Crisis and Civil War

One important early work on women and Spiritualism acknowledged that there were "small numbers" of people in the South who were "believers willing to brave the rancor of their neighbors" but, like most scholarship that touched on Spiritualism among southerners, did not find reason to take it very seriously. The book went on to prove this by stating that "Spiritualists universally condemned slavery," an assertion this chapter will demonstrate was not at all the case.[430] The letters to Spiritualist newspapers make it abundantly clear that slaveholders who were Spiritualists wanted nothing more than to separate belief in communication with spirits from any other agenda, particularly abolitionism. Failure to do so would undermine the cause of spiritual progression in the South. As early as 1854 the sectional differences began to come to the fore in the Spiritualist press, and the frustration and frequency of the letters on both sides ratcheted upward in the late 1850s. Only the onset of war stopped the squabbling.

A South Carolinian wrote from Camden in the summer of 1854 that he regretted the *Spiritual Telegraph* did not appear more frequently than once a week, "as I devour its contents in two hours after it comes to hand, and then have to wait one hundred and sixty-eight hours for another." The *Telegraph* pointed to this reader as an answer to the *cui bono* question, what good does Spiritualism do? It was "by the facts and truths of the New Dispensation he has, as he states," been "redeemed from Atheism, and made to

[430] *Radical Spirits*, 29, 78.

almost entirely forget, as it were, certain destructive and inconvenient habits which he had contracted while in his state of *un*faith. This fact he instances as an example of the good which Spiritualism can do." *Telegraph* publisher Charles Partridge, addressing a group of Spiritualists in New York a few months earlier, had "read and commented upon a letter received from a gentleman in Camden, S. C., stating the fact that Spirits had advised him to dispose of his slaves, forty-two in number, and remove to a free State, with which advice he is about complying." This had sparked a discussion with a southern gentleman in the audience, who wished to know "what were the general teachings of Spirits respecting slavery?" Samuel B. Brittan opined that while that would depend on the development of any individual spirit, "in point of fact he had not yet heard of an instance in which slavery was sanctioned from the spiritual world." Charles Partridge steered the conversation back to individual responsibility, since "upon the subject of slavery, as well as upon other subjects, we should not allow Spirits to dictate our opinions, irrespective of the light of our own reason, as Spirits, like men in the flesh, are sometimes liable to err." Another voice "expressed the hope that Spiritualism would be allowed to pursue its own course with reference to the question, and thought that if Spiritualists sought to clothe it with the insignia of abolitionism, they would shut it out of the Southern States. . . ."[431] This airing of views in New York was immediately shared with readers everywhere.

As southerners' engagement with Spiritualism and the Spiritualist press increased, it was inevitable that the South's peculiar institution would become a topic of discussion. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was the catalyst that began the conversation, northern abolitionists pleading God's "higher laws" as their justification for flouting the law's

[431] "Digest of Correspondence," *Telegraph Papers* V, 144; "Conference of Feb. 2d.," *Telegraph Papers* IV, 83.

requirement that every citizen serve as a slave catcher. In 1854, Arkansas planter E. L. Coleman told the *Spiritual Telegraph* it had pained him to see in its pages, "Under the caption of '*Higher Laws*' . . . advocacy of the doctrines which I conceive to be at war with the existing bond of union of the good people of these United States." Coleman correctly pointed out that recognition of slavery was the "*sine qua non*, without which the Constitution never would have been ratified by the slave-holding sovereignties." Until such time as the Constitution were amended, he said, citizens would be obliged to honor its provisions and uphold the laws of the country. "Fanaticism should have no place among a law-abiding people." He suggested if northern fanatics "are so much dissatisfied with our bond of union that they can not conscientiously fulfill its requirements, that they secede from it; this they have a perfect right to do."[432]

Frances Hyer, petition signer and medium from St. Louis, wrote in 1855 to the *Christian Spiritualist* from aboard the steamer *Henry Chouten.* Rhapsodizing about the beauty of the plantations she saw from the upper deck, and the "tastefulness and neatness" of the negro quarters, Hyer opined that, "It is a moral impossibility that utter wretchedness can assume so fair a seeming." Philosophizing, she said, "Do not, then, let us, in our sympathy for the African, forget that slavery is not confined to that race of men—it is frequently the case that slavery exists where freedom is most vaunted; and until the race emerge out of a lower condition into a higher, slavery of one kind or another must and will exist." Hyer may have been suggesting that fellow Spiritualists in the North address the misery of their own working classes before turning their reproach on the labor system of the South. "Let us cease to censure a particular kind of servitude,

[432] "A Voice from Arkansas," *Spiritual Telegraph* (August 26, 1854), 67.

or the use or abuse of power which sometimes might, and not right has conferred, and strive to elevate the universal family of man without favoritism. Salvation and emancipation is for the whole world, and not a portion only of the dwellers of the earth."[433]

The darkening national mood and changes of leadership in the Spiritualist press prompted more discussion in the years leading up to the Civil War, and it grew increasingly contentious after Andrew Jackson Davis got involved. A new paper, Luther Colby's *Banner of Light,* had debuted in Boston on April 11, 1857. "While carefully refraining from identifying ourselves with the many "isms" of the day," the *Banner* announced, "we prefer rather to roll onward with the car of Progress than to be crushed under its wheels, and shall therefore esteem it a duty we owe to ourselves and our readers to investigate calmly and candidly any new Truth, or theory advanced as such, and as we find it, so shall we speak of it." Most especially would this be true of Spiritualism. The *Banner of Light* did not directly criticize slavery, but in its "Messenger" column it printed spirit communications received through the paper's medium, Mrs. Conant. The first was from a woman hanged for witchcraft at Salem, saying her mediumistic experiences had been interpreted as witchcraft. Another from "Teddy, a Negro Boy," who had met his master in the afterlife: "My Massa don't have any boots or clothes for me to brush now—don't have noffin' to do now; but I'm no Massa, I ain't—no, nor never was."[434] Without taking an explicit editorial position, the *Banner of Light* expressed the prevailing belief

[433] "For the Christian Spiritualist," *Christian Spiritualist* (June 2, 1855), 3.

[434] "To You," *Banner of Light* April 11, 1857), 4; "The Messenger," *Banner of Light* (April 18, 1857), 6, 7.

among whites that blacks, while human, had some progressing to do as a race before they would be the equals of whites.

A week later the *Banner* printed a fictional piece about a cruel mistress in Vera Cruz. Domenica's "fifteen hundred slaves trembled when they spoke to her, and would have given their lives to take hers." But that was Mexico, not the United States. A few pages farther appeared an attempt at humor that parodied African Americans and elsewhere in that same issue is the first spirit message addressed to someone in the South, one Enoch Ordway, a merchant in New Orleans. As would be the case with virtually all spirit messages to or about southerners, no such individual can be found in available records. The following week brought another bit of condescending humor disparaging blacks and a spirit message to Israel Sheldon of Gaston, Alabama from his wife. Israel Sheldon was a real person, the exception to the rule. At the direction of spirits, a man appeared at the *Banner* office that very afternoon to procure a few copies of the paper for a friend in Alabama—Mr. Sheldon. "We then read to him this communication. He confirmed the truth of the circumstances, and we both received the interesting facts as one other evidence of the reality of spirit intercourse." The *Banner of Light's* resident medium, Mrs. Conant, would recall that ten years later a stranger had stopped at the *Banner*'s office and asked that they take down the bound volume of issues from 1857 and turn in a specific issue to the message from Harriet Sheldon. The message having been found, the stranger asked, "Does any one present know me? Did you ever see me before?" The answers being negative, he identified himself as Israel Sheldon.[435] The

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[435] "The Creole: A Story of Mexican Revenge," *Banner of Light* (April 25, 1857), 1; "The Messenger," Ibid. (April 25, 1857), 6; "Harriet Sheldon to I. Sheldon, Gaston, Ala.," Ibid. (May 7, 1857), 7; Theodore Parker, 1810–1860 (Spirit) and John W. Day, *Biography of Mrs. J. H. Conant, the World's*

ensuing discussion explained the meaning of his wife's message and the proofs within it that made Sheldon a believer in spirit communion.

While Mrs. Conant continued to channel messages from spirits of slaves ("We allow all grades of spirits to commune through our medium," the *Banner* explained.), they were all in heavy dialect and uncritical of the slavery. "Tole, an Alabama Slave," missed the care his master (probably Israel Sheldon) had given him. Apparently things were not so good for a masterless slave in the spirit world. "I come here—nobody takes care ob me—a nigga." Tole expounded at length on the joys of life as a slave. "Dere's bad massas, but you white folks what got no slaves, you say all bad massas. Its large, confounded lie, and I come to tell you so too. I live long ob Massa Sheldon long time and' he treats me well. Who takes care niggas when dey sick? Nobody takes care ob dem. Who buys niggas cloe's? Hum! nobody do dat. Good massas down souf do dat. Niggas hab no care." Nonetheless, the *Banner* had a bit of fun at the mistress's expense as Tole talked about white people's custom of taking snuff. "Massa, grand folks do dat; its what you call custom. You ought to see missus spit—sixteen yard." Bits of news looking askance at the southern way of life began to appear in the *Banner*'s "The Busy World" column: "THE SLAVE TRADE.—Several large vessels are now on their way from Africa to Cuba, with full cargoes of slaves—some with as many as *seven hundred* on board," "CAUTION TO SNUFF-TAKERS.—Died, in Prattville, Ala., Mrs. Mary S. Glenn, wife of William Glenn. The cause of the decease of Mrs. Glenn in the prime of early

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Medium of the Nineteenth Century: Being a History of Her Mediumship from Childhood to the Present Time: Together with Extracts from the Diary of her Physician; Selections from Letters Received Verifying Spirit Communications Given Through her Organism at the Banner of Light Free Circles; Specimen Messages, Essays, and Invocations from Various Intelligences in the Other Life, etc., etc., etc. (Boston: William White and Company, 1873), 239–241.

womanhood, was the intemperate use of snuff," and, "GAMBLING.—A young man recently lost $47,000 by gambling at roulette, at New Orleans."[436]

Before its first year was out, although it still relished deprecatory humor about ignorant blacks, the *Banner of Light* inserted a hint that slaves—even those dependent on masters who cared for them well—might actually aspire to more. "Sam, a Slave from Richmond," began his message, "Oh, bress de Lor, massa, I's free, free, free. Massa, whar dis place? I never was here, massa. It can't be so—it must be Richmond, massa. Oh, dear massa, I'se 'fused. . . . I used to brush massa's coat and boots—don't do so now; but I wanted to be free. Massa say I should be when I dead—so I'se dead and free too." On the next page was a quote from John Wesley: "Condemn no man for not thinking as you do. . . . If you cannot reason or persuade a man into the truth, never try to force him into it. If love will not compel him to, leave him to God, the judge of all." The *Banner of Light* also printed messages from the spirits of Indians, but while these spirits overused the term "pale face" they spoke in a much less pronounced dialect than the black spirits. One said, ". . . the Great Spirit has taught Logan to seek his happiness in his own way."[437] Indian spirits were, apparently, noble and cogent and self directed.

While most northern and southern whites accepted the almost ubiquitous assumption that persons of color were less evolved or progressed than they, and residents of neither region wished to have freed slaves living among them as equals, blacks figure differently in northern and southern Spiritualist practice. If there are records of former

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[436] "The Messenger: Tole, an Alabama Slave," *Banner of Light* (May 21, 1857), 7; "The Busy World," Ibid. (May 28, 1857), 5.

[437] "The Messenger: Sam, a Slave from Richmond," Ibid. (November 7, 1857), 7; "Noble Sentiments," Ibid. (November 7, 1857), 8; "The Messenger: Logan, an Indian—on Marriage. Truth Quaintly Expressed," Ibid. (December 12, 1857), 7.

slaves speaking to people in southern séances, they are rare indeed. None have been found in the research for this project. And while there are frequent references to antebellum black home mediums in the South and healing mediums in New Orleans, the two most discussed antebellum Spiritualists of color in the North were Sojourner Truth, veteran of the Kingdom of Matthias and not herself a medium, and Paschal Beverley Randolph, a trance lecturer and healer descended from the Randolphs of Virginia and more European than African in appearance. If other free blacks in the North were Spiritualists, more research will be necessary to find evidence. The influential white abolitionist editor William Lloyd Garrison was a Spiritualist, so perhaps northern African Americans who shared that interest can be located by starting with his network. The preeminent abolitionist of color, Frederick Douglass, was not a Spiritualist.[438]

By 1859 there were fewer messages from spirit slaves in the *Banner of Light* but they showed no better diction and little ability to understand what had happened to them or how to proceed without their masters. The *Banner* noted that Frederick Douglass in his paper was "rather severe, in his last issue, on Spiritualists, because they do not plunge head and shoulders into his favorite reform—rabid anti-slavery. The anti-slavery movement, in a *'militant'* attitude, aims a blow only at one branch of error; while Spiritualism, in an *anti-militant* attitude, aims a blow at all error." By early 1860, the editors printed a clear statement of the spirit world's position on slavery in "The Messenger" column: "We know of no time wherein we have stated that slavery was both right and proper—that there was nothing wrong attached to it—that the element by which it is controlled is right and not wrong," explained a wise spirit. "But we have said and

[438] Maria Diedrich, *Love Across Color Lines: Ottilie Assing & Frederick Douglas* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 208.

still do affirm, that the system of slavery as controlled by present conditions, present existences, is both right and proper. The slave is far better off, as the slave, than he could be as the free man. Society gives ample proof of this."[439] Above all, the *Banner's* editors thought of themselves as a voice for progress for *all* and a peaceful solution to the ills besetting mankind. Their idea of progress, however, did not include an awareness of racial prejudice or the many ways in which difference led to exploitation.

Unlike the *Banner of Light,* the *Spiritual Telegraph* did not run messages from slaves in the spirit world. In 1858, though, it reinforced southerners' assumptions about the activities of abolitionists while declining to align itself with radical emancipationists. An article in the Louisville *Courier* about the daily escape of "startling numbers" of slaves attributed "this unusual movement" to the presence of abolitionists. The *Telegraph* quoted the Louisville paper as saying, "Black Republicans are as thick in these parts as wolves on a prairie. It is almost respectable to be a nigger-stealer." In another item, the *Telegraph* summed up a recent meeting of Garrisonian abolitionists by observing that "on this occasion, as on all other occasions on which we have attended their meetings, seemed to us like a set of iconoclastic mallets that only serve to pound things to pieces, and when they have nothing else to pound, they pound each other." A year later the *Telegraph* ran small items about a group in South Carolina that wanted to reopen the slave trade and duels in Nashville and Vicksburg, pointing up the differences between North and South in an unflattering way. It also printed a longer item from the New Orleans *Weekly Delta* that refuted the Scriptural defense of slavery as proving only that slavery existed in the past and stressing that "the radical precepts of the Christian

[439] "Frederick Douglas [sic]," *Banner of Light* (June 25, 1859), 4; "The Messenger: Slavery and the Bible," Ibid. (March 17, 1860), 4.

dispensation are found nowhere either to expressly sanction or condemn any human institution whatever."[440]

The pioneering *Spiritual Telegraph* ceased publication in 1859, and was replaced by Andrew Jackson Davis's more stridently abolitionist *Herald of Progress.* Davis had made it clear in his prospectus for the *Herald* that he planned to "concentrate the power of all just and reasonable minds against . . . Intemperance, Poverty, Crime, Slavery, and War[.]". Its first issue included a message from *Spiritual Telegraph* publisher Charles Partridge notifying his readers that to "those persons who have not otherwise ordered, we will send a copy of the HERALD OF PROGRESS for each copy of the *Telegraph* due them." Gideon Lincecum of Texas, who subscribed in his wife's name, wrote on April 10, 1859 that she had concluded not to take the *Telegraph* any longer. "She likes spiritualism, and also the style and spirit of a goodly number of your contributors," but found "too many vulgar, and often malicious allusions to the subject of negro-dom."[441]

Little more than a month after Emma Hardinge's glowing account of her visit to Wilmington and the hospitality of Colonel John C. McRae appeared in the *Banner of Light,* he and his friends were expressing to A. J. Davis their dismay at the *Herald*'s inflammatory statements. Levi Austin Hart wrote that they had "long been subscribers to the *Telegraph*, and would have liked much to continue our subscription to *your* Paper, but

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[440] "Slavery in Kentucky," *Spiritual Telegraph* (May 22, 1858), 39; "The Garrisonian Abolitionists," Ibid. (May 22, 1858), 39; "The Moving World—The News: Re-opening of the Slave Trade," Ibid. (May 28, 1859), 10; "The Moving World—The News," Ibid. (June 4, 1859), 6; "Scriptural Argument for or against Slavery Repudiated," Ibid. (May 7, 1859), 7.

[441] "Prospectus for a New Weekly Paper, 'The Herald of Progress'," reprinted in Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Great Harmonia: Being a Progressive Revelation of the Eternal Principles which Inspire Mind and Govern Matter,* Volume V (New York: A. J. Davis & Co., 1861), 439; "The Spiritual Telegraph Subscribers," *Herald of Progress* (March 10, 1860), 4; *Gideon Lincecum's Sword*, 25.

are forced to ask you to discontinue it." Hart enclosed a letter from McRae, explaining that they, with his brother and others who hoped to promote Spiritualism in the area, "subscribed for twelve copies of the *Spiritual Telegraph*, two copies each of the *Age* and *Banner of Light*, and one hundred copies of the *Christian Spiritualist* for distribution, and have, thus far, taken your paper in substitution for the *Telegraph*, but now feel ourselves reluctantly compelled to request you to discontinue it." By 1860, the *Christian Spiritualist* published by the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge was long defunct, and L. F. W. Andrews in Macon, Georgia had taken up the name for his paper with a distinctly southern and Universalist perspective.[442]

McRae explained that even if Davis's position on slavery were acceptable to them, "*which it is not,* still as you must be aware, it is against both law and public sentiment here to distribute or circulate incendiary and Abolition publications." He cautioned that there was intense indignation at the South because of abolitionists' misrepresentations of slaveholders and "their abusive, vindictive and incendiary language towards the South; which culminated in the raid of John Brown." McRae was particularly enraged at Brown's being deified in the North, pointing out that Brown had "with his deluded flowerers, among other outrages, shed the blood of innocent men against whom even the charge of being slaveholders could not be brought; and for which, by Deifying him they are tempting others to commit similar outrages." McRae wanted more than anything to distance Spiritualism from abolitionism, and admonished Davis that "You have, therefore, shut yourself out from being *useful* to the cause of Spiritualism at the

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[442] "Letters of Disfellowship," *Herald of Progress* (March 31, 1860), 4; If any copies of this publication have survived, they are not in a major archive.

South."[443] McRae wrote again, saying he had not intended his letter for publication and asking that his personal subscription to the *Herald of Progress* be continued. "I may read though I deem it imprudent to circulate it; all to whom I might desire to give a paper might not understand the difference between Spiritualism and the many other isms which their advocates are trying to fasten upon it." Davis ran this on the first page. McRae, though, expressed a sincere concern for the higher purposes of communing with the spirit world, believing "the less it is mixed with other isms, and the less it is dragged through the filthy and scathing pool of politics, the cleaner will its garments be, and the more acceptable to all of honest purpose." Other readers were not as forgiving as John McRae. For example, A. W. C. of Nashville probably summed up the feelings of many southern Spiritualists when he wrote to the *Herald of Progress:* "Your paper is not what I was led to believe it would be. . . . *It has not enough of Spiritualism in it* for my family. I wish it discontinued."[444]

Gideon Lincecum of Texas wrote to Davis, admitting that it was he and not his wife who had subscribed to the *Spiritual Telegraph.* Apparently the *Herald of Progress* had begun sending copies to former *Telegraph* subscribers in an effort to interest them in subscribing. Lincecum wrote that he had received four issues and was pleased with much of what was in them, but that he could not support the extent to which "you and your sanguinary associates may think proper to encourage the worship of the bloody god" and

[443] *Herald of Progress* (March 31, 1860), 4.

[444] "Letters of Disfellowship"; "The North and South Controversy: Another Letter from Colonel John McRae," Ibid. (April 28, 1860), 1; "Not Enough Spiritualism," Ibid. (August 4, 1860), 5.

concluding, "*Write what you please to me, but nothing in print.*"[445] Lincecum did not want to become fodder for Davis's journalistic posturing.

As the nation looked toward the presidential election of 1860, Andrew Jackson Davis encouraged sectional partisans by printing their letters and rejoinders. The letters on both sides were earnest, and reflected the polarization of northern and southern views. "As for slavery, sir, we are all slaves, and more so than the negro, for when they do bodily labor, we have to perform great mental labor, more too than the poor negro can, or could, possibly endure," wrote Robert B. Ligon, publisher of the Holmesville *Independent* in Pike County, Mississippi. "I look upon slavery in these United States as a great blessing for the African race, for it may and will be the means of saving from banishment many a poor soul in the spirit land." Ligon was apparently not a believer in universal salvation, and invoked the argument that but for slavery the Africans would never have become Christians and earned a place in Heaven. Ligon quite agreed with John C. McRae that "The beautiful philosophy of Spiritualism, I think, is a sufficient field for you to labor in, and one in which you might do a great deal of good, provided you do not interfere with the political or social opinions and rights of the whole people." Ligon's lengthy letter was followed by even longer point-by-point "Remarks" answering his contentions. "We cannot see the connection," huffed Davis, "between a man's organization and the fitness for his use as property."[446]

News of the progress of Spiritualism and the movements of mediums appeared, but Davis encouraged the sectional debate and as time went on it gave an ominous tone to

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[445] *Gideon Lincecum's Sword*, 52.

[446] "Voices from the People: Subjects a Free Journal must not Discuss," *Herald of Progress* (July 14, 1860), 3.

the *Herald of Progress*. Not everyone agreed with Davis's definition of progress as embracing abolition, temperance, women's rights and other reforms popular in the North, but even some southerners admitted reservations about slavery. S. W. L. of Hillside, Kentucky wrote as "a citizen of a Slave State and a slaveholder" in agreement with Davis's reply to Ligon. The writer pointed out that "when a large portion of the slaves of the South have the blood of the white man flowing in their veins, and when white men can see, at almost any public slave sale, their own blood relations knocked off by the auctioneer, it ceases to be a question of Negro Slavery only." If the tone and perspective of this letter that ran under the heading "A Fraternal epistle from a Southern Man," seem out of the ordinary among defenders of slavery, it might be because S. W. L. was probably a woman. Sarah M. Lilly is the only match on the census, the handwriting factor accounting for the middle initial. She was a widow, which would explain her interest in Spiritualism. Mrs. Lilly was a farmer with five children on the 1850 census, and owned ten slaves. By 1860 she owned only two. Trying to see both sides, she suggested people at the North ask themselves if they were free of barbarism, of "institutions that tend to perpetuate social discord and inequality, castes, classes, aristocracies, and oligarchies?"[447] Like others, she hinted the North might not be entitled to cast the first stone at the South.

Daniel J. Baldwin, a Houston attorney and agent of Paul Bremond's Galveston, Houston and Red River Railroad, waded into the fray in support of John C. McRae. Baldwin argued that northerners were bigoted, and did not understand the negro's inability to take care of himself. W. Samson of St. Anthony, Minnesota fired off a

[447] "Fraternal epistle from a Southern Man," Ibid. (September 22, 1860), 2.

response to "D. J. Baldwin, Esq., and Others Who Think as He Does," to which Davis appended Baldwin's most recent salvo on the "Naturalness and Utility of Slavery" and one on "The Oppressor and Oppressed" from C. Robinson of Holley, New York. Lucina Hailey wrote from Natchitoches, Louisiana to predict that people would soon realize that "all this difference of opinion on the *Slavery question*, and a great many other things, is brought about by the *direct agency of God.*" A widow living on a plantation with her three children and fourteen slaves, she pondered the logical inconsistency of the "diversity of inspiration" between mediums at the North and South on the issue of slavery. "If the inspiration of the North comes from God, the inspiration of the South does, too: and how are we to say, *who is right*, or *who is wrong.*" Mrs. Hailey optimistically predicted North and South would soon meet "on the *open field of discussion.*" Someone using the initials L. D. wrote from New Orleans to say that while Davis did "tread on the 'corns' of us southerners about our own 'peculiar institution,'" he believed Davis erred with head and not heart. L. D. hoped Davis's understanding of the principles of progression would allow him to "admit that others may know more of *some things* than you, and I believe that you will listen to sound and logical reasoning based on truth." While regretting the misrepresentations of southerners and their institutions in some of the letters Davis printed, L. D. was willing to attribute their statements to ignorance even if some did "smack strongly of fanaticism."[448]

[448] "Houston and Red River Railroad," *Dallas Herald* (August 9, 1856), 1; Advertisement for D. J. Baldwin, *The Houston Republic* (April 23, 1859) 1; "The North and South Controversy. A Southern View of Northern Institutions," *Herald of Progress* (May 5, 1860), 3; "D. J. Baldwin, Esq., and Others Who Think as He Does," "Naturalness and Utility of Slavery. Another Letter from D. J. Baldwin," "The Oppressor and Oppressed," Ibid. (June 23, 1860), 2; "Has the Spirit World a North and South?" Ibid. (June 23, 1860), 2; "A Voice from Louisiana," Ibid. (September 1, 1860), 5.

In the *Herald's* "Messenger" column, where it ran communications from spirits, a January 1861 message set the tone for much of what would appear during the war, using a recognizable southern name to draw attention but fabricating kinship. Thomas J. Burke had been cashier of the Alabama State Bank and editor of the Tuscaloosa *Monitor* before his death in 1857. Burke's spirit had a message for his son in Montgomery, Alabama. "His name is Richard Burke." Thomas J. Burke did have two sons, but neither was named Richard. This Richard, it seems, was a partial believer in Spiritualism and had received communications from his father through mediums in New York and Montgomery. The spirit father's mission was to assuage his son's concerns about what course President Lincoln would follow, the father assuring the son that "I do not see anything in his mind" to warrant a belief that the president was "going to be a great enemy of the South."[449]

Even spirits at the South were sending antislavery communications. H. T. of New Orleans wrote to say that his wife had received in a message in French from their guardian spirits. He translated: "Douglas to be the next President of the United States, though he is not the man of our choice."[450] Apparently these spirits preferred Lincoln and his Black Republicans. When Lincoln was elected, many in the South believed the Union could be preserved, while others took it as signaling the end of the southern way of life. The epistolary tilting continued.

D. J. Baldwin told the story of a servant lured away on a trip to the North. She wrote that she was unhappy and wanted to come home, but he could not go and get her

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[449] Thomas Waverly Palmer, *A Register of the Officers and Students of the University of Alabama, 1831–1901* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: Published by the University, 1901), 37; "The Messenger: Thomas J. Burke," *Herald of Progress* (January 5, 1861), 6.

[450] "Whisperings," Ibid. (November 3, 1860), 1.

because he would be imprisoned. If pressed, he said, the South would fight to protect its "families black and white." "But let come what will," Baldwin wrote, "a white man is a white man, an Indian is an Indian, a negro is a negro, and a horse is a horse; each are from the earth, and each will return to it. But each are separate in spirit, soul, color, aspiration, and affection. God Almighty has made it so, and neither Abolitionism, Fanaticism, nor fire-eating can change it. Facts are facts." A. J. Davis did not append a comment on this letter, but a few weeks later printed one from William Thirds of Kankakee, Illinois that dismantled Baldwin's assertions. This was balanced by a letter from Alabama reminding readers that many of the "most substantial and thrifty people of the South were born and reared in the North" and that if asked now these men would agree that after living in the South "their views and feelings have undergone a total and radical change on this subject, and they are as ready to stand by the South in the perils and conflicts which seem to be impending" as those born to slaveholding. "I think it highly probable that had the lots of Mr. Garrison, and Mr. Phillips, and Mr. Beecher, and others like them at the North, been cast in the South, they would have been ultra men as they are, if not fanatics, but at the other extreme of their present position." New voices chimed in and the usual suspects repeated their arguments in the ensuing weeks, and Davis continued to print them. Sarah M. Lilly of Kentucky wrote again, claiming to be a slaveholder with doubts about slavery. As an editor, A. J. Davis relished and encouraged the controversy. "If friend Baldwin will make haste to strengthen his positions," wrote Davis, "and to remove the obstructions presented by such conspicuous facts, we are sure that our readers will cheer on the 'North and South Controversy.'" When Baldwin did

reply, Davis filed it, "with other papers on the same subject, to appear when the judgments of the people are more capable of dispassionate inquiry."[451]

Robert B. Hannay, the Scot whose name appeared in the *Spiritual Telegraph*'s remittances in 1856 but was not a *Herald of Progress* subscriber, had happened to see some copies and wrote in support of the letters from D. J. Baldwin. Hannay noted that "ideas of the Northern people in relation to Slavery appear to us childish, and only expose the ignorance of the writers, having no effect on us." Hannay included a thoughtful discussion of his years of interactions with slaves in the British West Indies and the United States. He believed that "The slave has a claim on his master which no free laborer has, and a tie exists which cannot be comprehended by those who have never experienced it." The following week Davis printed more of Hannay's letter, and a note from Hannay saying, "The spirits with whom I communicate seem to think I ought to write you further my experience in regard to Slavery and the African race." He had observed that "freedom seemed to deprive them of all energy generally," which explained why the expression, "I am as hungry as a free negro" was frequently used by slaves in the Indies. Blacks must be capable of progress, but "Slavery may be as necessary to their development as Freedom to ours." Hannay also saw people of African descent as congenitally inclined to lying and theft. "To enforce the criminal laws made for the white race against them, would be impossible, as no country could bear the expense with a numerous black population, and it would besides be absolute cruelty." Hannay felt it was kindest to acknowledge difference and "investigate and follow nature" rather than follow

[451] Ibid. (December 15, 1860), 2; Ibid. (January 19, 1861), 3; Ibid. (April 13, 1861), 3, 4; "Whisperings," Ibid. (May 25, 1861), 1.

the men of Massachusetts who knew little about blacks and nothing of the workings of slavery.[452]

Davis seemed to find Hannay's detailed description of life among slaves fascinating, and ran a third installment the next week. Hannay had been brought up on English abolition literature, and went to the Caribbean at fourteen. His uncle's slaves had united against him, and he had begun to understand their character and the necessary nature of the master/slave relationship. "Their aims and subjects of interest were those of children. They were conscious they could not use the wealth their labor created; but they were proud of their master's wealth, character, and influence, and would resent an insult to him sooner than to themselves." Davis acknowledged that Hannay's facts and reflections had been "given in a kind and fraternal spirit,"[453] but everyone knew the time for attempts to change hearts and minds was long past. Two weeks later, the South bombarded Fort Sumter.

Davis's prospectus had included war in the list of things the *Herald of Progress* meant to oppose, but any anti-war sentiment had long since disappeared from the *Herald's* agenda. The paper reported Union troop movements and other war-related items, including that "From a gentleman recently arrived from New Orleans, we learn that the war spirit prevails widely at the South. The people there evidently mean to fight," and that "Ross Winans, the secessionist millionaire, of Baltimore, has been arrested by the federal troops, and will be tried for treason." The war, the "derangement in postal

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[452] "Practical Workings of African Servitude. Southern Facts for the People of the North," Ibid. (March 16, 1861), 2; "Southern Facts for the People of the North. Number Two," Ibid. (March 23, 1861), 2.

[453] "Number 3 of Practical Workings of African Servitude," Ibid. (March 30, 1861), 3, 5.

service,"[454] and then the blockade severed communication between northern and southern Spiritualists.

The Civil War: Sarah Morgan

"It seems to me the moon was brighter in 1860," wrote Sarah Morgan in her journal entry for March 31, 1862. In her remembrances, 1860 in Baton Rouge had been a year of frolics, laughter, dancing, singing, buggy rides and evening walks in the garden of the State House. "Those days passed merrily by!"[455]

As 1861 began, the men talked of secession and the possibility of war. South Carolina seceded from the Union just before Christmas in 1860, and Louisiana became the sixth state to secede on January 26, 1861. The army of the Confederate States of America, commanded by General P. G. T. Beauregard, fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, under orders from President Jefferson Davis. Sarah's lighthearted days ended abruptly less than three weeks later when her brother Harry was killed in a duel, the first of four Morgan men to die by early 1864. The women of the Morgan family would spend the Civil War years mourning their dead. Sarah's journal makes clear the centrality of the Morgans' devout Episcopalian faith to their interpretation of the meaning of death and of the rituals associated with it. She also reveals that talk of spirits was very much a part of Sarah's antebellum world. For many in the professional and planter elite, "summoning the spirits" was apparently an acceptable parlor amusement and in fact had become somewhat passé by the Civil War. What was not acceptable was taking it seriously, yet

[454] "War Movements," *Herald of Progress* (May 25, 1861), 5; "Whisperings," Ibid. (June 1, 1861), 1.

[455] *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 31–32

we know that many did and that Sarah yearned for proof that real communication with the dead was possible.

Sarah's journal tells us about her attempts to find meaning in death through her Christian belief system and the ritual activities that were important to her. That she filtered her observations through matrices of class, faith, gender and emotion contributes to their richness and complexity. In the uncertain circumstances of the wartime South, the experiences and insights of this extraordinarily thoughtful and intelligent young woman distill the impact of a war that left many southerners homeless and impoverished and left nearly every white woman in the South with a close relative either missing, dead, or wounded.

Mourning involved predictable rituals and symbolically conveyed messages; custom and repetition allowed a community to deploy and read the ritual symbols in unspoken communication. Black was worn for a specified length of time, calibrated on the basis of the closeness of the relative who had died. At some point it became permissible to add a white collar, then to move into shades of purple as a sign that the mourning was lightening. There were cards and stationery and handkerchiefs with borders of varying widths to signify the stages of grief. To step outside community custom was deviant and likely to be read either as failure to understand the encoded symbols or as flouting decent behavior. Many residents of Baton Rouge at the time of Harry Morgan's death were appalled by the Morgans' failure to don the traditional black clothing and the accessories of mourning. But the Morgans did not act to please those whom they considered their social or moral inferiors, a category that encompassed most of the population of the South and included many who thought themselves the Morgans'

social equals. The Morgans eschewed the somber trappings of formal, ritualized mourning and focused on their grief at Harry's death as a sacred, private matter.

Ideas circulating in Europe and America questioned the appropriateness of both mourning garb and mourning itself, but few were so bold as to act on them. Christian faith set an ideal standard of belief that few if any could attain; because death was the will of God, and dispatched the spirit of a Christian to a place of endless joy, grief was theoretically inappropriate. Others decried mourning fashion and its encoded stages and accessorization as a decadent waste of money and observed that the expense of outfitting an entire family in black was a hardship most could ill afford. In Sarah's home, Judge Morgan was the ultimate arbiter. He hated the black of mourning.

The family did not invite public recognition of their loss. For all their pride, though, the Morgans lived with the knowledge that they were obliged to be meekly polite to their wealthy relatives across the river at Hope Estate. Colonel Philip Hickey was a sugar planter; in 1850 he owned seventy-six slaves. "'Grandpa,' we called him. Not that he bore that relationship," explained Sarah, "but because his daughter Adèle had married my mother's brother, Waller Fowler; and his daughter Caro had married my father's brother, Morris Morgan." Hope Estate was home to a large family in an unhealthful climate, and Sarah reminisced that the women of the plantation seemed to spend their entire lives in mourning.

> I think that is why my father hated it so. Whenever they decided to lighten it a little, some remote connection or prematurely deceased baby scion re-plunged them into funereal garb. My father said he had seen them in unbroken black Forty years, when Aunt Eliza's beautiful daughter Mary Fallen, then the young widow of James Mather, burst in upon him in rainbow colors one Sunday, accompanied by purple and lilac-tinted relatives. And next day, Pretty cousin Mary, whom mother hoped to see

> Brother's bride, died of Cholera in two hours' notice! Hope Estate took up its discarded livery promptly and forever, then.[456]

Judge Morgan's death six months later compounded the family's grief, but they had already decided how they should mourn. Sarah recorded in her journal her disgust with the shallow gossips who had dared criticize the Morgans' choice not to wear black: "The town bothers itself about our concerns much more than we do. They went wild on the subject of our not going in mourning; their tender feelings were outraged at such a breech [sic] of propriety and decency, and of course we were not grieved at father's or Harry's death, if we did not wear black!"[457] The Morgans had chosen to dispense with the commercialized trappings of mourning; what the community expected of them was less important to the Morgans than how they chose to share their grief. Sarah was displeased with her community and its intrusiveness. If her social inferiors were so insensitive as to misread her signals, it would not be the first time—or the last. Sarah was secure in her beliefs and sensibilities, and they were reinforced by her loving and socially unimpeachable family. That the community was unable to share those sensibilities was a frustration, but what mattered was that the Morgans stood together.

In many ways, Judge Morgan's was an exemplary Victorian death. "O dear father!" mused Sarah several months later, "was there ever such a beautiful death as yours?" He died in his home, surrounded by loving family, having made an emotional farewell to each and affirmed his belief in the Resurrection and the Life. Judge Morgan had influenced the decision not to wear black for Harry; not doing so for the judge would

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[456] "The Hope Estate Ladies," Sarah Morgan Dawson Manuscripts, 1908. Mss. 1703, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

[457] *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 72.

validate the wisdom his choice. Although they did not put on black, neither did the Morgans disregard all of the customs of mourning. They did, however, decide for themselves which to accept and which to reject.[458]

Her home had been the inviolable center of shy Sarah's life, the locus of security and the bonds of domestic affection. "Home" was the sacred space in which Sarah had learned the articles of her faith. She found comfort there in memory, in the association of absent loved ones (both quick and dead) with the personal possessions they had left behind and in the shared objects that evoked pleasant episodes of their daily life. And she loved to visit the graves of her brother and father, taking them flowers and keeping them alive in her prayers and rememberings. If the frequency of entries in her diary in which Sarah speaks directly to Harry and her father is any indication, she probably talked to them and even sang hymns or favorite songs when she visited their graves if she thought no one was watching. The Morgan family's plot in the city cemetery was an extension of the family's domestic sphere; fresh flowers there were as important as fresh flowers in the parlor. Remembrance mattered; you loved the dead no less because they had been physically removed from "the Holy of Holies—Home."[459]

Sarah never admitted that her faith wavered, but she did say that in her grief following the deaths of Harry and her father she was "so heart broken that even God

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[458] Ibid., 116; Ibid. 80: Besides strictly prescribed periods in which certain degrees of mourning dress were to be worn, people used stationery and handkerchiefs with black borders that grew narrower over time as they moved through the formalized stages of grief. These practices were appropriated from English and French customs. When an inquisitive neighbor and her escort intruded on the family's privacy shortly after Harry's death, Sarah flattered herself "that we made no unnecessary display of our feelings before a heartless woman and a strange man; if I had choaked, I would not have shown the border of my handkerchief."

[459] Ibid., 80.

seemed so far off that prayers could not reach him. . . ."[460] This suggests that women's responses to the onslaught of death in the Civil War, posited by historians such as Drew Gilpin Faust as a weakening of their religious faith and their trust in God, may not have been in character fundamentally unlike their antebellum sense that the pain of loss made a loving God seem distant.

By April 30, 1862, the anniversary of Harry's death, Union forces occupied New Orleans. The war was coming closer, and the Morgan women were feeling its effects. Anticipating what the near future might hold, Sarah fretted about the possibility of having to leave her home. "O my dear Home! . . . this house where we have been so happy and so sad . . . . The place where Harry and father kissed us good bye and never came back again!" The presence of Union troops confined Sarah to her home. The war had disrupted Sarah's most important mourning ritual—visiting the cemetery and tending the graves. "As we no longer have a minister—Mr Gierlow having gone to Europe and no papers," she wrote on July 7, 1862, "I am in danger of forgetting the days of the week, as well as those of the month; but I am positive yesterday was Sunday because I heard the Sunday school bells, and Friday I am sure was the fourth, because I heard the national salute fired. I must remember that to find my dates by." The comfort of worship in the church she had attended with her father and Harry had been sacrificed to the war. Sarah was disgusted to learn that citizens could not move about freely without a written pass signed by a Yankee officer, "such as we give our negroes . . . . Think of being obliged to ask permission from some low ploughman, to go in or out of our own homes!" The war and death were dissolving her class and race privileges, the basis of her understanding of her

[460] Ibid., 5.

place in the world. To avoid the unpleasantness of encounters with Yankee soldiers, the Morgans curtailed their activities and waited nervously to see what the future would bring. "I am afraid this close confinement will prove too much for me; my long walks are cut off, on account of the soldiers. One month to-morrow since my last visit to the graveyard! That haunts me always; it must be so dreary out there."[461] The war had disrupted Sarah's most important mourning ritual—visiting the cemetery and tending the graves. A month later, Baton Rouge was shelled again. The Morgan women found temporary refuge across the river at the plantation of family friends, but more shelling obliged them to move on and they were taken in by the Carters, the family of brother Gibbes's wife Lydia.

It was not until they had been forced from their home that Sarah began to write about spirit communication in her journal. For Sarah, something about the loss of her sacred spaces—her home, her church, her family's plot in the cemetery—encouraged her musings about the spirit world. She first mentioned it in the story about the family learning that the slave Lennice had been telling other servants about Sarah's visits to the cemetery to call up the spirits of her father and Harry. Barely able to suffer most white people, Sarah was appalled that slaves were gossiping about her. Nonetheless, hearing Lennice's perceptions put into words may have helped turn Sarah's thoughts toward the possibility of actually communicating with the spirits of her own dead. It might also have prompted another visitor to Linwood plantation to share her own experiences with Sarah. Mary Badger, a sister of General Carter, was also his guest. "Of course I do not actually believe in Spiritualism," wrote Sarah, "but there is certainly something in it one cannot

[461] Ibid., 85, 156, 97, 136.

understand; and Mrs. Badger's experience is enough to convert one, alone."[462] Although Sarah never tells us what Mrs. Badger revealed to her, we know that it probably resulted from Spiritualist activity in antebellum New Orleans. Mary Dortch Carter Badger and her husband were enumerated on the 1860 New Orleans census; he was employed at the Customhouse.

A carriage accident on November 11, 1862 left Sarah bed-ridden with a serious injury to her spine. During the five-and-one-half months she was unable to walk, Sarah had much time for solitary reflection. She had always assumed that God knew all she thought and did, but her injury caused her to think in new ways about the dead. The kindness of General Carter, whose white hair reminded her of her father, prompted her to ponder "what he would have felt if he could see me lying so helpless there. I wonder if the dead can see us? I would rather he and Harry should not know."[463]

One evening while the Morgans were at Linwood they held a spontaneous séance with Confederate officers. Sarah's description shows that they were all familiar with the protocols for summoning the spirits. "Six of us around the table invoked them with the usual ceremony. There was certainly no tricks played; every finger was above the board, and all feet sufficiently far from the single leg to insure fair play." Every rap seemed to come exactly from the centre of the table, and was painfully distinct, though not loud." It is immediately apparent that in summoning the spirits as a parlor pastime, they did not ask to speak to anyone in particular. Nor did they ask about the spirit world. This was all about asking questions for amusement. Someone asked, no doubt to speed things along, if

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[462] Lennice was one of the Carter slaves. Her earlier presence in Baton Rouge suggests that she was attached to the household of Lydia Carter Morgan when Lydia and Gibbes lived next door to his father. Ibid., 415.

[463] Ibid., 455.

there was a writing medium present and "it indicated Capt. McClure." The captain was reluctant, but took up the pencil and began to write answers to their questions about the war and their romantic prospects. "I believe Capt. McClure to be honest about it," Sarah noted. "He seemed to have no control over his hand, and his arm trembled and became exceedingly painful." After a time, Sarah's sister Miriam decided to waltz and the séance broke up. Left alone with the Sarah, Captain McClure confided that he had been reluctant to take the pencil because he had "sworn to abandon the practice of consulting them" after his father's sanity had been threatened by belief in spirit communication. Of course, Captain McClure did not believe in spirits himself, "but could not account for the influence he was under, when he saw his hand involuntarily write things he was totally unconscious of, himself." Reflecting on the evening, Sarah again denied that she believed in spirits. "Only wish I could; am more that willing to be converted. But there is certainly something that is not to be accounted for in it." [464]

A week later, a letter arrived from Sarah's brother Jimmy in England, where he was awaiting the completion of a Confederate navy ironclad to which he had been assigned. Sarah recorded in her journal a story Jimmy told about spirits, saying again, "I am almost willing to be converted to the belief myself." Jimmy wrote that he was thinking to himself how absurd the belief in spirits was, "when suddenly it must have been the devil that prompted him, he asked aloud 'If there is a spirit in the room, let it rap.'" Immediately a rap, rap, rap came form the corner. He asked again, and more raps sounded. "He says he wished to see if he looked pale, or frightened, and walked to the glass, when what was his horror at seeing not his own face but another's reflected there!" Sarah said Jimmy made light of it but "I should have felt rather shaky about it." Even so,

[464] Ibid., 414–416.

in the next breath she admitted, "I called the Spirits to rap for me this evening when I was alone, but they would not come. I wonder why they are so exclusive?" [465]

Three brothers were fighting for the Confederacy, and disrupted communications meant months of unrelieved anxiety for the Morgan women. In April of 1863, Sarah, her mother and her sister Miriam reluctantly left the Confederate States to seek shelter with Sarah's eldest brother Philip, a staunch Union man who had remained in New Orleans while refusing to take up arms against his Confederate brothers. As kind and loving as Philip and his family were, Sarah felt acutely the discomfort of living in a city occupied by Union troops, in the home of a Union sympathizer, while herself fervently praying for the success of the Confederacy and the safety of brothers George, Gibbes and Jimmy.

The Civil War: Elizabeth Lyle Saxon

Discussions of Spiritualism are rare in Confederate letters and diaries and few writers were as eloquent as Sarah Morgan, but she was not the only southern woman who left a record of her wartime spiritual seeking. Elizabeth Lyle Saxon's was a memoir, written half a century later and much more immersed in the paranormal than Sarah Morgan's. Elizabeth Lyle was born in Tennessee in 1832. Her mother died when she was two years old, and her father remarried. One of her three half-brothers from this union died young. Raised in Wetumpka, Alabama, she had been tutored by author Caroline Lee Hentz, and she was married there at sixteen to Lydall A. Saxon of South Carolina.[466] Mrs.

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[465] Ibid., 421–422.

[466] *Dictionary of Louisiana Biography,* s. v. "Saxon, Elizabeth Lyle," http://www.lahistory.org/site36.php (accessed April 3, 2010); *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life,* Frances Elizabeth Willard and Mary Ashton Rice Livermore (Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 634–635.

Saxon's older sister Amanda had died in 1853, which could be what turned her thoughts toward the spirit world in earnest. She appears to have had what is known as "second sight" in Scottish tradition, and claimed she had as a child been a "subject of deep interest as well as care" to her father, who "found that I did see and know of events that occurred miles away, as was more than once verified by him." In 1855 she accompanied her husband to New York, where he went into business, giving her access to the heart of Spiritualist activity in the United States. The Saxons spent summers in New York, winters in the Alabama. As war fever mounted in 1860, Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth's flashy Zouaves challenged other companies to come to New York and drill with them. She was observing them with a friend "as they wheeled and charged, fired with their guns kneeling, lying or running. I was looking at the young commander very intently when suddenly a haze swept before my eyes, and, as if in a mirror, I saw him fall, shot dead." Mrs. Lyle screamed, and when she looked again the vision was gone. "He was alive and unhurt. I told what I saw, and declared positively that nothing could convince me he would not die a violent death." Less than two weeks after war was declared, Col. E. E. Ellsworth, the young commander, marched into Alexandria, Virginia with Union forces. Spying a Confederate flag flying over a small hotel, he promptly climbed up and cut it down. Descending the stairs, Ellsworth was stopped by the hotel's proprietor and fell, shot dead, making him the war's first martyr and a cult hero in the North.[467]

[467] Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, *A Southern Woman's War Time Reminiscences for the Benefit of the Shiloh Monument Fund* (Memphis, Tenn.: Press of the Pilcher Printing Co., 1905), 9, 10, 24; Oscar Kennett Lyle, *Lyle Family: The Ancestry and Posterity of Matthew, John, Daniel and Samuel Lyle, Pioneer Settlers in Virginia* (New York: Lecouver Press Company, 1912), 259; Charles A. Mills and Andrew L. Mills, *Alexandria, 1861–1865* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 19–23.

"Men sneer at such statements as this," wrote Mrs. Saxon of that vision as she neared the end of a full life as a wife, mother, writer, Spiritualist, suffragist and temperance advocate. "My own impression founded on my own experience, is that all spirituality is as far as possible killed in children by their parents, owing to education and preconceived sentiments. We admit man is possessed of five senses, and if anything savoring of a higher or more subtle sense is shown, instantly it is deemed uncanny, unnatural, and must be repressed."[468] For this woman as for many, belief in any form of paranormal knowledge or communication had merged easily with Spiritualism.

Returning to Alabama after Christmas in 1860, the Mrs. Saxon and her children were accompanied on the steamer from New York by several West Point cadets from the South. She recalled the unusual appearance of the Aurora Borealis over the Gulf States, which "aroused the fears even of those far from superstitious." She would never forget the "intelligent old Scotch lady" who told her, "Oh, child, it is a terrible omen; such lights never burn, save for kings' and heroes' deaths."[469]

Visiting Mobile with friends in March, Mrs. Saxon retired late one evening. Suddenly, she said, she was aroused and felt as if unseen hands had lifted her to the ceiling. She looked down into a large room where a man lay dying. A woman fell across the man, struggled to raise him, and it was then Elizabeth Lyle Saxon saw the woman's face. "It was myself; and the dead man was my father." She had the sensation of falling, and found herself sitting up in bed. Dressing, she walked the floor and "wrote down the whole thing just as given here." Letters to her father were unanswered; no one seemed to

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[468] *Southern Woman's War Time Reminiscences*, 10–11.

[469] Ibid., 15.

know what had become of him. “This was in March, 1861, and that vision, or prophetic dream, whatever it may be called, was literally fulfilled in December of 1863.”[470]

Her two brothers had enlisted at the start of the war, and one of them was killed at Chickamauga. Anxious and grieving, she determined to get a pass and take her children north to reunite with her husband. “A young friend that I had known from her babyhood was about to be married, and she came to me to beg that, as I was going inside the Union lines, I would sell her all my best and finest clothing. It was a Godsend to me, for I felt as though I could never again wear the gay garments of a fashionable woman. . . .” Proceeding to Montgomery, Elizabeth said a tearful farewell to the black woman in whose arms her dying mother had placed her. After a difficult journey overland, they reached Memphis, and found a boat headed north to Cairo.[471]

“I had never before in my life seen my father wear a beard, yet for weeks I had seen, while sleeping, an old gray head, with long white beard and eyes like stars paling before the daylight gleam, so blue, so sad!” Waiting for the boat to depart, Mrs. Saxon chanced to meet a woman who knew her father, and told her he was a prisoner in Memphis, and dying. And so it was that she left the boat, and found her father, and her vision came to pass in every detail.[472]

Elizabeth Lyle Saxon believed the spirit of her dead brother Alex had brought her to Memphis. “Why should I not believe that the spirit freed from the limitations of flesh sought our father, found his condition, and impressed my mind with it, causing me to

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[470] Ibid., 24–26.

[471] Ibid., 47.

[472] Ibid., 60–67.

seek him? My singularly prophetic vision was long before my mental distress began, which was not until after my father's imprisonment and some weeks after my brother's death." Mrs. Saxon wondered if, had she followed the "monitions of the unseen" she might have found her father in time to save his life. "God knows, He only! I question not His mercy. I bless him daily that He brought me to my father's aid and gave to me the privilege of being his last earthly comfort. . . ."[473] Mrs. Saxon had no reason to doubt that her vision was a result of her preternatural gifts, her brother in the spirit world had guided her to her father, and it was all somehow the workings of God.

The Civil War: Julia Le Grand

"Mary Waugh spent the evening, talked about ghosts and goblins until Jake, the little darky, was afraid to go to bed," wrote Julia Le Grand of New Orleans on January 19, 1863. "Mrs. Norton said 'nonsense' and 'how can people be so silly?' to each veracious tale unfolded, but presently fell to telling the most wonderful spiritual visitation that I ever heard of, which had come under her own experience. She also quoted the spiritual accidents which happened in John Wesley's family — people whom she could not doubt, being a fervent Methodist." One of Julia Le Grand's "particular friends" was Mrs. Norton's daughter was Sarah Claiborne Norton Chilton. Glendy Burke had mentioned Mrs. Chilton's husband in the 1858 New Orleans *Delta* item about his correspondence with the spirit of his friend John R. Grymes through "spirit postmaster" J. V. Mansfield. The *Delta* piece was reprinted in the *Banner of Light.*[474]

[473] Ibid., 67.

Julia Le Grand was a spinster in her early thirties when she penned that journal entry. Her mother had been a descendant of Robert Morris, who helped to finance the American Revolution. Her father Claudius F. Le Grand had purchased land and moved his family from Maryland to Louisiana in the 1830s. Julia and her siblings grew up on a riverfront plantation near Milliken's Bend, across the river and just north of Vicksburg. A wealthy planter, Le Grand took his marriageable daughters and "a train of servants" to New Orleans each year for the opera season. Like Sarah Morgan of Baton Rouge, the Le Grand sisters may have been formally introduced to society there. Summers, Julia and her sister Virginia, "with their maids, their luggage piled high on wagons, would go to the Springs in Virginia." At some point the family suffered a financial setback. Claudius Le Grand exchanged plantations with family connection William P. Stone and moved to Hinds County, Mississippi, near the Mississippi springs. Julia, a family friend remembered, "distinguished herself by her culture, her extensive reading, her enthusiasm for poetry, romance and history, her love for all that was good, pure and great. A singular grace accompanied all she said and did, and her striking conversational powers were the delight and pride of all her friends. . . ." Julia had been engaged to a young man from Vicksburg who had gone off to the Mexican War on the staff of General Zachary Taylor and was presumed killed. After their parents died, the family fortune lost, Julia and Virginia had opened a school for young ladies in New Orleans. In 1861 they were living in a cottage on Prytania Street, "proud people who will exist on a crust rather than ask for help," awaiting a chance to escape to the family of their brother Claude in Texas. "I wish

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[474] Julia Ellen Le Grand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia Le Grand, New Orleans, 1862–1863,* ed. Kate Mason Rowland and Mrs. Morris L. Croxall (Richmond: Everett Waddey Co., 1911), 93, 30; "Another Test from Mr. Mansfield."

to God you had gone to Texas in time," he wrote from a Virginia battlefield in 1861. "I trust you are still with Mrs. Chilton."[475] When Union forces occupied the city they moved in with Mrs. Chilton's mother, old Mrs. Norton, for protection.

A year earlier, Mrs. Chilton had left New Orleans and returned to her family home in Hinds County, Mississippi. Julia Le Grand's New Year's entry for 1862 said, "Mrs. Chilton keeping us all alive." Sarah Norton Chilton begged the Le Grand sisters to accompany her to Mississippi, but they were not ready to give up their own home and Julia confessed herself unlikely to be good company as a houseguest. "We are so lonely-hearted, so wasted by early afflictions, anxious, nervous years of desolating losses, that we have nothing of feeling or interest to interchange with any, even those we approve." The night before Mrs. Chilton left New Orleans, the Le Grand sisters gave a supper in her honor. Julia entertained their guests "with a with a trick with a key and a book which told the fortune accurately of everyone present. If I had found the philosopher's stone, it could not have given more general satisfaction, I believe." The occult was an acceptable amusement for much of polite society, as long as one did not take it seriously. Julia "Wanted to keep Mrs. Chilton for a good-bye late talk, but Mrs. Norton hurried her off."[476]

Mrs. Chilton's sisters, Mrs. Harrison and Mrs. Brown, and their irascible mother, Mrs. Norton, appear frequently in Julia Le Grand's journal. Mrs. Waugh, whose father

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[475] *Journal of Julia Le Grand,* 22, 23, 25–26. In another illustration of how few degrees of separation actually existed in the South's planter cousinocracy, William Patrick Stone, who died in 1855, was the father of Civil War diarist Kate Stone.

[476] Ibid., 30, 37–39.

had been an elder in the Scottish Presbyterian Church in Charleston, was the wife of an insurance adjuster.[477] It was Mrs. Waugh who was the strongest believer in spirits.

On January 21, 1863 Mrs. Waugh stopped in on the Le Grands in the evening and they had a long talk about Spiritualism. Julia found Jane Waugh, a well-educated and practical woman to whom "nothing which she touches with her hands [is] more real and palpable to her than the spirits which surround her," a comforting presence. Julia admired her "profound sagacity" and appreciated the seeming contradiction that this woman "is thoroughly practical, a good linguist, a good work woman when necessity requires it, a good neighbor, a good wife and mother; she is thoroughly truthful, yet spiritualism is the one comfort of her life." It seems the Presbyterian faith in which Jane Haig Waugh was raised did not provide comfort. Grounding her thoughts about Spiritualism, Julia wrote, "I have long held a notion of my own about electricity—it is the spirit, the soul of the world. I find myself looking, longing, waiting for man's profounder acquaintance with it. He knows nothing of it yet, its power or capacity. When my undefined hopes in their future revelations flag, I think of the telegraph." Julia believed in the law of progression, and the power of science to unfold "one by one the mysteries of creation" and mankind's eventual acceptance—as with the telegraph—of its benefits. "The law of love of Christ is perfection," she acknowledged, but "Science is God's own minister. Chemistry, Geometry, Astronomy, how I hope and trust in them for they are but the names we have given to the steps of the comprehension of the thoughts of God."[478]

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[477] George Howe, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: W. J. Duffie, 1883), 222.

[478] *Journal of Julia Le Grand,* 98, 99.

Lofty thoughts were a relief from the day-to-day realities of life in occupied New Orleans, and the moment-to-moment realities of life with Mrs. Norton, who "can't comprehend how young people can wish to be alone; she is old and hates solitude. When she sits in her own room and we in ours she continually calls something out to us; she is devoted to newspapers and I cannot bear them except when they contain something of worth." Mrs. Waugh had spent several mornings with them, and brought them Andrew Jackson Davis's most recent work on Spiritualism. Julia was angry with Davis for approving of the war, not to restore the union but to free the slaves. She was exasperated with Mrs. Norton, whose constant chatter left her unable to punctuate what she tried to write. A few days later Mrs. Waugh called and read to them from Davis's book while they did handwork. The next day they spent at Mrs. Dameron's, and had "quite a discussion" on the subject of Spiritualism. "I don't like to hear people say a thing can't be true, or that is not true and they know it isn't. I said that I felt too ignorant of nature's mysteries to say what was or what was not true." All Julia Le Grand could say for certain was that truth would survive and false doctrine it must die out. "Most people," she sighed, "show so little sign of having thought at all except in commonplace, everyday matters, that it is a relief to be entertained with a beautiful fancy logically sustained as Mrs. Waugh sustains hers."[479]

Outside their doors, the mood of the city grew uglier. There had been violence by Union troops when crowds gathered on the levee to cheer Confederate prisoners who were being exchanged. "There are hundreds more people who hate the Yankees to-day than there were a week ago." The occupiers were also stealing all the horses in the city. Julia ran over to Mrs. Waugh's, "and felt in another atmosphere with her. No memories

[479] Ibid., 131, 135–136.

of the jarring world when with her, or at least an inspiring confidence that we can live above them." For all her intellect Mrs. Waugh had "a sincerity and earnestness, a childlike sweetness, that spiritualizes her most didactic discourse."[480]

Amidst the discussions of war and loathsome Yankees, Julia occasionally reported people's almost equally bitter opinions on religion. "I shall never, never be tempted into a church—a membership I mean—sectarianism awes and disgusts me, yet I often, often covet that *brotherhood feeling* which the members of one association seem to enjoy." She could not imagine religion as "Anything but a kindly interpretation of human action; a gentle forbearance with *all* efforts of the human heart toward God," yet she defined herself as a Christian. But, she said repeatedly, "My ideas meet no one's." She might have once found a spiritual home in Jesse Ferguson's Nashville congregation, or in Dr. Clapp's there in New Orleans, but neither preacher occupied his former pulpit after 1856. She had read Dr. Clapp's sermons, observing that "they seem imbued with Christ's spirit, though they differ in letter from the churches." But Dr. Clapp and others she admired, including Andrew Jackson Davis, were condemned by her friends. Davis's *Great Harmonia* (1850) "met and convinced my reason, soothed my anxieties, unraveled my perplexities, pleased my imagination, lifted my aspirations, reconciled much of paradox to my mind and tinged with far-off hope my longings." Julia's insistence on thinking for herself, even if often constrained by politeness from expressing her views, left her feeling isolated. "Our opinions make us—I cannot yield mine." Her thoughts turned to one with whose spirit she might have wished to commune. "I have known the

[480] Ibid., 143, 146–147.

bliss of a *meeting of thought,*" she wrote wistfully, "but it is gone, and never on this side of eternity can it be mine again."[481]

On another occasion, when Julia was weary of visitors, Mrs. Waugh appeared with an armful of books for them. "I willingly give a morning to *her.*" It was a relief to be able to just be herself with Mrs. Waugh, and not to feel she had to set aside whatever she was working on to entertain her guest. "She is so kind, so true, that she is no restraint on one, as some other people are." Julia wished they might be neighbors always, and Mrs. Waugh reminded her that they would never be separated in the spirit world.[482]

Experience and change were reshaping Julia Le Grand. "*I* was once an Abolitionist, and resented for this race's sake their position in the awful scale of humanity," but recently liberated blacks in wartime New Orleans were not living up to her standards of honesty and morality. She did believe in the law of progress, and that "What they may be some time I can not prognosticate." Whites were clearly, by her cultural and moral standards, superior. In fairness, though, she would "call to mind the age when the Britons wore skins, and hope for all things."[483] Freedmen were certainly not the only people in New Orleans whose behavior disappointed Julia Le Grand.

"I can prove," Julia wrote, "that household furniture has been boxed up and sent to *women* at the North—taken from the houses *captured* by these people." It perplexed and vexed her that women at the North were complicit in and even encouraged the persecution of women and children in the South. Mrs. Norton's daughter Courtenay Norton Dameron and her children had been driven empty handed from the "elegant

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[481] Ibid., 161–163.

[482] Ibid., 176.

[483] Ibid., 168.

establishment" owned by her sister Louisa Norton Brown so it could be plundered by Federals and house a general. The home and possessions of another daughter, Sidney Norton Harrison, were taken over by "Butler's people" and became the residence of General Banks. Mrs. Norton was angry and querulous, and doggedly attempted to have her daughters' things restored and her own light-fingered runaway slaves returned to her by Federal authorities. It all left Julia feeling "nervous, sick and wretched." Mrs. Waugh continued to visit, but Julia did not mention Spiritualism again in what remains of her journal. Julia's last comment on Mrs. Waugh described her friend as "simple-hearted, honest, true and kind, wiser and *more spirited* than those who pretend to more."[484]

Unable to get to Texas, the Le Grand sisters made their way to the plantation of Sarah Norton Chilton in Mississippi, as did Sarah's sisters Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Dameron with some of their children and their mother, Mrs. Norton. They all moved on "like one big family" to refuge in Georgia.[485] There is no record of what they discussed in that time, but we know that Mrs. Chilton became a medium and corresponded with her sisters about Spiritualism during Reconstruction. Julia Le Grand was married in 1867 and lived in Galveston, Texas.

The Civil War: Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas

"In April I had to record the death of Pa and since then—to you my Journal I must confess to a wild, unsettled, chaotic state of mind," Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas wrote on a sultry August day in 1864. "Even while I am writing my pen glances from my hand down the page—When I was writing some time since this happened several times. I

[484] Ibid., 249, 284, 307.

[485] Ibid., 20.

suppose it was some nervous contraction of the muscles of the fingers, bit I drew a sheet of paper to my side and thought perhaps (I have heard of such things) there may be some spiritual influence wishing to communicate with me. If I could commune with my father's spirit I would willingly do so . . . . " Devout Methodist Gertrude Thomas first mentioned her curiosity about Emanuel Swedenborg in 1857, but the birth of a healthy daughter kept her thoughts firmly in the present until the changes in her life during the Civil War forced her to consider what becomes of loved ones who die outside a state of grace. Her father's death had deprived her of the one certain source of stability and support in her life, compounding the misery of living in wartime Georgia. Dr. Lewis D. Ford, one of the attending physicians, was a Swedenborgian. Perhaps they had talked of the world of spirits. Ella Thomas, a devout Methodist, was expected to accept her loss with Christian resignation and take comfort in God's promise of eternal life. The rules were clear, though. Reunion in the hereafter was only through belief in Jesus Christ, and her father had not been a church member. Historian Virginia Burr observed that Gertrude's anguish was fed by the realization that her slave-owning father had probably fathered children outside the bonds of holy matrimony, children who were his property and were willed to his heirs. "The question of 'where oh where in the great unknown world has my father's spirit gone?' has tortured me as with the whip of Scorpions. A restless longing to know—to be sure, to have something definite— that spirit which was so calmly conscious as to know that it was raining so short a time before his death. Where can it be?"[486]

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[486] Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848–1889,* ed. Virginia Ingraham Burr, intro. Nell Irvin Painter (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 231; Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Journal, 1848, Sept. 20–1864, Sept. 18 (typed copy), 25–27, Box 3, Duke; *Secret Eye,* 232, ff 17, 334, 30, 232.

Her reaction to her father's death was much like Sarah Morgan's, but Sarah had the consolation of hearing Judge Morgan reaffirm his faith before he died. God seemed distant to both of them, but Gertrude admitted—unlike Sarah—that she had doubted Him. "I was cold and indifferent to spiritual things. I had no faith in God or man—and yet in all this time I have prayed, wildly, earnestly—and then again a mere lip service—my prayers not ascending higher than my head."[487] That winter, Sherman marched through Georgia. Gertrude Thomas had accepted biblical pro-slavery arguments as an article of her faith, and when God turned his face from the South and the Confederacy died, her faith was again shaken. Like Sarah, it was not yet her time to commune with the spirit world. Like Sarah, she would pursue the possibility for the rest of her life.

The Civil War: Mary Todd Lincoln

The southern woman whose wartime Spiritualism has been most discussed was the wife of the president of the United States, Mary Todd Lincoln. The Lincolns' twelve-year-old son Willie had caught cold in early 1862, but his illness worsened and he died, probably "of typhoid fever contracted from the White House's polluted water supply," the Potomac River. The blow all but incapacitated Mary Lincoln. She visited Spiritualists Cranston Laurie and his wife in Georgetown, and is reputed to have had séances in the White House. Even before Willie died, there had been reports in the press that President Lincoln himself might be a Spiritualist, and the stories continued long after his death.

[487] *Secret Eye,* 233.

Communications from Willie Lincoln's spirit appeared in the *Banner of Light's* "Messages" columns.[488]

Mary Todd Lincoln's acceptance of spirit communion probably stretched back to her childhood in Lexington, Kentucky. She was six years old when her mother died, leaving older children who reminded their father of his dead wife and a baby brother for whom he had to arrange nursing. Mary was a child in the middle, and probably got less attention than her older or younger siblings. Her family's Christian consolation was based on their Presbyterian understanding of themselves as among the elect, which must have seemed abstruse to the stricken child. More accessible was the comfort of the stories she would have heard from her family's slaves, who retained the African conviction that the barrier between the world of the living and the world of spirits was permeable. "In black folk religion the dead returned, sometimes to see their babies," a hope that would intrigue any young child dealing with such an incomprehensible loss. "A mourner had only to walk backward or rub dead moles' feet at daybreak to help a dead mother return, at least for a visit." In the White House, Mrs. Lincoln developed a friendship with Elizabeth Keckley, a Washington dressmaker who began to work for Mary Lincoln in 1861, and became her modiste and confidante. Keckley, born into slavery, had purchased her freedom and parlayed talent and hard work into a successful business. It was natural for Mrs. Lincoln, raised among and comforted by blacks, to fall into easy conversation with Elizabeth Keckley in the hours they spent together. The dressmaker consulted

[488] John Whitcomb and Claire Whitcomb, *Real Life at the White House: 200 Years of Daily Life at America's Most Famous Residence* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 134–135; "The President is a Spiritualist," *Banner of Light* (March 23, 1861), 6; Nettie Colburn Maynard, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist? or, Curious Revelations from the Life of a Trance Medium* (Philadelphia: Rufus C. Hartranft, Publisher, 1891), 71–75, 84–91, 97, 101, 109, 117–122, 129–132, 135, 153, 157, 163–170, 179–181, 193; "Message Department," *Banner of Light* (April 3, 1864), 6; (June 4, 1864), 6.

Spiritualists after her son was killed, and encouraged Mrs. Lincoln to contact Willie after he died.[489]

Mary Todd Lincoln never turned away from the comforts of Spiritualism. When her son Robert had her declared insane in 1875, although he was sure her Spiritualism contributed to her instability, it was never named at her trial. As historian Jason Emerson pointed out, a doctor testified "that Mary heard voices, listened to table rappings, and was protected by her husband's spirit," which "certainly smacked of Spiritualism, and some newspapers reported that Mary's insanity was partly caused by her belief in Spiritualism; but it was never explicitly stated in court as a cause of her madness." Robert Lincoln was willing to make his mother's insanity a matter of indisputable public record, apparently, but not her Spiritualism. Alan M. Dershowitz, in his summary of the issues involved in the trial, observed that conspiracy theorists claimed Robert Lincoln's decision to seek legal action against his mother was engineered by Liberal Republicans who wanted to ruin his chances to run for office "with the magical vote-getting name of Lincoln" by linking the family name with insanity. At the other extreme are those who argue Mary Lincoln was never truly insane, but merely a grieving widow who had also lost three of her four sons.[490] That she was a Spiritualist is well substantiated.

The Civil War: Shakers

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[489] Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1987), 24, 219, 230; Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1868), 60, 91, xiv

[490] Jason Emerson, *The Madness of Mary Lincoln* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 59; Alan M. Dershowitz, *America on Trial: Inside the Legal Battles that Transformed Our Nation* (New York: Warner Books, 2004), 181.

During the war the Kentucky Shakers continued to follow the progress of Spiritualism outside their communities. Many at South Union had signed the 1854 petition, and in 1861 "Mr. Amos B." of Pleasant Hill wrote to the *Herald of Progress* with a medical query. Amos Ballance and several members of his family were living at Pleasant Hill, and many relatives of Lawson Runyan, who had left as a young man, would also grow old and die there. Ballance was a nurseryman, and over the course of the war saw the fruits of his labors feed companies of soldiers moving across and camping on the Shakers' land. One Pleasant Hill Shaker compared the "ragged, greasy and dirty troops" who descended on them in 1862 to "the locusts of Egypt." Always opposed to slavery, the Shakers professed neutrality and tried to avoid conscription. In 1864, Amos Ballance and B. B. Dunlavy sent a box of preserves to Abraham Lincoln, and a note expressing their admiration of his "probity & private virtues, & the unbending integrity & signal ability which have characterized your official administration, in this unprecedented & lamentable crisis." They hoped that some of the fruits of Lincoln's "native State, cultivated under the arts of peace," would please him.[491] The Shakers had to know that Lincoln's name had been linked with Spiritualism, which would have made the president's "private virtues" of particular interest to them.

The Civil War: Confederate Generals

There is no indication that Spiritualism was popular among Confederate troops, and a great deal to support the contention that facing death made some men more

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[491] "Medical," *Herald of Progress* (June 29, 1861), 1; *Shaker Experience in America*, 202; Letter, Amos Ballance & B. B. Dunlavy to Abraham Lincoln, May 15, 1864. Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (Washington, D. C.: American Memory Project, 2000–02), http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alhome.html (accessed January 30, 2003).

receptive to the message of Christian salvation. Countless letters and journals express concern for the fate of the souls of the unconverted, but none has surfaced that entreats a beloved son, husband or brother to embrace spirit communication. Orthodox Christians had reason to worry about the prospects of those who died without confessing faith in Jesus Christ as their Redeemer. Death was always lurking in the antebellum South, and much nearer in the anxious years of Civil War. Conversion was the only way ensure eternity in heaven with the spirits of those you loved on earth. Believers in universal salvation no doubt felt less urgency about conversion, and were more focused overall on their relationship with God than the mediation of His Son. Spiritualists knew that everyone who died lived on in the spirit world. The fact is, though, that everyone lived in fear for themselves, their loved ones, their property, their way of life. As the war wore on in the blockaded South, anxiety was compounded by poor communication, dislocation and shortages of everything.

Confederate generals were subject to greater scrutiny, and a few of them were known to be Spiritualists. George and Gabriel Rains, the "bomb brothers" originally from New Bern, North Carolina, were believers. George Washington Rains had undertaken a scientific investigation of Spiritualism in New York in the 1850s and become convinced the phenomena were the result of spirit activity. Married, he left the army in 1856 to become president of his father-in-law's iron works in Newburg, New York. By July 1861 he had a commission in the Confederate army. He built and operated the Confederate gunpowder works in Georgia. When George Rains began looking into Spiritualism, his older brother Gabriel (also a graduate of the United States Military Academy) was stationed in the Pacific Northwest, but by the Civil War Gabriel too was apparently a

Spiritualists. The effectiveness of the Rains brothers' manufacture and deployment of mines in southern waters was well known. A correspondent of the *New York Times* in 1862 quoted a captured Confederate who said under oath that Gabriel Rains superintended the preparation and placement of the "torpedoes." All the writer could do to lighten the piece was claim the informant had also told him Rains "goes among the rebel soldiers by the *soubriquet* of 'Sister Rains,' on account of his devotion to the doctrines of Free Love and Spiritualism."[492] Spiritualism, even in the North, could be usefully linked with free love, unmanly weakness of mind and susceptibility to delusion and fraud. The war years demanded clarity of thought and purposeful masculinity.

Gereral Humphrey Marshall was a prominent Kentuckian who felt his distinguished military and political career merited a better assignment in the Confederate army. A hefty man, Marshall was an easy target for derisive comment. One military historian, writing on the cusp of the new social and religious history, echoed the attitude of the *New York Times* piece a century earlier when he said this of Marshall: "His near 300-pound frame caused him to move slowly in the mountains, and had he arrived sooner in East Kentucky he might have intercepted Morgan at some point south of Mount Sterling. But this unusual fellow, reportedly a devout believer in spiritual seances, failed to provide the necessary support on the right flank. And Bragg needed a general there—not a spiritualist." [493] Actually, Bragg probably needed a nimble general with a good attitude, whatever his personal cosmology.

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[492]C. L. Bragg, Charles D. Ross, Gordon A. Baker, Stephanie A. T. Jacobs and Theodore P. Savas, *Never for Want of Powder: The Confederate Powder Works in Augusta, Georgia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 18–19; "From Gen. McClellan's Army," *New York Times* (May 8, 1862), 9.

[493] Thomas Lawrence Connelly, *Army of the Heartland: The Army of Tennessee, 1861–1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 238.

The Civil War: Mary Boykin Chesnut

Mary Boykin Chesnut's friend Louisa McCord, who had "the brain and energy of a man," told her that their friend Dr. Daniel Heyward Trezevant "believes with all his heart, with all his mind, with all his soul—in spirits. Listens with credulity to their rappings—credits every word a medium conveys to him from the spirits. So does Waddy Thompson, my father's friend." Daniel Trezevant was a Columbia physician in his sixties who had buried his first wife and four of their children in the 1830s; his namesake son had died at Chapultepec. Besides this history of loss, Trezevant had an abiding interest in the working of the mind. From 1830 to 1856, as a regent and visiting physician, he had "played a dominant role in the history" of the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum.[494] Poor Waddy Thompson, since his earliest public brush with mesmerism in Washington, D. C. had set the tongues of South Carolina politicians' wives wagging, seems to have carried the stigma of susceptibility to the occult. Somehow belief in spirit communication was not quite the thing for a man in the eyes of shrewd wives such as Chesnut and McCord.

Even so, Mrs. Chesnut admitted she found some things inexplicable. Her second cousin, Dr. Edward Boykin, had been in excellent spirits one day, but that evening, in "brilliant company he sat dead still, as if in a trance." She later learned that after Dr. Boykin left on the train a telegram had arrived with the news that one of his children had died suddenly. "Queer! In some way he must have known it," she acknowledged. "He

[494] *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 304, 328; John Timothée Trezevant, *The Trezevant Family in the United States: From the Date of the Arrival of Daniel Trezevant, Huguenot, at Charles Town, South Carolina, in 1685, to the Present Date* (Columbia, SC: Printed for J. T. Trezevant, 1914), 27–30; Peter McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias & Madness: Insanity in South Carolina from the Colonial Period to the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 65. McCandless discusses religious insanity and enthusiasm, but does not mention Spiritualism. Trezevant was probably associated with the asylum when Columbus Patton died there in 1856.

changed so suddenly. And seemed so careworn and unhappy. He believes in clairvoyance—in magnetism and all that. Certainly there was some terrible foreboding on his part." Her sister Kate told her the story of Dr. Keitt, killed by negroes, whose shade appeared to Mr. Taylor, "a plain, strong-minded, hard-sense, clear-headed man—not given to nonsense in any shape," and told Taylor they had hanged the wrong person, and "'let the rascals who cut my throat go,' and instantly vanished." Taylor rode home shaken, and in a little while a brother of Dr. Keitt rode up. He too was pale and agitated, and finally said, "My brother came in last night. We had a long talk. He says I screened the rascals who cut his throat." Mrs. Chesnut made light of it, calling it a tale for Robert Dale Owen's *Footprints of Another World.* "I believed every word she said—but then, of course I knew it was not true. How could it be?"[495]

The Civil War: The Unquiet Dead

Tales of the unquiet dead returning to demand justice were less common than stories of apparitions appearing to announce their deaths. Mrs. M. A. White recalled that when her father, a Methodist minister, died in 1864 he appeared to a friend in Florida, asking him to "write to John, my son, to take up the work that I have laid down." His son must "go and preach the gospel." The editor to whom Mrs. White wrote assured her that John Wesley gave several similar cases, and had written that "A spirit finds no difficulty in traveling thousands of miles in a moment." Emma Hardinge Britten recounted a story originally printed in a Spiritualist newspaper about people she had met in Macon, Georgia. During the second year of the war, John Holmes wrote to his aunt Caroline to

[495] *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 21, 23, 218–219. Robert Dale Owen's book was *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (1860).

say he was coming home on furlough. John's sweetheart Annie, the story went, came to help with preparations for his homecoming, but according to 1860 census John and Annie Holmes were married with two children, living with Caroline Williford, and apparently John's assets had been transferred to his wife—not an uncommon practice during the war. In any case, John's voice was heard at the gate, calling for "faithful Bob" to come and get his horse. Bob found no one at the locked gate. "On the very day that his voice was heard calling at the gate for Bob to come and take his horse, a great battle was fought, and John Holmes was amongst the 'killed.'"[496] Ann Holmes gave birth to a child she named John in November 1864, so her husband probably did not die in the second year of the war. Did the writer make up the story? Was there a germ of truth distorted by memory and retelling? We have no way to know.

The Civil War: Professional Mediums

Medium and spirit postmaster J. V. Mansfield had arrived in New Orleans in the midst of excitement over secession, and for a time attracted little notice. Soon, reported E. C. Hyde, people began to turn to Mansfield for information and—unlike Andrew Jackson Davis's *Herald of Progress*—he remained carefully focused on the spirit world. Through Mr. Mansfield's mediumship "Members of the different professions, persons of all sects, parties, and classes of society, have received communications," Hyde wrote, "most of them, I learn, satisfactory, and wisely adapted to convince those to whom they were given or directed of the fact of universal spirit-life, instructive and beneficial to them without intermeddling with domestic, social, or political relations." No northern

[496] "A Voice from the Spirit Land," *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1876), 12; "Records of Spiritual Facts and Phenomena," *The Two Worlds* [London] (July 11, 1890), 407.

medium or mesmerizer would venture into the South until hostilities were well over, but at least one southerner attempted to supply the deficiency. Mago Del Mage, "The Great Southern Wizard and Magician" gave performances and benefits for soldiers. He advertised in Augusta, Atlanta, Savannah, Macon and Richmond, and may have been working in Texas as early as 1859.[497] He advertised himself as southern, and made no mention of Spiritualism. No other evidence about him has been found.

The Civil War: Sarah Morgan

"I love to think about death," claimed Sarah in the summer of 1863. She was twenty-one years old. That the experience of the past two years compelled this young Confederate woman to think about death is understandable. Why she might love to is less immediately apparent. As Sarah Morgan contemplated the mysteries of death on that sultry July day in Union-held New Orleans, the realization of her losses in two short years of civil war overwhelmed her. Thinking and writing about death offered Sarah a way of reconstituting her sundered family in the promised hereafter. She embraced

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[497] "Mr. Mansfield in New Orleans," *Banner of Light* (May 4,1861), 7; "Masonic Hall. Mago del Mage," *Savannah Republican* (March 18, 1862), 2, http://www.uttyler.edu/vbetts/savannah_republican_1862.htm; "Concert Hall. For Three Nights Only. Commencing on Tuesday Night, April 29. First Night for the Benefit of the Sick and Wounded Soldiers. Mago Del Mage, The Great Southern Wizard and Magician!" *Daily Constitutionalist* [Augusta, GA] (April 29, 1862), 2, http://www.uttyler.edu/vbetts/augusta_const_ja-je_62.htm; "Athenaeum. For a Few Nights Only. Friday Night, Dec. 5, 1862 Mago Del Mage," *Southern Confederacy* [Atlanta, GA] (December 5, 1862), 2, http://www.uttyler.edu/vbetts/southern_confederacy.htm; "Athenaeum. Fun, Farce, Frolic and Foibles. Monday Evening, Feb. 2d, 1863, First Night of Mago Del Mage, The Celebrated Southern Wizard & Magician." *Savannah Republican* (January 31, 1863), 2, http://www.uttyler.edu/vbetts/savannah_republican_1863.htm; "Pantechnoptomon! Metropolitan Hall! . . . Mago Del Mage. The renowned Southern Wizard, will appear in new and wonderful Necromantic Feats," *Southern Illustrated News* [Richmond, VA] (April 4, 1863), 3, http://www.uttyler.edu/vbetts/southern_illustrated_news.htm (accessed December 28, 2008); Richard W. Iobst, *Civil War Macon* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 272; E. W. Winkler, "Check List of Texas Imprints, 1846–1876 (Continued)," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 49:4 (April 1946), 533.; Richard W. Iobst, *Civil War Macon* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2009), 272; E. W. Winkler, "Check List of Texas Imprints, 1846–1876 (Continued)," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 49:4 (April 1946), 533.

thoughts of death defiantly because they forced her to ponder the reality of human mortality and reaffirm her faith in God's promise of eternal life. Harry's death was her first experience of profound sorrow. "Then, for the first time I knew what grief was. But I had always been so happy until then! 'Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also?'" The only way to conceive of death that made any sense to young Sarah Morgan was to accept that it was an act of Divine Providence with the words, "Thy will be done." Yet if her losses were God's will, which she struggled to believe, then it was wrong, even blasphemous, to think of them as evil. God sent afflictions to strengthen one's faith, to teach Christian resignation. She even hinted that she deserved the punishment of Harry's death for the sin of idolizing him, of loving him too much.

Sarah seems to have lived with an almost constant sense that she was watched. She struggled mightily to be a perfect daughter for her father, craved the approbation of her brothers, and felt the omnipresence of God and the weight of her own inability to live up to her ideal of Christian and social perfection. "I am humbled and cast down when I compare what I am, with what I should be!" As she thought about Harry after her father's funeral, Sarah gave an early hint that she might be trying to communicate with his spirit. "How I long for you, wait for you, pray for you, and you never come! Do you no longer love your little sister?" Another time, as she lay in bed fearing she might never recover from the injury to her spine, she thought, "I wonder if the dead can see us?" and hoped her father and Harry in Heaven could not watch her suffering. By 1864 she would write,

"No eyes except those of spirits read the words over your shoulder, eyes that see every thing. . . . "[498]

She sprinkled references to dreams through the pages of her journal. "The first dream in a strange house comes true; but I tried in vain to recall it," she wrote of a stopping place between Baton Rouge and Linwood. "As usual, I named the bed posts, and prepared to remember my dream," she noted after another trip. In an interesting but probably not unusual way, Sarah Morgan was able to blend piety with snippets of folk belief. On nine different occasions in the journal she refers to her prophetic soul.[499]

In a typical meditation, she had written on November 9, 1862, "O dear father! . . . If it were not for the hope that every Christian has, of meeting those we love here after, I could never have borne it so. But why should I murmur when God takes, and calls me to follow? Father! Harry! I'll meet you again, pleas[e] God, where I shall never be called to cry over another parting!" Sarah tried to achieve perfect Christian resignation to God's will as she anticipated how what had happened could be healed by her faith in God's promises, but her tears proved that it was an elusive goal. Her suffering was the cross each Christian must bear in her pilgrimage through life. So far, Sarah was doing a satisfactory, if uneven, job of accepting terrible events as Providential. Her success hinged on her faith and her Christian hope that her family—in which she had learned the faith, hope, and love she now deployed to help her cope—would spend a blissful eternity together. More immediately, she hoped that God would see her three Confederate brothers safely through the war. "We have lost so much already, that God will surely spare those three to us," she had written in the fall of 1862. Sarah's pilgrimage would

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[498] *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman,* 84, 22, 527.

[499] Ibid., 211, 525; prophetic soul: 287, 294, 314, 324, 430, 476, 525, 556, 558.

continue through even more losses that lay in store for her; in little more than two months brothers George and Gibbes would be dead.

Figure 12. "Cemetery in New Orleans—Widow and Daughters in Full Mourning." Engraving, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* April 25, 1863.

The deaths of George and Gibbes were no time to flout convention, and her social position was far less secure in 1864 New Orleans than it had been in 1861 Baton Rouge. Perhaps wearing black was the only way she could express the depth of her loss and her solidarity with other bereaved supporters of the Confederacy in New Orleans. Brother Jimmy's memoir gives another clue. His mother and sisters, he remembered, "had

suffered much from privation and want in the Confederacy, and were now suffering more mentally on account of the attitude of their former friends. . . ." Many of these old friends, staunch Confederates, "despite the fact that two of our brothers had given their lives to the Southern cause, and that they had served 'from the crack of the first gun to the end of the war,' shunned them as though they were unclean because they had taken refuge from starvation in the house of a brother who was a Union man."[500] Putting on mourning would also have been a way for Sarah to demand that these former friends acknowledge her sacrifice to the Confederacy.

In a lone entry in early April, several weeks after the deaths of her brothers, Sarah recorded a dream. After Communion on a Sunday morning, she collapsed on her bed and slept. Dreaming she might be dead but reawaking to life with dread, she seized upon the idea that on awakening she would not remember where she had been and it "reconciled me to life which had seemed insupportable before." Sarah found herself "with a vague consciousness of having been in another world, and a feeling of awe as though God had talked to my soul. . . . It has left me with a 'peace that passeth understanding.'" Perhaps Sarah believed the loving God she remembered from the past was answering her prayers or perhaps that dream was a wish her heart made when she was fast asleep. It is also possible that Sarah's dream reflected a knowledge of the literature of Spiritualism or Swedenborg's visits to heaven. This entry does give an important piece of information about her life; she was attending Episcopal services. With New Orleans occupied by Union troops, any Episcopal rector allowed to occupy the pulpit would have been required to include the prayer for the president of the United States that was a part of

[500] James Morris Morgan, *Recollections of a Rebel Reefer* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 254.

denominational liturgy. Sarah's need for ritual and shared faith apparently transcended her reluctance to take part in worship under the Union's conditions even though she still had a brother fighting for the Confederacy.

Sarah wrote on New Year's Eve 1864, a time when she and many diarists traditionally reflected on the year gone by and what the new year might bring, often by making reference to where they had been and what they had predicted a year earlier. "O sad, dreary, fearful Old Year! I see you go with pain!" The "customary observations" appropriate to the occasion were largely left unwritten. "The less I recall the sorrow and pain, the better it will be."[501] Sarah's second period of mourning was different from the first. What may be most telling is that she could no longer claim she loved, or even liked, to think about death. It was too painful, and there had been too much of it.

She had not mentioned communicating with spirits since George and Gibbes died. What had been a widespread interest in the mysteries and possibilities of Spiritualism in the 1850s was supplanted by the anxiety, disruption and terrible loss of the war years, and for many of the religious by a fear that the war was a chastisement for their sins or that they would not be reunited in eternity with loved ones who had died without accepting Christ. It was not a time conducive to metaphysical or experimental religion. Sarah Morgan had endured the deaths of Harry and her father with an unflagging Christian faith, but something profoundly different happened to Sarah and other southern women when they thought about loved ones sacrificed to the war. Confederate loss meant, on some level, that their deaths had been a useless sacrifice. Sarah knew that George had probably lost his life to medical incompetence. The same framework of Christian acceptance, the same language of faith she had invoked after Harry and Judge Morgan

[501] *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 605.

died, felt different when applied to the deaths of George and Gibbes. And so she came to the close of the war, no longer the girl who presumed on the goodness of God and loved all the wonders of his creation. She had not lost her faith, but her understanding of God's plan for her would require careful reconsideration. Like most southerners inclined to communicate with the spirit world, Sarah Morgan would again be drawn to try and time and again would believe she had succeeded. First, though, they would have to begin to rebuild their lives.

The Civil War: Spiritualism in the South

Evidence of Spiritualist activity in the South during the Civil War is scant. Spirit communion required a peaceful environment and a focused mind, scarce commodities in the makeshift domestic arrangements of Confederate families. Julia Le Grand was ready to believe, as were Sarah Morgan and Gertrude Thomas, but swirling rumors and news, anxiety for absent loved ones and the very real difficulties of procuring the necessities of life occupied their thoughts. Nor had they yet reconciled their interest in talking to the dead with their identity as Christians. Not until a semblance of normalcy and stability surrounded them would southerners turn again to communing with the spirits.

CHAPTER NINE

Reconstruction

"To see a whole city draped in mourning is certainly an imposing spectacle," Sarah Morgan wrote on April 22, 1865, "and becomes almost grand when it is considered as an expression of universal affliction." Lincoln's death brought forth an outpouring of genuine grief throughout the Union. But not everyone in New Orleans who draped their homes in mourning was sincere. The more "violently 'secesh' the inmates" the more "profusely the houses are decked with woe. They all look to me like 'not sorry for him, but dreadfully grieved to be forced to this demonstration.'" New Orleans Confederates may have felt that black crape offered them protective coloration, but their sham mourning disgusted Sarah. She observed the Union mourning its fallen leader as an unreconstructed Confederate in New Orleans, but refused to share the glee of other southern sympathizers at Lincoln's death. "Where does patriotism end, and murder begin?" she mused. "This is murder! God have mercy on those who did it."[502]

Sarah Morgan had a carefully thought out structure of moral rectitude and was a devout Christian all her life. Her engagement with Spiritualism, like that of most southerners, does not fit easily into any of the temporal patterns identified by historians of Spiritualism. Scholars frequently point to a trajectory in which interest peaked in the years after 1855 and then began to diminish as news of exposures of fraudulent mediums

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[502] *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman,* 606–608.

became more common. Some have noted an increased interest during the Civil War and in its immediate aftermath, occasioned by the massive loss of life.[503] No evidence has emerged to suggest that any of this was true of the South. Each story that follows helps us understand that most of the South was too devastated to focus on more than survival in the early years of Reconstruction. When it did begin to show signs of real vitality, it would generate a distinctly southern Spiritualist movement that was also distinctly Christian.

"While praying for the return of those who have fought so nobly for us," Sarah Morgan wrote in May 1865, "how I have dreaded their first days at home! Since the boys died I have constantly thought of what pain it would bring to see their comrades return without them—to see families reunited, and know that ours never could be again, save in heaven." The Confederacy was dead, but Sarah vowed that it, like her brothers, would live on in her heart. "I only pray never to be otherwise than what I am at this instant—a

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[503] Moore, *In Search of White Crows* is probably the most influential source for the oft-repeated contention that Spiritualism grew rapidly in the early 1850s, leveled off for the rest of the decade, and declined during the Civil War,. "After the Civil War," he saw, "a recovery fed by the wish of many people to communicate with those who had perished during the war. A veritable spiritualist mania swept the country in the form of a modified ouija board called a planchette. The recovery lasted until the late 1870s." Moore cites Eppes Sargent's *Planchette; Or, The Despair of Science* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), which says the planchette was introduced in America in 1868. Others report a decline in the years before the Civil War because of exposures of fraudulent mediums that was exacerbated by the war. Geoffrey K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 16: "Public activities seem to have ceased almost entirely during the war. . . ." City and state associations began forming in the North shortly after the war. Andrew Jackson Davis started the first in St. Louis in 1865 (Nelson, 26). There was some early activity in Baltimore. Except in New Orleans there was no comparable activity in the South in the 1860s. Some sources claiming increased interest during and/or immediately after the Civil War do not cite a source. Examples: Bridget Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 147; Edwin Scott Gaustad and Leigh Eric Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 202; Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 139.

Robert C. Fuller contends "The Civil War brought a temporary halt to the growth of unchurched spirituality. Political discord and the carnage of war siphoned away much of the enthusiasm for religious innovation. But, by the mid-1880s, when some measure of normalcy had returned to American life, it was inevitable that the nation would regain its spiritual vitality." *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), 46.

Rebel in heart and soul, and that all my life I may remember the cruel wrongs we have suffered." [504]

Confederate surrender in 1865 meant emancipation, which liberated most of the capital assets of previously well-to-do southerners. Confederate leaders at first wondered if they might be hanged for treason. White southerners were required to take an oath of loyalty to the Union. Their homeland was occupied by Union troops. The greatest immediate challenge for previously well-off white women who had never had to hire servants or do their own housework was learning to cook and clean. The jubilation and "disloyalty" of former slaves angered them. Men had to find a way to earn their livelihood; planters and former slaves had to work out the unfamiliar details of a free labor system. There is no evidence that anyone in the newly-conquered South had the time or energy to commune with the dead. The physical and emotional scars were too fresh; one of every four white southern men of military age had been sacrificed to the carnage and disease of the war.[505] Most people were struggling to survive.

In Georgia, Gertrude Thomas's problems were pressing. Under her husband's control, the property her father had given her was gradually being lost; she endured the public humiliation of seeing it advertised for sale in town. Her husband drank. She also lived with constant reminders that the men she had trusted had committed adultery with their former slaves. Her father had willed her slaves in 1864 who were probably her half-siblings. The connection between miscegenation and degradation was most painful as she watched her eldest son, forced by his father to give up his education, plowing the fields

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[504] *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman,* 610, 611.

[505] Gary Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten: How Hollywood & Popular Art Shape What We Know About the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 17.

with a mulatto boy, "perhaps his father's son by a woman a shade darker than *his* mother."[506] It would be years before Gertrude Thomas would attempt to contact her father's spirit.

The only record of a southerner's interest in the spirit world immediately after the war is an interesting study in how one man, incarcerated and facing the possibility of death, turned his thoughts to the afterlife and the unknown. In 1865 the imprisoned Alexander Stephens, former vice president of the Confederate States of America, kept a diary. His meditations on faith, the Trinity, dreams and superstitions mix casually with reflections on the realities of imprisonment, the aftermath of the war and the problem of bedbugs. His faith and courage allowed him to face whatever lay in store for him calmly, but his homesickness and yearning to be with family were unconquerable. Hearing nothing from his family, and imagining all the things that might have befallen them, was agony, an anxious misery shared by the thousands of former Confederates trudging toward homes hundreds of miles away and by the families awaiting them. There is no evidence that Stephens actually became a Spiritualist, but he was reflecting on times in his life when knowledge came from unknown sources, and was eager to understand its origin and meaning. In June, he was reading Cicero on divination and fate and dreams. His own fate uncertain, Stephens thought about dreams. Some, he wrote, "seem to carry an unmistakable impress of an agency other than that known in ordinary workings of the mind." Events in dreams sometimes "come to pass in almost exact accordance with the vision. What I say is mainly from my own experience. I have had many such dreams." Reason offered no explanation. Man is "a triune being; there is in his composition matter,

[506] *Secret Eye,* 321.

mind, and soul." The laws governing each are different. Stephens neither believed nor disbelieved in Spiritualism, but assumed there was much deception practiced, "as it has been in all ages by professed fortune-tellers, soothsayers, conjurers, and diviners." Nonetheless, "reason in its pride" should not reject spiritual things merely "because they are beyond its power of understanding and accounting for." After a "presentiment that I shall hear good news," Stephens claimed he did not think he was superstitious, but he did believe "in a Divine Providence and in His manifestations to me in spiritual communication."[507]

After a thoughtful meditation on extending the franchise to newly freed slaves, he turned to a consideration of superstition about viewing the new moon. "Without being much of a believer in signs and auguries," he wrote, "yet I do like always to get a clear view of the new moon." Stephens, like Sarah Morgan, recalled "Old sayings about the dreams one may have the first night in a new room." He dreamed frequently of his brother Linton, and worried because he had no news of him. Stephens recalled a dream in which Linton did not speak. "It rained that night. To dream of the dead is said to be a sign of rain." The life they had known *was* dead, but he soon learned that Linton was not. Early August found Stephens reading the Bible, commenting that at first even the disciples only dimly understood "the great truths of Christ's mediation." Davis seems to have been treated well by his guards, and enjoyed conversation on his supervised walks inside the prison. One of his guards, Major Appleton, was a Swedenborgian. Stevens was interested in learning "something of this great theologian's doctrines," and Appleton

[507] Alexander H. Stevens, *Recollections of Alexander H. Stephens: His Diary Kept When a Prisoner at Fort Warren, Boston Harbour, 1865; Giving Incidents and Reflections of His Prison Life and Some Letters and Reminiscences,* ed., with a bio., Myrta Lockett Avary (New York: Doubleday and Page, 1910), 258–259, 430.

provided books; soon Stephens was immersed in Swedenborg's writings, and to the extent he understood them found the seer's views in harmony with his own. Despite his Presbyterian background, Stephens had never been able to comprehend the idea of "divine vengeance," and was inclined to see God as the "very embodiment of love and mercy" and His punishment as the inevitable consequence of violations of moral and physical laws. Scripture gave man the rules and thus the power, "through Divine aid and faith in the Redeemer," to avoid error.[508]

Faith was his bulwark. "That the Lord is a strong hold in the day of trouble I know. But for His sustaining grace, I should have been crushed in body soul long ere this. Yet do I fully trust Him?" Major Appleton and his family were kind to Stephens, and their daughter reminded him of the nieces he so missed. When the major went back to civilian life, Mrs. Appleton gave Stephens a parting gift of a bundle of books by Swedenborg. "So, one by one," Stephens sighed, "my friends leave me. No sooner do I begin to form attachments than they are broken." But the ideas the Appletons had shared with him remained, as did their books. Poring over a volume of sermons by a Church of England cleric, Stephens was struck by how precisely the minister's notions of the Trinity matched Swedenborg's. "The sermon indicating this was preached on 26th May, 1850, from I Thess. v, 23. It considers man in his *three-fold* nature of matter, and two other

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[508] Ibid., 270; Richard Malcolm Johnston and William Hand Browne, *Life of Alexander H. Stephens* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott & Co., 1878), 335: Stephens wrote to his half-brother Linton in 1857 about superstition, remembering the death of Linton's mother thirty-two years earlier. Stephens's letter illustrates how profoundly the superstitions of the family's slaves could impress young southerners. "When I received your letters I was thinking of this day thirty-two years ago. It was on that day that your mother followed our common father to the world of spirits. . . . A few nights before my heart almost sank within me on hearing the screams of an ill-omened bird,—a raven it must have been,—. . . . Ben said, when he heard the croaking of the nightly messenger, that it was a sign of death. His remark sank deep into my soul. . . . You may set this down to a sprinkling of superstition in my nature I will plead guilty."; *Recollections of Alexander H. Stephens,* 478, 483, 425, 431, 470.

distinct principles, soul, and spirit, as I have been believing for a long time." Reading of the confiscation of the home of a Georgia Confederate, Stephens was afraid his would be "confiscated in a similar way by the Freedman's Bureau." A letter came, reassuring him that several family members had survived the war and were safe at home. Stephens was impressed by the fact that on the day he recorded a dream of being at a friend's house, his brother Linton had been there. "Was not my spirit with him?"[509]

Alexander H. Stephens understood this dream as evidence that he was connected to Linton in ways that could not be explained by science or religion. He continued to read Swedenborg, and concluded it was possible that Swedenborg's attempts to reconcile "spiritual mysteries with the laws of human understanding," an impossible task, had unbalanced the seer. "Whether he was under Divine illumination or labouring under a hallucination, I do not know, but that he was sincere, I believe." Stephens concluded that in "things relating to the culture of the soul, reason, technically speaking, had nothing to do. The whole lies in a sphere beyond human reason."[510] Each person was left to configure a personal system of belief, a *bricolage* of the available ideas and explanations most resonant with his or her own influences and experiences. Stephens's ideas about the mysteries of spirit connecting to spirit in life—embodied—fell just short of taking the next step—belief in communication with disembodied spirits. He gave up as unknowable the source of his dreams and premonitions, while Spiritualists would have attributed them to the influence of spirits. Within the same matrix of ideas and experiences Stephens inhabited, other southerners chose to believe in communicating with the world of spirits.

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[509] Ibid., 472, 443, 477, 466, 468.

[510] Ibid., 473, 471.

In September Stephens told Linton he had a presentiment that he would soon be released. "I was reluctant to tell him this, for I thought he might consider it superstitious, and so it may be, but O my God, in Thy mercy make it true!" He dreamed of being at home. Stephens left Fort Warren in October. Linton was with him. They stopped in New York and Washington, then started inland. "The desolation of the country from Alexandria to near Charlottesville was horrible to behold." Passing through east Tennessee, they heard that "all men who sympathized with the Southern Cause" would be killed if they did not leave. Nearing home, he wrote, "War has left a terrible impression on the whole country to Atlanta. The desolation is heart-sickening. Fences gone, fields all a-waste, houses burnt."[511] At last he reached his home. "I seemed to myself to be in a dream. But my heart went up in fervent thanksgiving to Almighty God for preserving and guiding me back once more to this spot so dear to me. And with this entry this Journal closes forever." Stephens had had the uninterrupted leisure, however unwelcome, to consider the mysteries of body, soul and spirit in 1865. His journal shows how Christianity, dreams and even superstition merged in his musings, and all defined who he was and how he interpreted matters of life, death and belief. Under duress, his active mind welcomed the opportunity to supplement his morning readings from the Bible with Swedenborg's devout mystical interpretations of the meaning of Scripture. There is no evidence that Stephens pursued an interest in Spiritualism or Swedenborgianism further, but his diary helps us to understand that though he made note of current events, read voraciously and was a man of deep faith, his dreams and premonitions were about family and close friends. The ways in which he processed and mingled dreams, superstitions and

[511] Ibid., 505, 537, 538, 539.

different theological perspectives on Christian faith shows how inextricably linked they were in his mind, as they probably were to many southerners who had neither the resources nor time to record their thoughts on such matters in the immediate aftermath of war. He would not have been alone in his musings and questions.

While Stephens contemplated the mysteries of the unknown, Jesse Babcock Ferguson's former parishioner Andrew Johnson was formulating what came to be known as Presidential Reconstruction. The desolation and instability Stephens observed on his journey home were emblematic of the politically and financially devastated South. As both black and white southerners assessed the wreckage of their antebellum lives and waited to see what shape change would take, federal occupation forces and northern missionaries, teachers, political organizers and opportunists (some of them in more than one of those roles) flowed into the South. As Reconstruction became more "Radical" and the strangers in their midst instituted rapid political change, many defeated Confederates grew more embittered and suspicious of northerners and their motivations. Reconstruction's first several years were not conducive to the public embrace of "isms" by former Confederates.

Reconstruction-era Southern Methodists in particular had reason to distrust their northern co-religionists. The Methodist Episcopal Church had formally divided into northern and southern entities in 1844 over the issue of slavery, the Baptists in 1845 and the Presbyterians in 1837, again in 1858 and again in 1861. When the Civil War began in 1861, a separate Protestant Episcopal Church was organized in the Confederate States. The Episcopalians reunited at the end of the war, and the Baptists and Presbyterians by

the end of the century.[512] The postwar actions and attitude of Northern Methodists engendered bitterness among white Southern Methodists that would last well into the twentieth century. Post-war Southern Methodists were among the least likely in the region to welcome deviation from within as they began to rebuild because they had the added burden of an aggressive missionary effort from Northern Methodists.

By the early 1840s, Northern Methodists had been caught up in political agitation against slavery. As historian Hunter Dickinson Farish made clear, the position taken by the Northern Church "had the effect of confirming the Methodists of the South in their adherence to a narrowly Scriptural definition of the scope of the Church and in particular it inclined them to a narrow view of the functions of the church where their exercise involved an interference with political issues." Northern Methodists, through their connections with the government, were permitted to take "forcible possession" of Southern Methodist churches in occupied Confederate cities. Many Methodists in the North believed that territory recovered for the Union was also territory won for 'loyal' churches." The vigor and vitriol of Northern Methodist leaders was exceptional; they wanted to absorb Southern Methodism and its assets. No other northern church took this stance. From the perspective of southern bishops in 1866, "a majority of Northern Methodists have become incurably radical. They teach for doctrine the commandments of men. They preach another Gospel. They have incorporated social dogmas and political tests into their Church creeds." The New York Conference that year issued a statement affirming that "expediency, constitutional law, justice, and the Bible all unite in

[512] William M. Newman and Peter L. Halvorson, *Atlas of American Religion: The Denominational Era, 1776–1990* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Alta Mira Press, 2000), 28.

demanding that at least some of the leaders of the rebellion be punished with death."[513] Since the 1840s, Southern Methodists had rejected politics in the pulpit and cleaved to "the old Gospel;" the post-war actions of their northern brethren affirmed that choice in their minds. It was not among Southern Methodists and other former Confederates that Spiritualism began its immediate post-war revival.

Signs of Spiritualist activity began to appear in 1866 in Baltimore, which had lost its identity as a southern city during the war. Maryland had been controlled by Union forces from the beginning of the conflict and emancipationist sentiment had grown quickly among the city's white population. A southerner visiting the city in 1866 found Baltimore, with its "exulting, abounding, overrunning wealth of the North," a stark contrast to "the utter desolation of the unfortunate South." Vermont medium Frances O. Hyzer and her husband relocated their family to Baltimore, and in September four Baltimore residents—J. H. Weaver, Washington Danskin, James Frist and Isaac Corbett—attended a Spiritualist convention in Providence, Rhode Island. Danskin was the center of Spiritualist activity in Baltimore. Isaac Corbett was a prosperous dealer in India rubber goods, umbrellas and parasols.[514] James Frist was a young carriage maker. John H. Weaver was a successful cabinetmaker, and he and his brother Jacob had made undertaking the family business. The Frist family was Methodist, the Weavers

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[513] Hunter Dickinson Farish, *The Circuit Rider Dismounts* (Richmond, Va.: The Dietz Press, 1938), 37, 55, 123.

[514] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 39–41, 124; "Spiritualist Lecturers' Appointments and Addresses," *Banner of Light* (June 30, 1866), http://www.spirithistory.com/66light.html (accessed March 15, 2007); "Third Annual Convention of the American Association of Spiritualists, Providence, R. I.—Delegates and officers," *Banner of Light* (September 1, 1866), http://www.spirithistory.com/66aas.html (accessed c. 2007); "Protection for the Feet," *Monumental Fountain and Temperance Banner* [Baltimore] (January 12, 1850), 79.

Episcopalian. They were the sort of men who were comfortable fraternizing with northern Spiritualists, glad the war was won and they could get on with their lives.

Washington Danskin remained at the forefront of the Spiritualists in Baltimore, always open to new manifestations of spirit power. In January of 1867 Danskin invited a group to witness an escape artist's feat known as the "iron ring manifestation." This involved the securely tied subject, under cover of darkness, slipping solid rings on and off of his arms. Like the Davenport brothers, who had been repeatedly found out in their tricks while Jesse Ferguson traveled with them in England, the young illusionist in Baltimore was able to convince some people that it was all done through the agency of spirits. Danskin called the performance "an unmistakable genuine spirit-effort to demonstrate to us their superior knowledge of the laws of Nature." The will to believe was strong, and thirty-one witnesses attested to the manifestation, including former Presbyterian Francis H. Smith, four members of the Weaver family and the husband of professional medium Francis Hyzer. Washington Danskin issued a book of messages from the spirit of Judge Edmonds in 1874. The Danskins never wavered in their commitment, but never convinced those inclined to disbelieve. A commentary in an 1876 number of *Harper's* used the word "twaddle" in a paragraph discussing Mrs. Danskin's spirit-inspired utterances.[515]

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[515] Hudson Tuttle and J. M. Peebles, *The Year-book of Spiritualism for 1871, Presenting the Status of Spiritualism for the Current Year Throughout the World; Philosophical, Scientific and Religious Essays; Review of Its Literature; History of American Associations; State and Local Societies; Progressive Lyceums; Lecturers; Mediums; and Other Matters Relating to the Momentous Subject* (Boston: William White and Company, 1871), 108–112; *The Spirit World, Its Locality and Conditions, by the Spirit of Judge John Worth Edmonds, Late a Prominent Citizen of New York. Given through the Mediumship of Wash. A. Danskin, and Published at the Request of the First Spiritualist Congregation, of Baltimore* (Baltimore: Steam Press of Frederick A. Hanzsche, 1874); "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 53 (June to November, 1876), 784.

As in Baltimore, Spiritualist activity in St. Louis soon began to revive. Abolitionist Carl Schurz had called antebellum St. Louis "a free city on slave soil," but there were more than four thousand enslaved people in St. Louis County in 1860. The city's location and shipping had made it a center of slave exports from the upper to the lower South. The Union had taken firm control of St. Louis by the end of 1861, rooting out cadres of Confederate plotters and requiring all public officials and eventually all residents to take a loyalty oath. St. Louis had had a thriving and well-organized Spiritualist movement before the war, and began rebuilding; two societies held regular meetings by 1867, and one included a Children's Progressive Lyceum.[516] Trance speaker Emma Hardinge's 1867 lecture tour included an engagement in St. Louis, but she went no farther south. Another Spiritualist lectured at Cincinnati and organized a Spiritualist Children's Lyceum in Louisville, but did not venture into the former Confederacy. Emma Hardinge's hostile reception in Memphis on the eve of the war was a cautionary tale for professional Spiritualists, and in any case there was little money to be made in the ravaged and defeated South.

In Galveston, where Spiritualism had also flourished before the war, it took longer to revive. Still, many of its underlying beliefs and assumptions were very much a part of how people made sense of things that happened in their lives, and people who never called themselves Spiritualists shared what we would consider a Spiritualist cosmology. Amelia E. Barr, for example, believed in dreams and premonitions and "the ability of departed souls to communicate with the living and in reincarnation." Mrs. Barr, the

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[516] Galusha Anderson, *The Story of a Border City During the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1908), 369, 235–236; Martha Saxton, "City Women: Slavery and Resistance in Antebellum St. Louis," in *Contested Democracy: Freedom, Race, and Power in American History,* ed. Manisha Sinha and Penny Marie Von Eschen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 81; "Notices of Meetings," *Spiritual Republic* (April 13, 1867), 238.

daughter of a Methodist preacher from England, was immersed in contacts with the other side in 1867. She had come to Texas with her Scots husband and two children in 1856. He worked as state auditor in Austin, and then as a teacher. Amelia Barr was deeply religious, but the death of infant Ethel in December 1861 devastated her. "What I suffered for many weeks only God knows, but at last he took pity on my grief, and comforted me." Alone one evening, she picked up a book and found that a page was crumpled. As she straightened it, her eyes fell on two lines that "stood out as if illumined" and said, "Weep not for her, she is an angel now, And treads the sapphire floors of Paradise." Those lines were all she saw, and they "held a strange and heavenly comfort" for her. Her baby Archie was buried next to Ethel in 1865. War had taken its toll on Austin and left the family without support. Mr. Barr found a job and went on ahead to Galveston, leaving the family behind to await the end of fever season. Amelia Barr's last night in Austin was filled with fear. The cavalry had left a week before and she "was in terror of the negroes who hungry and angry were going to-and-fro in the darkness, seeking whom they could injure or rob. I dared not sleep." The beautiful city of Austin was now "a desolate place," and she was glad to get away.[517] The family, by then numbering seven, reunited in Galveston in September. They moved into a larger home that spring, but it made her uneasy.

Then yellow fever settled on the city. One night their sons Calvin and Alexander cried and said they could not go upstairs to their rooms because there were evil spirits there. "They emptied my drawers last night," claimed a sobbing Calvin. "They pulled the clothes off our bed. Oh, they are so wicked, and so dreadful!" Daughters Mary and Lilly

[517] Philip Graham, "Barr, Amelia Edith Huddleston (Mar. 29, 1831–Mar. 10, 1919),"in *Notable American Women, 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary,* Volume II, ed. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James and Paul S. Boyer (Cambridge, Mass.: Radcliffe College, 1971), 95, 233–234, 257, 260–261.

told a similar story. Mrs. Barr learned that the cook refused to sleep in the house. Mr. Barr confessed that he heard such things everywhere, but reminded her that if there were evil spirits "they are only the agents of a wise and merciful God who permits them so far, and no further." She described that fever season as a time of "spiritual terror," when "every one for three months dwelt at the mouth of the grave. . . . The invisible world drew strangely near to the visible; every one talked with bated breath of things supernatural." Three of their children sickened in September, then began to recover. Unable to sleep, Mrs. Barr opened the Bible, "for my father had often told me, to take a verse to bed with me to meditate upon, if I happened to be wakeful." Her eyes fell upon Jeremiah 49:11, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in me." Soon she had symptoms of yellow fever, and was delirious for a week. Her husband slept briefly, and woke believing his father, dead thirty-two years, had summoned him. Then their son Robert, desperately ill, asked who the man waiting for him in the next room was. No one was there. Robert died, and his brother Calvin's last words were, "Tell him to wait for me. I am dying too. . . ."[518] Within days, her husband was also dead. Mrs. Barr prayed for life so her daughters would not be left alone; she recovered, and then they survived a hurricane. In December, she gave birth to a son, who died within the week. Mrs. Barr grieved, but gave it all up to God and in time found comfort and guidance. A voice told her to go to New York, where she became a successful novelist. Perhaps it was some combination of Methodism, with its Wesleyan tradition of acknowledging the reality of the unseen agencies around us, and the Scottish belief in second sight from which the Barrs constructed their perceptions of God and

[518] Ibid., 270, 271, 278, 280, 282.

spirits. We only know that to Amelia Barr, even without a label and a movement, spirit communication and direction from God were a reality.

A few southerners wrote to a new Spiritualist paper in Chicago, the *Spiritual Republic.* Proclaiming itself "Devoted to Radical Reform," the *Spiritual Republic* was sent to Alex King in Americus, Georgia by a friend in Massachusetts. King was not a believer in communications through mediums but did endorse Spiritualism's "labors to reform, elevate and improve mankind" and the inspiration of Jesus to give "universal love to our brother man, without regard to clime or color." The editors asked hopefully, "Are there many of our Southern brethren who cherish so fraternal feelings? Come, let us be one brotherhood, filled with that love which prayed on the cross, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'" Former Confederates did not particularly want Yankee forgiveness. An early and frequent correspondent was Lydia H. Baker, who lived south of Dallas, Texas. She lamented the undeniable sectionalism and antagonism that divided northern and southern Spiritualists as "unworthy of us, or the philosophy we profess to teach." The editors declared progress inextricably linked to reform; this construction of Spiritualism was a high-minded version of many of the "isms" the South had long resisted, and would not win many hearts and minds in a land under martial law. Lydia Baker was born in Ohio and came to Texas with family. Her brother William had been a devoted abolitionist who sheltered runaway slaves in his barn. Lydia Baker's assertion that "The elevation of any person, or set of persons, does not require the degradation of a

great majority of other persons, not their suffering either,"[519] would have seemed maddeningly counterfactual to Sarah Morgan or Gertrude Thomas or any southerner struggling to rebuild life in a world with new but not entirely clear rules.

The few from the South who ventured north to make common cause with Spiritualists there tended to be those who had supported the Union cause. Among the delegates to the national convention of Spiritualists held in Cleveland in 1867 were Washington Danskin and Jacob Weaver of Baltimore, whose wife had died the year before. Representing Louisiana was Col. Nathan W. Daniels of the United States Army, husband of famous medium Cora Hatch and former commander of a black regiment, the Louisiana Native Guards. The delegates rubbed elbows with the venerable Andrew Jackson Davis at the convention. B. C. Murray of San Antonio was probably the only former Confederate soldier in attendance, and why he chose to go is not known. He is probably the same B. C. M. of San Antonio who wrote to the *Herald of Progress* in 1860. His interest may have combined the personal, professional and even political. Murray was a newspaperman who the previous year had married Amanda Swisher, a descendant of notable Texas pioneers and the sister-in-law of Arizona's former Confederate governor.[520]

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[519] "Gleanings from Correspondence," *Spiritual Republic* (April 20, 1867), 251; Rose Sharon Richardson, "Buttons, Bows, and Dust: Baker Mercantile, 1894–1941," Master's thesis, Texas Tech University, 1987, 16; "Voices from the People," *Spiritual Republic* (February 2, 1867), 75.

[520] "Descendants of George Weaver," http://72.14.207.104/search?q=cache:DEmE9iwFd8cJ:www.sbgenealogy.com/sudsburg/html/George%2520Weaver.html+%22Jacob+weaver%22+baltimore+md&hl=en&client=firefox-a (accessed March 22, 2007); Edwin C. Bearss and C. P. Weaver, *Thank God My Regiment an African One: The Civil War Diary of Colonel Nathan W. Daniels* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); "Fourth Annual National Convention of Spiritualists, Cleveland, Ohio, September 3-6 [1867]." Cleveland *Plain Dealer,* http://www.spirithistory.com/67cleve.html (accessed March 22, 2007); "Whisperings," *Herald of Progress* (September 22, 1860), 1; "B. C. Murray. Read before the Red River Historical Society held in Sherman, Texas December 11, 1926," http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~searchin4kin/bcmurray.html (accessed June 17, 2007).

The national conference in 1868 was held in Rochester, New York, where twenty years earlier the Fox sisters had given their first public séances. Jacob Weaver was there. Jesse B. Ferguson of Tennessee was elected a vice president, as were Emile F. Simon of Louisiana and Amanda J. Dignowity of Texas. Emile Simon had recently begun to publish *Le Salut* with an association of Spiritualists in New Orleans. Like Chicago's *Spiritual Republic,* it was "'an advocate of Spiritualism in the broadest sense,' embracing material, as well as moral and spiritual reforms, and expounding ideas and teachings of Spiritualism, and recording its progress."[521] Just as before the war, some Spiritualists coalesced around reform agendas while others did not. Those with the resources to publish newspapers in the years just after the war were people with what prior to 1861 had been deemed "northern" perspectives, so their appeal to former Confederates was limited.

Mrs. Dignowity was the former Amanda Jane McCann. She was born in Virginia, and as the eldest of a large family of girls with many servants, it had fallen to her to help care for them all. "I took a fancy for the study of medicine" she wrote, "and although women were not then allowed to practice I determined to learn something of the subject." She read under a doctor in Mississippi, then continued with others in Arkansas as her family relocated, and married Czech-born Dr. Anthony Dignowity in 1843 in Little Rock. They raised a large family in San Antonio, and Dr. Dignowity did well in his practice and in land speculation. His opposition to secession made it advisable to spend the war years elsewhere, and he worked for the government in Washington, D. C. Two sons were

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[521] "Fifth National Convention of Spiritualists, Rochester, New York, August 25-28," Rochester *Daily Union and Advertiser,* http://www.spirithistory.com/68roch.html (accessed March 22, 2007); "'Le Salut.'—Cures by Dr. Newton." *Spiritual Magazine* [London] (April 1868), 183.

drafted into the Confederate army but escaped by swimming across the Rio Grande and made their way to Washington. Mrs. Dignowity remained in Texas with her other children.[522] The Dignowitys were Catholics, and both were Spiritualists.

Among the participants in the 1869 convention in Buffalo, only Jesse Ferguson can be identified as a former Confederate. Spiritualist gatherings and publications in the early years of Reconstruction were run by northern reformers, and attended by people comfortable in their company. James Frist had been at the 1866 national convention. In 1867 James's older brother John joined him to witness Danskin's iron ring manifestation, and John attended the 1869 convention. James and John were linked by family and tragedy, both having survived an 1859 Fourth of July boating mishap in which John's wife and two of their four children drowned. The family were Methodists, but James and John sought more than Methodism could offer. With them at the convention were others, including Weaver brothers and someone new, Jane Bay. Miss Bay had lived with her unmarried brother James in Baltimore after most of the Bay family moved to Ohio. Neither was employed in 1850, though James claimed assets of $10,000. We can guess that Miss Bay began taking an interest in spiritual matters in the 1850s, and that the family might have been regarded as eccentric. The 1860 census lists James as a milliner and Jane as a physician. She might have been a medical doctor, but more likely to have been dabbling in spiritual healing or caring for James, who died in 1863. In 1869 Miss Bay was a lonely and very wealthy woman, with property valued at over $200,000. Undertaker Jacob H. Weaver was also at the 1869 convention. Weaver became the medium for messages from Miss Bay's brother James. In 1874 she wrote a will that

[522] Frank White Johnson, *A History of Texas and Texans,* Volume IV, ed. Eugene C. Barker (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1906), 2024–2028.

provided for Weaver, believing her brother in the spirit world had directed her to accept Jacob Weaver as her spiritual child. After her death, family members would contest her will, claiming her actions demonstrated she had been delusional, and a jury would agree.[523] But what happened in Buffalo or even Baltimore held little interest for most southerners, and among the many lonely and grieving women in the South there were few worth fleecing.

What may have given impetus to spiritual rapprochement between North and South was the appearance in 1868 of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's first novel, *The Gates Ajar,* which offered a comforting vision of heaven as the perfection of earthly domesticity to a grieving nation that found the consolation of traditional religion inadequate after the Civil War. Its success gave rise to a genre of novels about the afterlife, including Phelps's *Beyond the Gates* (1883) and *The Gates Between* (1887). *The Gates Ajar* was second only to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) in sales of a novel by a nineteenth-century woman. Phelps's beau had died of wounds received at Antietam, and she turned that experience into "A Sacrifice Consumed," a short story that was printed in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in January 1864. Her bereavement, and the inability of patriarchal religion to comfort her, were experiences shared by thousands of women after the Civil War. *The Gates Ajar,* with its vivid descriptions of reunions in heaven, was an immediate

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[523] William H. Frist, Shirley Wilson and William H Frist, M. D., *Good People Beget Good People: A Genealogy of the Frist Family* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 43; "Hopewell Methodist Cemetery, Port Deposit, Cecil County, Maryland," http://idreamof.com/cemetery/md/cecil/hopewell/hopewell_f.html (accessed March 14, 2007); "The first college in the world regularly organized for the education of women for the medical profession was incorporated by Act of Assembly in Pennsylvania, approved March 11, 1850, under the title of the 'Female Medical College of Pennsylvania'. . . ." Clara Marshall, *The Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston & Co., 1897), 9; "James H. Bay," www.imanfamily.net/johnktr/other_web/pedigree_Campbell/Records/II0192.html (accessed March 17, 2007); J. Shaaff Stockett, *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Court of Appeals of Maryland,* Volume LIII (Baltimore: Printed by William K. Boyle, 1881), 385

bestseller. It drew heavily on contemporary utopian and Spiritualist themes, and rankled conservative clergymen. The sequel, *Beyond the Gates*, was conceived in 1868 but not written until 1883. It depicted a heaven with supportive males and women seeking personal fulfillment.[524]

Gertrude Thomas in Georgia longed for supportive males—heavenly if not earthly—and did begin seeking personal fulfillment. After years of wondering where her father's tarnished spirit was, and telling herself that he would approve, she resolved in 1870 to try to contact him. "I have heard Pa say that if he thought he could communicate with my Grand Father or Uncle that he would meet them at any hour of the night whenever they might appoint. So too would I and the intention was formed and fully matured that I should seek out a powerful medium when I visited New York." She went with friends, and began the conversation with the medium by questioning him about his beliefs and receiving assurance "that he believed in the mediation of a Saviour" before proceeding. The medium, "either by some powerful legerdemain or witchcraft placed me in communication with my father." She also attended two Spiritualist meetings at Apollo Hall. In December, as she worried about her son Turner, her thoughts turned to her father, and "somehow I wanted Pa worse than I did God & I stretched out my arms and called him. Perhaps tonight in the land of dreams I may see him and hear counsel from him."[525]

The following April, in a meditation on the seventh anniversary of her father's death, Gertrude still "yearned to pierce the wall which divides, to catch a glimpse of Pa's

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[524] Nancy Gray Schoonmaker, "Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart [Ward] (1844–1911)," *Women in the American Civil War,* Volume I, ed. Lisa Tendrich Frank (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 438–439.

[525] *Secret Eye,* 337–339, 347.

face to hear one sound of his voice. How I have longed to do this God only knows." She took paper and pen, hoping to write. "I uttered a silent prayer that God would help me but my pen did not move." Gertrude thought too of her three children in the spirit world, and promised herself that she would read and reflect more "upon the Swedenborg or Spiritualist faith, because the little I know of that doctrine comforts me more than any other I know and confirms some ideas I have formed. . . ." William Henry Holcombe would have been distressed by her conflation of Swedenborg's teachings with Spiritualism, but Gertrude's understanding of them as of a piece was not unusual. Her interest was in reuniting her family and her belief in "God's law of progression" that promised she would have "a higher development when I leave this world." Methodism encouraged the former, and she happily incorporated progression into her belief system.[526]

In 1868 Holcombe had published a thoughtful reflection, *Our Children in Heaven,* dedicated "To Those Who Have Been Bereaved of Their Children." In the final chapter, Holcombe confronted the question of spirit communication, attempting to explain why it is forbidden, why the world of the living and the world of spirits are "so closely woven and yet so widely separated." Swedenborg was "so pure, so faithful, so capable" that his spiritual experiences were "granted especially by the Lord to illumine what was dark before, and to give a new doctrinal basis to a New Church," and the records Swedenborg left "offer us the best, the only solution of these difficulties." Acknowledging the Old Testament stories of spirits and angels communicating with men, Holcombe explained that "The secret of the possibility of such communication is to be

[526] Ibid., 368, 373.

found in the inmost harmony of thought and affection which existed between the inhabitants of both worlds at that period. The men of that age loved the Lord supremely and the neighbor as themselves." He cited Swedenborg's declaration that "sin and evil alone have closed the avenues between heaven and earth." Those in heaven who are good are progressing spiritually, and "we should not wish them to be brought back to us" because their spiritual natures would be damaged by "taking so many backward steps to be brought into rapport with us. . . ." Moreover, some in the spirit world are destined for hell, and "they have a powerful tendency to return into this world." They "attempt to take possession of us. They are anxious to communicate with us; to knock on our tables and attract our attention; to write through our hands and teach us; to compel our belief; to control out thoughts." These spirits "may be inconceivably subtle, cunning, and dangerous."[527] In New Orleans, Glendy Burke was a New Church leader who openly embraced spirit communication. Holcombe and Burke both believed themselves to be good Christians and probably good New Churchmen.

Washington Danskin and his wife Sarah were grounded in Christianity, but their Spiritualism emphasized frequent communication with the spirit world and rejection of denominational creeds. Mrs. Danskin was a figure who incorporated elements of public and private mediumship, offering her services to the public but not accepting remuneration, while her husband promoted organization and continued to write enthusiastic reports of Spiritualist activities in Baltimore, where he was president of the First Spiritualist Congregation. Danskin believed his wife was a remarkable medium, but he made it clear that she opened herself to spirits only "under the careful supervision of

[527] Wm. H. Holcombe, *Our Children in Heaven* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., New Edition 1875), 5, 183, 185, 184, 190.

my spirit-father" to prevent any impropriety. "I mean, when a spirit addicted to profanity was allowed to control all impropriety of expression was avoided, no matter how forcibly he may have given utterance to his feelings." She had no musical training, but had improvised words and music of Italian opera and played the piano under spirit influence.[528] Mrs. Danskin was not a medium for hire, but some professionals were beginning to make their way south again.

A professional Spiritualist lecturer located in Tallahassee in 1869, and a Methodist clergyman and trance speaker moved to Beaufort, North Carolina.[529] They were farther south than others had ventured, but still at the periphery. By the end of 1870, all the states of the former Confederacy had been readmitted to the Union under the strictures of what is known as Congressional or Radical Reconstruction, and the first African American was elected to the Senate from Georgia. Ku Klux Klan attacks on black Republican voters led Congress to pass the Force Acts stipulating heavy penalties for interference in voting rights.

In 1871 there were healing mediums in Atlanta and Macon, who did not stay long, and homegrown Spiritualists offering their services in Nacogdoches, Texas. The Texans were Dr. Henry C. Pierce and his wife Alice. In 1860 Pierce was a twenty-seven-year-old school teacher, and his wife was eighteen. They lived in Hallettsville, where there were four Spiritualists whose names appeared in the *Spiritual Telegraph* in the late 1850s. Although he was born in New York, Pierce served as a lieutenant in the Texas

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[528] *Reply of Wash. A. Danskin, Esq., President of the First Spiritualist Congregation of Baltimore, to Rev. Thos. E. Bond, M.D.* (Baltimore: Printed by Armiger & Talbot, 1870); *Yearbook of Spiritualism for 1871,* 218–219.

[529] "List of Spiritualist Lecturers," *Banner of Light* (August 28, 1869) http://www.spirithistory.com/69light.html, and (June 18, 1870) http://www.spirithistory.com/70light.html (accessed August 12, 2007).

Confederate Infantry; in his company was Galveston Spiritualist Ferdinand Sims. After the war the Pierces settled in Nacogdoches and he began to practice medicine. In 1872, eighteen years after the petition was laughed off the floor of Congress, he wrote to the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* in Chicago lamenting that "men of letters too often refuse" to investigate "the phenomena of our philosophy of life." While he was a firm believer in physical manifestations, he thought "Spiritualists have enough of the truth, not to stand in need of juggleries." Tricks such as the iron ring manifestations and cabinet materializations could be faked. Mrs. Pierce was a trance medium who often exhibited recognizable spirit faces, but did not use a cabinet; "the 'materialization' was upon the face of the medium." Spiritualists should welcome scrutiny, and be wary of counterfeits, "for be assured they are in circulation."[530]

James M. Peebles was a respected Spiritualist medium and lecturer. He wrote in 1871 of the hospitality of John Bowen, who had entertained Emma Hardinge so graciously in Mobile just before the war. Bowen, a wealthy Unionist, "threw open his parlor-doors" wrote Peebles, "and we had a large and enthusiastic meeting. On the whole, I am delighted with the South. The people are cordial, warm-hearted, and noble, and very *liberal* in theologies. . . ." That last observation was probably based on the very limited group of southerners Peebles met, and would not have been shared by most evangelical clergymen. Stopping in Goldsboro, North Carolina, Peebles dined with Universalist minister Hope Bain, a "firm and out-spoken Spiritualist" whose daughter Valeria was a medium. Bain was born in 1795, another Spiritualist who began life in Scotland. He had

[530] "List of media in the United States with post-office address, " *The Year-book of Spiritualism for 1871,* 234; "8th Texas Infantry, Company F," http://www.angelfire.com/tx/RandysTexas/page217.html (accessed July 16, 2007); "Science and Spiritualism," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (October 26, 1872), 2.

buried two wives and seven children by the time Peebles met him. In 1858, contemplating why his church had so few members in the South, Bain had concluded that many who belonged to other churches believed the Universalist doctrine of salvation for all but were reluctant to admit it. He also complained that most ministers in the South did not know their Bible adequately to understand its promise of universal salvation.[531] Jesse Babcock Ferguson of Nashville, in the spirit world, would have agreed.

Like Colonel Nathan Daniels, other Spiritualists in the Reconstruction-era South were not southerners. Robert B. Nelson was a corporal from Ohio with the federal forces stationed at Mobile on the 1870 census. He wrote in 1872 that "Spiritualism seems to have taken a deeper hold on the hearts of the people here than in any other part of the South" but did not explain *which* people in Mobile were Spiritualists. He did say that the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* sold out at news dealers within a day of its arrival, and that he never heard of a public medium or Spiritualist lecturer coming to Mobile. When John Bowen threw open his parlors in 1871 so friends could hear Reverend Peebles, Private Nelson had not been included. Nor did he know that Annie C. Torrey of Texas had visited Mobile in 1870 and found "many true friends." She was invited to return in 1872, and remained there for a time "lecturing friends" in the studio of artist and former Texas resident H. A. Tatum, and then at the solicitation of another Texas friend went to Atlanta.[532]

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[531] Joseph Osgood Barrett, *The Spiritual Pilgrim: A Biography of James M. Peebles* (Boston: Colby and Rich, Publishers, 1878), 302; *Mind of the Master Class,* 606, 471.

[532] "Letter from R. P. Nelson," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (March 2, 1872), 6; "A Medium's History," *The Spiritual Magazine* (January 1875), 73–74.

The organizations functioning in Baltimore, St. Louis and New Orleans never achieved the same strength they had before the war but did have dedicated supporters. Many of the same names appear on lists of local officers and rosters of national Spiritualist convention attendees. One new name at the 1871 convention in Troy was Levi Dinkelspiel of Louisville. Born in Bavaria, by 1870 he was a young retail boot and shoe merchant who had accumulated $1,200. Dinkelspiels had been among the incorporators of that city's Adas Israel congregation in 1842, and the first regular rabbi was a Dinkelspiel.[533] The same angels Christian Spiritualists cited were also a part of Jewish tradition. There were relatively few Jewish adherents of Spiritualism in all of the nineteenth-century South, but the appeal of spirit communication did transcend the limits of all organized religion.

In 1871, medium Jennie Ferris went to Memphis after a successful stay in New Orleans. A testimonial to her "uniform consistency of character and lady-like deportment during her sojourn with us" was forwarded to Chicago's *Religio-Philosophical Journal* by merchant James D. Slack, Dr. Daniel Reed and cotton merchant James Holmes. Reed cannot be identified. Holmes was born in England and seems to have come to Memphis after 1870. Other Memphis believers included Slack's sister Mary and her husband, General William J. Smith. The Slacks were natives of New Brunswick. Smith was born in England, settled in Memphis after serving under General Winfield Scott in the Mexican War and was himself a Union general at the beginning of the Civil War. [534] So

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[533] *JewishEncyclopedia.com,* s. v. "Kentucky," http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=178&letter=K (accessed July 29, 2007).

[534] "Gen. William J. Smith," *Goodspeed's History of Hamilton, Knox, and Shelby Counties of Tennessee* (Nashville, Tenn.: C. and R. Elder Booksellers, 1887), 1041–1042.

far, those who were publicly involved in Spiritualism in Memphis were not defeated southerners, but this would change after Samuel Watson published a book about Spiritualism in 1872.

The Southern Methodist emphasis on Scripture made Methodists such as Samuel Watson and Robert Bigham receptive to the sort of otherworldly communications depicted in the Bible, especially the ones in the stories of Christ and his Apostles. Robert W. Bigham "came of good old Georgia stock, and was molded by Georgia Methodism when it was at the height of its militancy and fervor." Bigham entered the Methodist ministry as "a beardless boy" and died "in connection with the Conference" more than fifty years later. Bishop Oscar Penn Fitzgerald described him as without fear and without guile, a man who "lived a life and preached a gospel that made many to see the beauty of divine truth and to follow Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life." When he died, the memorial in the Minutes of the Conference was long and laudatory; it did not mention that he was a Spiritualist. The story of his first spirit communion appeared in the Newnan, Georgia *Herald* in 1872 and was reprinted in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal.* When Rev. Bigham's wife died, he was prostrated by the loss. "Suddenly, however, the heart-stricken man seemed to throw off the great burden of grief, and assumed an aspect of reassurance curious to behold. His closed windows were thrown open, he went forth upon his pastoral duties serenely as of yore" to the astonishment of his parishioners, for his anguish had been so profound he verged on madness, and his recovery so sudden it defied the usual resources of Christian faith. People began to speculate, and Bigham felt it was his duty to tell the congregation how he had been comforted. One Sunday he announced from the pulpit that his subject would be supernatural visitations, and

proceeded to declare his belief in the "ministrations of spirits from the dead to the living, even as many passages of Holy Writ describe." Bigham told of two times "God had permitted his sainted wife to reappear to him bodily." Her first visit was to assure him she was happy and watched over him lovingly. A second time, "preceded by heavenly music, she had come to him in her mortal semblance, and he had conversed with her as in life." He told his flock he would "as soon doubt my own existence as the truth and reality of what I have told you."[535] There seems to be no record of the Methodist hierarchy taking Bigham to task, nor of any sort of backlash from within the congregation such as Jesse Ferguson had experienced in Nashville. Perhaps it was because Bigham never wrote about his experiences for publication or worked publicly as an advocate of Spiritualism that he avoided confrontation, and perhaps this Methodist flock was more accepting of the idea that God permits spirits to minister to the living than Ferguson's Campbellites. Bigham managed to talk about his experiences without repercussions because he handled them as a matter important enough to be shared with his flock but not the most vital part of his Christian faith. Bigham's life-altering spirit visits helped him get on with his life, to resume his ministry. Having once discussed spirit intercourse publicly, he apparently did not do so again.

Reverend Samuel Watson of Memphis, also a Southern Methodist, was heading for confrontation. Watson was a popular minister with a large congregation, and publishing books avowing his belief in spirit communication made him a high-profile

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[535] George G. Smith, *The History of Georgia Methodism from 1786 to 1866* (Atlanta, Ga.: A. B. Caldwell, Publisher, 1913), 246; *Sunset Views in Three Parts*, 155, 94; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for the Year 1898* (Nashville, Tenn.: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1898), 132–134; "A Saintly Spirit," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (October 5, 1872), 1.

heretic. In 1872 his first book, *The Clock Struck One, and Christian Spiritualist Being a Synopsis of the Investigations of Spirit Intercourse by an Episcopal Bishop, Three Ministers, Five Doctors, and Others, at Memphis, Tenn., in 1855,* told how he had become a Spiritualist and, as Jesse Babcock Ferguson in Nashville had done almost two decades earlier, Watson began naming names. Southern Methodism's strict adherence to Scripture left it unprepared to deal with members like Samuel Watson who found evidence there of angelic and spiritual interaction with earthly beings and used it to support their own Spiritualism. The next two chapters will tell Samuel Watson's story.

After Jennie Ferris proved Memphis was safe and profitable, it became a regular stop for professional mediums. A long letter about their visits appeared in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* in February 1872. The writer, in Memphis on business, had heard Moses Hull lecture on "our beautiful harmonial philosophy," and described the Memphis Spiritualists as numerous and outspoken. He noted that Rev. J. M. Peebles had been there recently, and that Mrs. Hollis had visited for a few weeks, "giving very satisfactory tests in independent writing, and spirits speaking in audible voice to their friends in her dark séances," but he regretted Moses Hull's statements about physical medium Charles H. Read. Hull rose to speak before a crowd and noted Read's arrival; he advised his audience to go and see Read, "but observed that individually he took no stock in Read" and later suggested they "go with their eyes open, as some mediums would cheat, and he believed Mr. Read would cheat if he could."[536] The writer thought it a shabby way to treat a brother Spiritualist, but Hull's actions suggest that he saw Read as likely to be exposed and did not want to be associated with him.

[536] "Items from Tennessee," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (February 17, 1872), 1. The writer, Thomas P. Wilson, was probably a homeopathic physician from Cincinnati.

There were many Spiritualists in the New Orleans, and Dr. J. W. Allen was president of the Spiritualist society. Allen had been an active Spiritualist since at least 1854. Other officers were publisher Emile Simon and healing medium James Wingard. There is no indication that Allen, Simon or Wingard ever had Confederate sympathies, and the organized Spiritualists of New Orleans welcomed Spiritualist mediums and lecturers. Allen hosted séances by escape artist Charles Read, who performed the steel ring trick. A witness gave an enthusiastic account to the *Religio-Philosophical Journal.* The medium was securely tied to a chair and examined by a committee that pronounced him unable to move. His wrists were secured and to ensure that he could not use his hands he clenched handfuls of rice. Nearby on a stand were the objects the spirits were to maneuver through his mediumship: "two solid steel rings, three-linked ropes, guitar, bells, &c." The room was made dark and "the manifestations all occurred in the incredulous short space of two or three seconds, while the light was out, it being quickly re-lighted, and the knots thoroughly examined." The light must have been extinguished and relit repeatedly, for "The chair, rings, and ropes passed on and off his arms, on to his head and back to the table. The instruments floated in the air; his coat was taken off; rings put on his fingers; the table lifted to his head, and many other startling performances—all occurring while he was securely tied." [537]

What throngs of otherwise reasonable men and women attributed to spirit power, those with a greater knowledge of the workings of contortionists and illusionists would

[537] "Harmonial Spiritualists," *Christian Spiritualist* (May 13, 1854), 4; Hudson Tuttle and J. M. Peebles, *The Year-book of Spiritualism for 1871*, http://www.spirithistory.com/71yrbook.html (accessed September 16, 2007); "That Mysterious Man—Charles H. Read," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (May 4, 1872), 4.

put down to skill and dexterity under cover of darkness. Many doubted the agency of spirits, but still could not explain how it was done.

The Spiritualists on the traveling circuit were a mixed lot. Reverend James Peebles was a gifted and winning speaker, a believer in Jesus Christ and spiritual gifts. Peebles lectured for two months at New Orleans in early 1872, eliciting formal resolutions of thanks from a committee of local Spiritualists consisting of Captain John Grant, Dr. J. W. Allen, Spencer Field and M. F. Hyer. Dr. Allen we have met, and Mrs. Hyer when she signed the 1854 petition and became a traveling medium. Spencer Field, born in Massachusetts, was a wealthy coal merchant who in 1860 had owned three slaves. Captain John Grant had emerged as a leader among Spiritualists from New Orleans to Mobile. Born in Pennsylvania in 1796 and raised in Baltimore, Grant was an engineer. After building and operating a dredge in Baltimore harbor, he moved to Mobile in 1827 to construct a dredge for the federal government. He began building the Ponchartrain Railroad under contract in 1830, and upon its completion was offered the position of superintendent. In 1839 he opened a shipping channel, called Grant's Pass, from Mobile Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. Elizabeth Lyle Saxon had met him in 1863, and called him "one of the remarkable men of the times." By 1860, he gave his occupation for the census as Gentleman. He and his wife Elizabeth had buried three adult children before her death in 1868.[538] We do not know when he turned to Spiritualism, but he would inevitably have

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[538] *The Spiritual Pilgrim*, 266; "Elizabeth Disney Grant," http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=28227729 (accessed August 18, 2009). This site includes a photograph of the headstone shared by John Grant and his wife, from which the information was taken; "Capt John Grant," http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=28227297 (accessed August 18, 2009); Source for information is New Orleans *Picayune;* http://lrs.railspot.com/pontchartrain/p_pont.htm (accessed November 2, 2007): "This article on the Ponchartrain Railroad is from the October 1928 issue of the Louisville & Nashville Employes' Magazine. The article was provided by Jerry Lachaussee, a life-long employee of the L&N and its successors; and is reproduced *here with the permission of the L&N*

met and worked with other internal improvers over the years who were Spiritualists, and he devoted much of his energy in his last years to the cause.

Peebles was effusive after his visit to New Orleans, and some might have thought him delusional. "The interest was electric. The Southern heart is exceedingly genial. Freed now from the incubus of oppression, the Caucasian and sable races, under the domain of the same 'stars and stripes,' are greeting this morning of a new day with hallelujahs that find tongues in the very waves of the great Gulf."[539]

Without organizations or visits from professionals, Spiritualists in more isolated southern locations continued to rely on the Spiritualist press. Orpheus S. Poston of Harrodsburg, Kentucky had written to Andrew Jackson Davis in 1860, thanking him for an article on breathing that appeared in the *Herald of Progress.* Poston, an attorney, also lectured on temperance and health reform and as a younger man had supported the American Colonization Society. In 1872, Poston sent a tale of prophetic dreams. About 1870, a Kentucky doctor and his wife, members of the Christian Church, both dreamed one night of a relative in the spirit world who said he had come for their daughter Florence. The child died of diphtheria, and with her last breath said to her spirit uncle, "If you have come for me, let me see Ma first," then turned and extended her hand to her mother and died. Although the fact that diphtheria was prevalent in the neighborhood could explain their frightened dreams, the parents confided in Poston that the child had

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Collection, University of Louisville Archives; Louisville, Kentucky."; Historic Mobile: An Illustrated Guide (Mobile, Ala.: Mobile Junior League Publications, 1974), 84; *Southern Woman's War Time Reminiscences*, 27; "Capt John Grant," http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=28227297 (accessed August 18, 2009). A historic marker says of Grant: "Built first RR in old S. W. 1831. Invented passing track & raised platform. Dredged "Grant's Pass" & E. branch Pascagoula R. Legislator in Miss., Ala. & La voting for Ala. charter to N. O. & M. (L & N) 1866."

[539] *Spiritual Pilgrim*, 301.

spoken to her spirit uncle. Poston interpreted this episode as proof that children as well as adults could see spirits as they neared dissolution. D. J. Dingman was a thirty-two-year-old telegraph operator in Louisville when he wrote about his brother's son in Clarksville, Tennessee. Bennie, a perfectly healthy boy, had become a medium and seen and spoken with an apparition several times. Bennie had never met the spirit in life, but gave a description that identified the wraith as a boy who had died after falling on an open knife while running down a hill. The phenomenon had made a Spiritualist of Bennie's father. Lydia H. Baker of Texas shared a story in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* about the McComas family after reading a recent article on animal mediumship by Robert Dale Owen. In her early years as a writing medium, Baker had gone to stay with a brother and created "a little stir among the people on that subject." Mrs. McComas, a neighbor, was naturally spiritualistic, but her husband resisted "upon the supposition it opposed the Bible." Nonetheless, she and her oldest daughter became mediums and sat in circles with Baker. John McComas became a believer when his horse spoke to him, rebuking McComas for "keeping it tied up all day without food." The experience, Baker concluded, "convinced him of the truth of Spiritualism beyond a question." By the time she became a Spiritualist, Lydia Baker had five sisters in the spirit world.[540] She was an unmarried seamstress in 1870. John McComas, a farmer, and his wife Missouri had come

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[540] "Whisperings," *Herald of Progress* (October 13, 1860), 1; *The Progressive Annual for 1862; Comprising an Almanac, a Spiritualist Register, and a General Calendar of Reform; Published at the Office of "the Herald of Progress."* New York: A. J. Davis & Co.. http://www.spirithistory.com/62annual.html (accessed July 22, 2006). He also was listed in 1863 and 1864; *The African Repository, and Colonial Journal,* Vol. 24 (Washington: C. Alexander, Printer, 1848), 32; O. S. Poston, "Dying Child's Experience," in J. R. Francis, *The Encyclopedia of Death and Life in the Spirit World: Opinions from Eminent Sources,* Volume III (Chicago: The Progressive Thinker Publishing House, 1900), 151; "Extraordinary Manifestation," *Religio-Spiritual Journal* (June 1, 1872), 1; "Balaam's Ass Excelled," *Religio-Spiritual Journal* (March 30, 1872), 6; "Abigail Clapp," http://awt.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=REG&db=riceedmund&id=I1670&ti=4317 (accessed May 25, 2009).

to Texas with extended family by about 1850. For some people in the post-war South, Spiritualism had become the default explanation for prophetic dreams, ghostly visitors and even, in one instance, talking animals.

People like Poston and Dingman and Baker found few fellow Spiritualists and relied heavily on the Spiritualist press, and publications such as books and newspapers are the richest source for southern Spiritualist activity after the war. Evidence is also found in the unpublished papers of three families whose records are in archival collections, by individuals whose interest can be documented as dating from the 1850s or earlier. They are Godfrey Barnsley, Sarah Norton Chilton and Sarah Morgan Dawson. None of them wished their belief in Spiritualism to be a matter of public record.

Godfrey Barnsley, like fellow southerners Sarah Morgan Dawson and Sarah Norton Chilton, maintained an interest in Spiritualism that spanned several decades. Barnsley had been a staunch supporter of the Confederacy, and his sons George and Lucian had served in the Confederate army. The Barnsleys were among the earliest southerners to leave records of serious post-war interest in Spiritualism. In 1866, George was corresponding with Mrs. E. V. Berrien, an old family friend. One of the things on their minds was emigration, and George and Lucien would eventually become part of a Confederate expatriate colony in Brazil. George had been a writing medium, with "Unknown" as his controlling spirit. Mrs. Berrien asked, "Do you ever *write* now?" She wanted him to ask Unknown about emigration, hers especially.[541] George had been thinking his own thoughts as he recovered from a broken leg.

[541] E. V. Berrien, Perry–Jan 17th [1866] to George Barnsley; George Barnsley Papers, SHC.

"I was certainly astonished," wrote his father in March 1866, "to learn that you had accepted the creed of Swedenborg." The Episcopalian Godfrey Barnsley had been doing some theological reconsidering as well. "I do not believe that the scriptures have any double meaning nor in their divine origin beyond good being influenced to write them," he claimed. "I believe all that occurs has been foreseen by the Creator and that Christ and many other good men have come into the world to be guides and teachers of mankind, but I do not believe in the blood of Christ being atonement for our sins. We should all judge for ourselves & seek *the truth.*" In a postscript, he asked, "Do you receive any 'communications' now? Mrs. Berrien was supportive of George's new faith, though she knew little about Swedenborg besides his belief in the possibility of intercourse between the visible and invisible worlds. "I cannot see why such a belief should affect the doctrine of the Christian religion as all the clergy say it does–Oh I do so crave to believe, to feel sure, there is a link between me and the loved and parted–that they are near me–that they do strive to make me aware of it." Her next letter expressed her perplexity at George's disavowal of spirit communion, not understanding that as a New Churchman he might believe it was forbidden to him. "[W]as all you have written, all I have pondered so deeply, so solemnly, over, only the emanations of your own brain?" she asked incredulously. "[D]o write me fully about this–it would seem passing strange that your fathers clear mental eye–discerning judgement–calm and sound views of the things of life–should be so entirely at fault as to believe in what is only an illusion as unreal as a mirage in the desert." George, like his father, could not long avoid communicating with spirits. In December, Godfrey wrote to him about a communication he received from George and Lucien's brother Harold, who had died in Asia in the 1850s.

"In one of your letters you said Harold had been with you–I hope your have preserved some of your comms and will send them as what leisure I have is often occupied with the subject." Barnsley was getting messages as a writing medium. "I can distinctly trace your mother's comms–they all lay great stress on the *Love* of God and in that consists the happiness of the next life and this." He wrote the same day to Lucien about their plans to go to Brazil, saying sadly, "I sincerely hope you will carry out your good resolutions and that "life's fitful fever o'er" we may all meet and be welcomed to that home your mother has prepared for us–it is hardly to be expected we shall meet again on earth**[.]**" He also asked that Lucien and George destroy his letters, "as I do not wish them to get into other hands for reasons which must be obvious to you in a business point of view."[542]

An 1870 letter from Godfrey Barnsley to George let him know that Mrs. Berrien had become a subscriber to the *Banner of Light.* Another conveyed current events and complaints about political corruption and waste. That December, he finally had an opportunity to see a cabinet performance by the Davenport brothers in New Orleans. He described the manifestations at length, and was duly impressed by the experience.[543]

Barnsley was feeling old and tired in April 1872, but had been to a séance for physical manifestations. He was sending his copies of the *Banner of Light* on to George and Lucien in Brazil. In March 1873 he wrote to Lucien, complaining that he did not write often enough and sending him four copies of the *Banner.* Godfrey Barnsley died in

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[542] Godfrey Barnsley, N. Orleans 11th Dec 1866 to Dr. George S. Barnsley, George Barnsley Papers, SHC; N. Orleans 21st March 1866 Godfrey W. Barnsley to George S. Barnsley, Ibid.; Mrs Berrien, Perry–Houstoun Co–April 1st [1866] to George S. Barnsley, Ibid.; Mrs Berrien, Perry–Houstoun Co–29 May [1866] to George S. Barnsley, Ibid.

[543] New Orleans 11th May 1870 Godfrey W. Barnsley to George S. Barnsley, Ibid.; Godfrey W. Barnsley at Woodlands 14th Sept 1870 to George S. Barnsley, Ibid.; Godfrey W. Barnsley in New Orleans to George S. Barnsley, 13 Dec 1870, Ibid.

New Orleans on June 7, 1873 and is buried at Woodlands.[544] Until the end, and despite endless debunkings and all the unpleasantness of some of his experiences with spirits before the war, Barnsley believed in spirit communion and that his family would one day be reunited in the eternal home where his beloved Julia awaited them.

Sarah Morgan was another southerner who could not resist the desire to peek behind the veil before being reunited for eternity with her lost loved ones. She had tried to distance herself from the idea of communicating with spirits when one of the family slaves gossiped about Sarah's visits to the graveyard to summon the spirits, but the irrepressible yearning to *know* was a part of her nature. Sarah acknowledged that the Bible prohibited any dealings with familiar spirits, but nonetheless believed that her life had been mapped out for her, "in some manner, certainly not by evil-seeking on my part," since 1869 when a woman in Memphis told her about the man she would marry. Sarah met him three years later.[545]

Francis Warrington Dawson fell hard for Sarah Morgan. She and her mother were living with Sarah's youngest brother Jimmy on the South Carolina plantation he had purchased from Wade Hampton, and Jimmy's friend Frank Dawson was the editor of the Charleston *Courier.* Between visits, Dawson courted Sarah with letters. One night in early 1873, as he sat balancing his books, his thoughts turned to Sarah. "Instantly I became filled with your presence; your voice was in my ears, I could see your face, it seems that you were around & above me," he wrote. "I felt you must be thinking of me;

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[544] Godfrey W. Barnsley in N. Orleans 14th April 1872 to George S. Barnsley, Ibid.; Godfrey W. Barnsley letter from N. Orleans 14th March 1873 to Lucian, Ibid.; Godfrey W. Barnsley in N. Orleans 14th April 1872 letter to George S. Barnsley, Ibid.

[545] "The Narrative of Sarah Morgan Dawson, Book No. 2." unpublished writings by Sarah Morgan Dawson, Box 73, Dawson Papers, Duke.

perhaps, praying for me. It was so sweet a thought, & for an hour or more, while the spell was upon me, I was perfectly happy." Dawson was not a Spiritualist, and in fact heartily disapproved of it, but even he was caught up in the romantic idea of embodied minds somehow connecting with each other. "Was it chance," he asked, "or was it as I believe? I ought to stop now, but I am so near you in spirit that I could keep on forever."[546]

Sarah, on the other hand, had since childhood mingled folk beliefs with common sense and Christianity. She described an "All Hallow E'en" in New Orleans with her sister Miriam and two friends, probably in the late 1840s when as children they lived on Camp Street. They "tried all the formulas prescribed for unhallowed witchcraft—including the throwing of apple peelings which were to give the initials of our future lords." Rigorously Episcopalian, the Morgans no doubt arose the next morning and piously observed All Saints' Day. Before the war Sarah dabbled in social séances and made note of the predictions of fortune tellers, and during the war began to think more seriously about where her dead loved ones actually were and if they were aware of all she thought and did. After she married and settled in Charleston, Sarah often spent time with Marie Chazal Patrick, daughter of a Charleston physician and granddaughter of refugees from Haiti. Marie Patrick told fortunes by reading cards. Both Mrs. Patrick and teenage Celia Brux had foreseen impending tragedy for Sarah in early 1889. Miss Brux had told Sarah in January that "the next eighteen months of my life were to be of unbroken sorrow—sorrow that would never leave me, though the darkness would lighten and I would learn to enjoy life and enter into a certain peace," and Marie Patrick had agreed, predicting in February "a great upheaval is about to take place" and that Sarah would be

[546] Letter, Francis Warrington Dawson to Sarah Morgan, Box 1; Letters, 1873 Jan–June, Dawson Papers, Duke.

alone and impoverished and ultimately forced to leave Charleston.[547] Two weeks later Frank Dawson was shot and killed by a neighbor. For the rest of her life Sarah would continue to consult mediums and fortune tellers.

Sarah Norton Chilton was living in Clinton, Mississippi in 1875. The Chiltons had been exposed to Spiritualism since they lived in New Orleans in the 1850s, and in a later letter Mrs. Chilton mentioned having consulted a medium there. During the war Sarah's sisters and her mother had talked of Spiritualism with diarist Julia Le Grand and her sister Virginia. They had all followed Sarah to her Clinton plantation to get out of occupied New Orleans, but there is no record of what they discussed in wartime Mississippi. Ten years after the war ended, spirit communion was very much on Sarah's mind. Her son Charlie had been shot and killed in his yard in the presence of his family by blacks after a handful of whites triggered a riot at a large Republican rally during the 1875 election season. Charlie died in the arms of his brother John, a known Republican. "It was only a mere chance that prevented the massacre of my entire family," Sarah reflected. [548]

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[547] "The Narrative of Sarah Morgan Dawson, Book No. 2."

[548] Historian Paul Harvey claimed Charles Chilton was "killed while defending the ballot box from potential black voters," but no contemporary accounts support that assertion. See Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 22. See also, "The Mississippi Riots. General Slaughter of Negroes," *The New York Times* (September 8, 1875), 5; J. S. McNeilly, "Climax and Collapse of Reconstruction in Mississippi, 1874–1876," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society,* Volume XII (University, Miss.: Printed for the Society, 1912), 385–386; Mississippi in 1875: *Report of the Select Committee to Inquire into the Mississippi Election of 1875, with the Testimony and Documentary Evidence, in Two Volumes,* Volume I (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1876), lxvi; *The Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States, for the Second Session of the Forty-fourth Congress* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), 51–52, 741; Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, Clinton, September 17, 1875, to My Dear Luly [Louisa Norton Brown], Series 1 folder 11 1875, Norton, Chilton, Dameron papers, SHC; *Report of the Select Committee to Inquire into the Mississippi Election of 1875, with the Testimony and Documentary Evidence, in Two Volumes,* Volume I (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1876), 322.

Sarah wrote to her sister Louisa Brown that Charlie had said "that if it were possible he would come back to us." The first time Sarah thought Charlie's spirit might have come, she marveled that "such a strange thing happened to me just now. A beautiful little bird flew into my room, circled around my head, touched me with its wings upon my cheek, and flew out again. I have looked all around there is no nest any where near my room. Could that bird have been my sweet Charlie come back again!" Any comforting thought was a relief, and unusual. She was not sleeping much and had no appetite, and her grief was compounded by the pervasive rumors of impending attack by blacks armed by the governor and her fear of losing another of her sons to the pre-election violence. "They say that not one white person shall be left to tell the tale," a friend had told her. White women stayed inside with doors and windows locked and kept loaded guns at the ready. Charlie's widow was great with child. Mrs. Chilton become a writing medium.[549]

Charlie's spirit, she told Louisa, came at the same time every day; she asked him questions, then wrote his answers. "His style of talking is very familiar and I always feel calm and even happy whilst those interviews last." Even though they could discuss Spiritualism freely between themselves, others were not receptive. "Don't talk about it to any one," she cautioned her sister Louise, "You know the suspicion and the odium attached to these things by nearly everyone." Sarah was happy to learn that Louisa found comfort in the communications from Charlie, and she herself felt "infinitely comforted." The chatty messages from Charlie that flowed through her arm answered her questions

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[549] Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, Clinton, September 17, 1875, to My Dear Luly [Louisa Norton Brown]; Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, October 5, 1875, to My Dear Luly; Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, Jackson, October 24, 1875, to My Dear Loly [Louisa Norton Brown], Series 1 folder 11 1875, Norton, Chilton, Dameron papers, SHC.

about her loved ones in the spirit world and what their lives were like there. Then other spirits began to come: a brother-in-law who had died the year before, a nephew, Sarah's father. Her father's spirit was in "the heaven of heavens" and had "seen Jesus our Savior," but had not seen God. He could also give word of all her spirit children, Minnie, Major, Lake, Sarah and Charlie. "This thing of being a medium is governed by certain laws–It is a science, it is not a miracle, and people by practice will discover these laws after a while," she predicted." The great frustration was that her communications required perfect quiet and privacy and a calm mind, hard to come by in a house with children and servants and in a country "in such an excited condition" that she had "been nearly dead for weeks with anxiety and fright." Sarah apologized to her sister for being unable to get answers to other people's questions for them.[550] She had predicted things before they came to pass but was not a test medium, and what followed demonstrates how familiar the sisters were with mediumistic activity in New Orleans.

Mrs. Chilton explained that the well-known medium Madame Caprell was a seeing medium. She probably did not know that Mark Twain had visited Madame Caprell in 1861, and described the clairvoyant as "a right smart little woman." Caprell had predicted that his brother would receive a government appointment, and indeed he did. Mrs. Chilton had consulted a Mrs. Seward, "something of a test medium," who gave her "the most startling tests of her powers." In discussing a planned trip to New Orleans, Mrs. Chilton said she would go to see Mrs. [Elizabeth Lyle] Saxon for "help to develop my

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[550] Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, Jackson, October 24, 1875, to My Dear Loly [Louisa Norton Brown]; Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, Jackson, October 31, 1875, to Mrs. L. N. Brown, New Orleans; Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, Jackson, October 31, 1875, to Mrs. L. N. Brown, New Orleans, Series 1 folder 11 1875, Norton, Chilton, Dameron papers, SHC.

powers–or perhaps she herself can give me even more satisfaction than I now feel." In another letter she thought of seeking out Mr. Folger, who "has been a medium for years." She and Folger had both been visitors at Mrs. Seward's.[551]

Sarah Chilton cited several specific instances, attributing them to spirit influence, in which she had been given accurate predictions of events to come. She also reported being visited by the spirit of Julia Le Grand's sister Virginia two weeks before learning of her death. But the busy household afforded little quiet and solitude and she did not "wish to attract attention. How crazy people would call me if they could see these letters or hear me talk- but if lunacy gives peace why desire that sanity which knows no balm except desperation." In retrospect, she found harbingers of Charlie's death. In one, the wife of a nephew had foretold "great troubles" between blacks and whites in Mississippi. "She said she had seen it in a dream of the previous night, and that one in my family was to be taken by it who would cause universal sadness. I thought of her prediction thousands of times."[552]

Mrs. Chilton understood that her role as a medium was to receive messages of comfort for those still on earth, but after a while it occurred to her to ask about future punishment. Her strict Methodist upbringing would have left no doubt as to the answer, but she would probably also have been aware of Samuel Watson's books and the *Spiritual Magazine* he had been publishing for almost a year. The answer to her question

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[551] Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, nd: November 1875?, to My Dear Loly, Ibid; Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain: A Biography; The Personal and Literary Life of Samuel Langhorne Clemens,* Volumes I & II (New York & London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1912), 156–159; Mrs. Saxon was first published in Samuel Watson's *Spiritual Magazine* in May 1875. It was a poem called "Ministering Angels," 165; Addendum to letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, nd: December 16, 1875?, to My Dear Loly [Louisa Norton Brown], Series 1 folder 11 1875, Norton, Chilton, Dameron papers, SHC.

[552] Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, November 18, 1875, to My Dear Loly, Ibid..

sounds very much like the spirit Mystery's explanation of hell embraced by Watson. A spirit told her that "as far as my knowledge goes there is no punishment except regrets and sorrow for neglected chances and misapplied talents." She began to receive communications from people outside the family, even some she had never met. The early Methodist theologian Adam Clarke came, professing "an interest in you and in your mission. This is a cause which if it succeed will have the effect of reconciling 'man to God.'" There is no evidence that Mrs. Chilton followed the career of Samuel Watson, but Watson wrote frequently of Adam Clarke's belief in spirit agency. Sarah explained to Louisa that as a medium she could not seek out spirits; her power was "simply that of sympathy" which explained why Adam Clarke had come to her. They were both concerned with " the fate of the eternal soul–He told me that I must make up my mind to be treated with 'doubt and scorn'. . . ." Louisa, too, began to receive communications from Charlie before the trail in the archives grows cold. Sarah and Louisa had two living sisters, Sydney Harrison and Courtenay Dameron. By 1880, only Louisa was not a widow, and Sydney, Courtney and their younger children had moved into Browns' home on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans. The Damerons had not approved during the war and were apparently still unreceptive to Spiritualism; life with them in the household would not have been conducive to spirit communion. Sarah Norton Chilton was also in New Orleans in 1880, living with a daughter and her husband, so there was no need for Sarah and Louisa to write letters. There is no further record of Sarah's mediumship, or of Louisa's, but the family papers do contain some fascinating jottings made by Sarah. Speaking of her mother and her Scottish heritage, she described "an old tradition among the Scotch–That if young women, on the first day of May hold a looking glass over a well

which has water in it and look in the well just where the glass is reflected, the person may see the likeness of the man they are to marry." When her mother did this with friends in 1810, she described a man sitting at a table with writing materials. The next year, a young man who had recently moved to the area visited her family and when he left, she told her sister it was the man she had seen in the well, but he was so ugly she would never marry him. But she did marry him, on St. Valentine's day in 1812. "My mother, Mary P. Terrel, who married Charles Mynn Norton," Sarah wrote, "was born with a caul over her face–and also her daughter Sarah Norton Chilton." Being born with a fragment of the amniotic membrane over the face—a caul—was thought at least as far back as the Dark Ages to be associated with strong magic or good fortune.[553] In Sarah's case, she probably thought it predisposed her to foretell the future and communicate with spirits. For her, though, as for Sarah Morgan Dawson, Godfrey Barnsley and their like-minded family and friends, one's belief in Spiritualism was not something safely shared with those outside the family circle.

Publicly, interest in Spiritualism seems to have begun to enjoy a resurgence as post-war lives returned to a semblance of normalcy and the pain of wartime sacrifice receded, which happened more quickly in the North. Hoping to make Chicago a destination for spiritual seekers, the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* announced in 1872 that it was opening new spirit rooms to be presided over by mediums Maud Lord Drake and Bertha Jorgensen. The Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge had done

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[553] Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, Clifton, December 2, 1875, to My Dear Laly, Ibid; *Journal of Julia Le Grand,*, 135; Letter, Sarah Norton Chilton, November 18, 1875, to My Dear Loly [Louisa Norton Brown], Series 1 folder 11 1875, Norton, Chilton, Dameron papers, SHC; Notes by Sarah Norton Chilton, Series 3 folder 27, Norton, Chilton, Dameron papers, SHC; *The Manner Born: Birth Rites in Cross-Cultural Perspective,* Ed. Lauren Dundes (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2003), 119.

this almost twenty years earlier in New York, but the Chicago venture was not so well capitalized and there would be a moderate charge for the mediums' services. The *Journal* also advertised that "Individuals from the country, coming here to investigate the Phenomena of Spiritualism, will be accommodated with Board by the Day or Week, at Reasonable Rates."[554]

A scattering of northern mediums continued to make forays into the South. The same issue that advertised Chicago as a Spiritualist mecca featured a letter from Monroe, Louisiana, where Dr. R. R. Roberts of Pennsylvania had "succeeded in awakening much interest in the Philosophy of Life, among the higher classes" there. Two months later, the paper ran Roberts's article on "Somnambulism, Animal Magnetism, Psychology, Spiritism and Spiritology," sent from the town of Minden and arguing against the fashionable practice of ascribing "uncommon phenomena either to electricity, molecular motion, or the Devil." Roberts was a restless man. A practicing physician in San Francisco in 1870, that autumn he had visited Utah offering his services as a magnetic physician to "Heal the Sick by Animal Magnetism and the Swedish Movement Cure." With Roberts in Utah was Dr. Goss, Indian Herb Doctor, "prescribing Herb Remedies in those cases that require Medication" to supplement the treatments Robert provided. The Swedish Movement Cure was a massage technique popularized in an 1860 book from the New York press of phrenologists Fowler and Wells. The year 1875 would find Roberts in Auburn, New York devising his "Patent Turkish Hot-Air Vapor Baths," to "cure all diseases usually cured at the Hot Springs of Saratoga, and by 1880 he would be

[554] "New Spirit Rooms," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (June 8, 1872), 8.

practicing medicine in New Orleans, married to a professional clairvoyant.[555] Roberts's travels in the small-town South were unusual. Most reported activity in the South before 1872 was in large cities on the Gulf or the Mississippi river.

Atlanta became the first inland southern city to support an organization of "advocates of the beautiful teachings of the Harmonial Philosophy" and regularly host professional Spiritualists. Dr. F. F. Taber wrote enthusiastically in the spring of 1872 of a recent visit from Mrs. Charles Rice of New Orleans, who gave physical manifestations of a variety of spirit characters. "Richard Le Rougin, Bell, Irish Ann, and last though not least, Rosa, the merry little Indian girl who controls her, will ever be remembered by those who witnessed her manifestations with interest and pleasure." Col. Samuel D. Hay was there, developing mediums and "doing great good" as a lecturer. It was Hay who induced Annie C. Torrey to come to Atlanta after visiting Mobile in 1872.[556]

Though they had previously been hostile or dismissive towards Spiritualists, the Atlanta daily papers covered Mrs. Torrey's trance lectures as "something new " and "singularly forcible and expressive," while describing her as "a typical Southern woman." Her first lecture "inveighed strongly against the shams and follies of the church" and described God as "a living omnipresence of love and truth." Her next

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[555] Advertisement for Dr. Roberts, the Great Magnetic Physician, *Deseret Evening News* (October 5, 1870), 3, http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=336&dat=18701006&id=uYodAAAAIBAJ&sjid=4TADAAAAIBAJ&pg=2300,3241916 (accessed April 18, 2010); Geo. H. Taylor, *An Exposition of the Swedish Movement-Cure, Embracing the History and Philosophy of This System of Medical Treatment, with Examples of Single Movements, and Directions for Their Use in Various Forms of Chronic Disease, Forming a Complete Manual of Exercises; Together with a Summary of the Principles of General Hygiene* (New York: Fowler and Wells, Publishers, 1860); Advertisement for Dr. R. R. Roberts's Hot Springs at Home, Auburn *Daily Bulletin* (January 9, 1877), Old Fulton NY Post Cards By Tom Tryniski (accessed April 18, 2010); "1880 Professional Spiritualists," http://www.spirithistory.com/80fedcen.html (accessed May 6, 2007).

[556] *The Spiritual Magazine* (January 1875), 74.

lecture, under spirit control, explored the "Perfect Character of Jesus," and another was on worthy living. Her lectures, along with the formation of an association, awakened interest in Atlanta, "especially among Christian people, on the subject of Spiritualism."[557] This was Spiritualism by and for southerners.

The early leaders and speakers in Atlanta were neither carpetbaggers nor scalawags. Fairman Frank Taber was born about 1835 in Louisiana. The 1860 census found him working as a clerk in Huntsville, Alabama with a wife and eponymous year-old son. Taber had been a surgeon in the Confederate army. His wife returned to her family home in Rhode Island in 1862, and died in 1863; it is not clear what became of the child. Taber married again in 1864, and by 1870 had three young sons. He lived out his life in Atlanta, and in 1875 was the resident physician at the Homeopathic and Electric Infirmary, assisted by Mrs. S. E. Smith, clairvoyant and electrician, offering cures for opium use and inebriation in addition to treating "all kinds of chronic diseases."[558]

The medium and lecturer Samuel D. Hay was an attorney, a Spiritualist who had been "a worker in the vine-yard for fifteen years" when he came to Atlanta. He had served as United States district attorney for Texas in the 1850s, was described as "one of

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[557] *History of Atlanta, Georgia, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers,* ed. Wallace P. Reed (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Co., Publishers, 1889), 462.

[558] Advertisement for "Medical: Aryes & Wade, *Confederate Military Surgery,* 1863," http://www.prices4antiques.com/books/medical-dental/Medical-Aryes-Wade-Confederate-Military-Surgery-1863-D9927633.htm (accessed April 18, 2010): "A Civil War medical book, *Confederate Military Surgery* by Aryes & Wade, published in Richmond, 1863. Signed in the front 'F. F. Taber MD Asstnt. Surgeon Confederate States Army April 1863'. Illustrated in the back. Leather bound with marbled paper."; "An act for the relief of Fairman F. Tabor and his wife, Louisa Jane Tabor, formerly Louisa Jane Patch," *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of Georgia: Passed in Atlanta, Georgia, at an Annual Session Beginning Jan. 13, and Ending March 18, 1869* (Atlanta, Ga.: Samuel Bard, Public Printers, 1869), 194; *Beasley's Atlanta Directory for 1875, Being a Complete Index to the Residents of the Entire City and a Classified Business Directory, to Which is Added an Appendix Containing Useful Information of the City, County, State, Churches, Banks, Societies and Miscellaneous Matters, Together with a Street Directory* (Atlanta, Ga.: James W. Beasley, Publisher, 1874), np.

the oldest Spiritualists in that state," and was a friend of Texas Spiritualist Gideon Lincecum. Hay had met many southern mediums in his travels. Annie Torrey of Texas had given him a message from a friend; a year later medium and Confederate veteran James Sellick of Tuscaloosa conveyed a similar one. Samuel Hay happened to be in Memphis shortly after Jesse Ferguson died in 1870, and met with a circle there hoping for a message from Ferguson. Instead, they had a communication from John Pierpont. Pierpont, a New England minister and Spiritualist who had attended séances in Georgetown with Cranston Laurie and Mary Todd Lincoln, had two who sons settled in Savannah. John Pierpont, Junior, was the minister of the Unitarian Church there. John's brother James had come south to visit after his wife died in 1853, and became the church's music director. James copyrighted a song in 1857 which we know as "Jingle Bells." He was married that year to Eliza Jane Purse, daughter of Savannah's Confederate mayor and probably the niece of Swedenborgian Edward J. Purse with whom her husband and brothers volunteered for the Confederate army.[559] Samuel D. Hay lived in Kentucky in 1880 and is listed as a widower, but for a public figure left scant information in available records. These Spiritualists tended to have strong Confederate credentials, and when a Yankee spirit came calling it was one whose son was one of their own.

There was continued opposition from both scoffers and evangelical Christians in the North and the South. Sarah Norton Chilton knew people might think she was crazy, and Godfrey Barnsley feared being labeled a Spiritualist would be bad for business. In

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[559] *Golden Memories of An Earnest Life*, 133; Burkhalter, *Gideon Lincecum,* 109, 144; "John Pierpont and Jesse B. Ferguson," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (August 17, 1872), 2; *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?*, 66; Timothy Daiss, *Rebels, Saints, and Sinners: Savannah's Rich History and Colorful Personalities* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, 2002), 163; Jacqueline Jones, *Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 132.

1872, F. F. Taber had claimed the Atlanta press, with the exception of the *Atlanta Whig,* did not show them the courtesy they should "for fear of censure, I suppose" until visits from southern mediums made a positive impression. O. S. Poston of Kentucky wrote to the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* in 1872 to alert fellow Spiritualists about the National Religious Convention, lately adjourned at Cincinnati. The group was circulating petitions, asking Congress to amend the Constitution to recognize Jesus Christ as the supreme ruler of the nation and the Bible as the definitive statement of "his revealed will." Poston feared "suppression of Spiritualism, or any phase of infidelity" in the interest of evangelical orthodoxy. As early as 1851, the New Hampshire House of Representatives had considered a law to protect "the people of the State against imposition and injury by persons pretending to hold intercourse with departed spirits," and in 1860 the Alabama Legislature had passed an act setting a fine of five hundred dollars for public spiritualistic manifestations. Louisiana in 1869 instigated a $100 licensure fee for Spiritualists, including healing mediums.[560] Poston knew that evangelical zealots armed with an amendment to the Constitution would cite Scripture from a perspective that viewed Spiritualism as heretical and even Satanic, and that there was already a record of legal action against spiritual mediums and speakers.

Both public and private Spiritualism were slow to revive among former Confederates in the South, in part because their homeland was ravaged by war and their lives were thoroughly destabilized and in part because of its association with northern ideas at a time when the South seemed overrun with Yankees trying to reconstruct Dixie

[560] *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (June 29, 1872), 6; "The New Amendment," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (March 2, 1872), 6; Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, 305; "Spiritualism in the Louisiana Legislature," *The Spiritual Magazine* [London] (July 1, 1869), 332–333.

in their own political, social and religious image. Perhaps is should not surprise us that the most vibrant post-war southern Spiritualist movement would be led by Reverend Samuel Watson of Memphis and be firmly rooted in the careful adherence to Scripture that characterized Southern Methodism.

CHAPTER TEN

Samuel Watson: Spiritualism through a Methodist Lens

Samuel Watson was on a collision course with the beleaguered Southern Methodist establishment. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was fully occupied with re-establishing congregations and church institutions such as publishing and missionary work. The last thing it wanted or needed was one of its own igniting internal conflict. Yet when Watson did make his belief in spirit communion a matter of public record he tapped a reservoir of deeply held Christian belief in ministering angels. He was hardly the only southern Christian who spoke with spirits or hoped to, and many of these people were, like Watson, Methodists.

Watson was born in Maryland in 1813 but spent most of his life in Tennessee. His mother died when he was five years old and the family moved to the Nashville area. He had been "brought up after the strictest sect—a Methodist." His father was a class leader, keeping tabs on the spiritual welfare of a small group of Methodists, for forty years. Watson's only vocation was the ministry, and after 1839 he remained in Memphis. When spirit rapping became a topic in the news, he "verily believed it to be one of the vilest humbugs from the land of 'isms'." Then, in 1854, the Watsons began to hear knockings in their house. He found it annoying, but did not know how to make it stop. A slave, "a servant girl, who was born in our family," first told him it was the spirits of three of his children. She had been their nurse, and claimed they came to her often, "that she saw

them and talked to them, as she did when they were living." Watson, who would own thirteen slaves on the 1860 census, did not welcome this information; he threatened to punish her if she continued to say such things.[561]

Curiosity soon overcame him, and he sat down at a table with his wife and the servant girl. There were raps on the back of his chair. "I was perplexed, and knew not what to say or do. I resolved not to threaten to chastise her any more, or ridicule the subject as I had done." It was Watson's habit each day to spend time alone in contemplation, and he began to feel presences. His initial reaction was fear, but he realized it was those who loved him, and that they came to "minister" to him. "It produced then the most hallowed influence upon my mind and heart, such as I never before experienced." Just at that time, there was much excitement in Memphis on the subject of séance circles. "I never attended any of them," he said, "nor would my self-respect permit me to be associated with what I heard occurred at them." Perhaps he thought levitating tables and rapped out messages were likely to be the work of lying spirits or perhaps the participants in these circles were not socially or morally acceptable companions, and he certainly did not approve of mediums with "mercenary motives,"[562] but his curiosity was piqued.

One night the maiden daughter of an old ministerial colleague stayed with the Watsons. They were drawn into a discussion of spirit communication and their guest, Miss McMahan, told them that she had never been to a circle but found that when she sat down quietly with pen and paper, her hand would write "without her agency." She wrote

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[561] *Clock Struck One,* 79.

[562] *Religion of Spiritualism,* 14.

in many different styles, and when compared to the handwriting of family members long dead from whom they claimed to come, "they were the same chirography." After dinner, writing supplies were brought. Watson formulated unspoken questions and "whatever controlled the pencil was cognizant of what was passing through my mind" as Miss McMahan's hand wrote out answers. After that evening, many things took place at his house over a period of several months that Watson found similar to the "preternatural noises" and other phenomena John Wesley's family had experienced in his father's parsonage at Epworth in 1716.[563] If Methodism's founder had written of them as real, they must be.

While Watson was "perplexed with these things" a friend recommended him to a group interested in investigating the subject. The group was led by James Hervey Otey, bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church for Tennessee, who had visited the Fox sisters in Cincinnati and publicly stated that the phenomena were too potentially important to dismiss without investigation. The group included five physicians, Watson and two other ministers, and "several influential lay members" from local churches. Their medium was Miss Ferris, a pious young woman who belonged to the Baptist Church. "With these persons," Watson explained, "I was willing to be associated to investigate the subject which was attracting so much attention." They opened each meeting with prayer, and "earnestly besought the Divine Spirit to direct us to the truth." This was no frivolous parlor game. "Our meetings were religious, and produced a most hallowed influence on our minds and hearts." "Had all circles been thus happily organized and conducted,"

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[563] *Clock Struck One,* 81; Watson probably had read Wesley's journals, published in 1827. Others had noted the striking similarity between the events at Epworth and the phenomena of Modern Spiritualism; J. P. Stuart, "Sermon on Spiritual Manifestations," *Buchanan's Journal of Man* II:7 (January 1851), 195–196.

Watson reflected in later years, "how much Spiritualism would nave gained in dignity and how much less would be heard of the follies and deceptions. . . ." They met for two hours each Tuesday and Friday evening for several months, and were guided by a spirit who called himself Mystery. Their activities were private, but not secret, and apparently tongues began to wag. When a local newspaper editorial charged that "there was a circle that taught that Christ was an impostor," Watson's circle was directed by Mystery to write to the paper "stating what we knew to be the facts in the case." They must all sign the statement. Bishop Otey must write a separate statement. It was done, and they were published, making their investigations a matter of public record.[564]

From the outset, Bishop Otey's circle made theirs a religious quest. "We were often told to reject, as coming from lying, deceiving spirits, any and everything that was not in spirit sustained by the teachings of the Bible." The Memphis circle would have been aware of Jesse Babcock Ferguson and followed with interest the Nashville controversy. Their investigations coincided with the height of Ferguson's pamphlet war with orthodox Nashville Church of Christ members and his communications to Spiritualist newspapers in the Northeast. Ferguson's highly publicized interpretation of Spiritualism focused on personal interpretation of the divine, faith in a loving God and universal salvation. The Memphis group put Christ at the center of their quest. Mystery taught them that, "The Godhead, so far as it can be manifested to finite beings, exists in the divine humanity known historically to men of this earth as the Lord Jesus Christ." Mystery explained that there was disagreement even in the spirit world about the nature and mission of Christ; those who were infidels in the flesh came to the afterlife with their

[564] *Clock Struck One,* 78, 90; *Religion of Spiritualism,* 14.

earthly beliefs intact and retained them "until they were better informed." Because death changed neither a man's character nor his opinions, the circle should not give more credence to a spirit's statements than to those of a living man, but "try all by the infallible word of God, The Bible." Mystery also taught that it was possible for people who had been "wicked or undeveloped" in life to progress in "the intermediate state," but that there was a "fearful hell—not of fire, but of remorse" for those who chose not to improve. The idea that "spirits had an opportunity for repentance in the future"[565] corresponds to Ferguson's belief that Christ preached to "spirits in prison," but the Memphis circle did not share Ferguson's conviction that a loving God would not consign even one of his creatures to an eternity in hell. The Memphians agreed with the orthodox (and Swedenborgian) belief in hell, if not in its searing details. Mystery's hell was an eternity of regret, of certainty for the damned that it was their own choices that had barred them from heaven.

Taking leave of the circle, to whom he referred as "the twelve" in a way that must have evoked to them Christ's disciples, Mystery predicted that Spiritualism would prevail, that "men shall believe and rejoice in it." Once that happened, Jesus would "reign over the whole earth; and oh! 'tis Mystery's prayer that some at this table may live to see it; for earth will be a heaven." Mystery was tasking them with preparing the world for the Second Coming, and assuring them that some of their circle might live to see it. Mystery's final message for Samuel Watson was, "Spiritualism is only in its infancy, let it not go until it is able to stand of itself. So put not your hands to the plow and then look back, but move on, and a glorious harvest shall be yours, and a crown at the right hand of

[565] *Clock Struck One,* 90, 91, 89; *Religion of Spiritualism,* 13.

His Majesty on high shall be yours."[566] Watson was directed to have home circles with the servant who had introduced him to spirit communication, and allow another to develop as a medium. ""Don't give your girl up," Mystery had admonished him. "She will be a good medium, and so will another servant-girl of yours, a female much older than the one not practiced with. . . ." If Watson did investigate with these women, he left no written record of it.

Convinced of the reality of spirit communication, Watson shared the good news with his congregation. This caused quite a stir, and his replies to queries from the secular press soon made his beliefs nationally known. Watson's opinions, tempered in later discussions, apparently did not interfere with his relationship with Methodist authorities. He had sent a frank statement of his experience to the Methodist Memphis *Christian Advocate* in August 1855, affirming his certainty that some messages "if they be from spirits at all" come from lying spirits, and his belief that if "these communications are from the spirit world, God has permitted them, to demonstrate to the materialist that there is a future state of existence after death." Waxing millennial, he declared, "That we are upon the eve of the most important events the world has ever witnessed, I have no doubt." When someone wrote to the *Advocate* to protest coverage of Spiritualism, Watson's rejoinder pointed out that several Methodist and other religious papers had discussed Spiritualism recently, "admitting more than I ever believed to be true relative to the so-called spirit manifestations." Apparently taking care to distance himself from Jesse Ferguson and doing a bit of backpedaling, Watson reminded readers that he had been asked for his views and had given them honestly, and that he had made it clear that "those who consulted with any such ' *oracles*,' to know any thing of their *spiritual and eternal*

[566] *Clock Struck One,* 146, 143.

interests, were 'led captive by the devil at his will;' that even to admit they were from spirits (which I have never done), they taught the doctrine of ' ETERNAL DAMNATION' to the finally impenitent." He even threw in a quote on the subject from a recent *Spiritual Telegraph:* "It is true that all who are renewed by the spirit of God will progress and finally reach heaven, but those who do not yield their hearts to him will not progress—*they will sink to hell.*"[567] Watson clung to the cross, while Ferguson had pronounced it irrelevant to salvation. Watson remained in his pulpit; Ferguson did not.

Watson received a message through Miss Ferris from his mother, telling him that he should investigate Spiritualism at the North and he had a good medium in his family and should make her practice. He claimed he paid no further attention to the subject until 1860, but we know he visited the Davenport brothers in Boston in 1856 and his name appeared on a list of remittances to the *Spiritual Telegraph* that June. Nathaniel Tallmadge's name was also on that list.[568] Watson's undiminished position in the Methodist hierarchy was confirmed when he was elected editor of the Memphis *Christian Advocate* in 1856 and a delegate to the General Conference in 1857. He accepted the presidency of the State Female College for a year in 1859. In 1860 he was among the incorporators of the Memphis Elmwood and Greenwood Railroad Company, the Book and Tract Society of the Memphis Conference, and the State Female College. These were good years for Samuel Watson as a man of God and citizen of Memphis. As a family man, they were harder. Watson and his wife married in 1842 and had thirteen children; most died in childhood and only one would survive him.

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[567] Ibid., 84, 85.

[568] Ibid., 149–150; "John King," *The Spiritual Magazine* (June 1854), 260; "Remittances," *Spiritual Telegraph* (June 7, 1856), 2.

In 1860 Dr. Mansfield, the medium and "spirit postmaster," came to Memphis. He stayed with Dr. Samuel Gilbert, who had been part of Bishop Otey's circle with Samuel Watson and had hosted medium Warren Chase in early 1857 when Chase gave a series of lectures there. A year later, the *Spiritual Telegraph* had announced that "Dr. S. G., of Memphis, Tenn., for many years a prominent Methodist leader, has come out a bold, fearless advocate of our faith." Gilbert was in fact a lifelong Methodist and a devout Christian in addition to believing in spirit communication. Born in Virginia in 1802, he had been a tailor's apprentice and an early settler of Cooper County, Missouri where he preached at yearly camp meetings. His "success in after life as a cancer doctor was a surprise to all and a familiar theme of conversation among the old settlers." Gilbert had suffered for years with a running sore on his side that doctors could not cure, so he began to search for treatments on his own. He became "skillful in treating ulcers, and it was often asserted that he cured incurable cancers." Gilbert was well known by 1846, when Rachel O'Connor traveled from her Louisiana plantation to his infirmary in Memphis, hoping he could cure her "diseased breast." His skill at treating "chronic diseases of every grade, especially cancers, ulcers and tumors without the knife" made him a wealthy man. When the medium Mansfield came to Memphis in February 1860, Gilbert and his wife welcomed him as their guest. Mansfield had been invited by "the progressive minds of Memphis—not only by those who profess to be Spiritualists, but those who are in high church standing." Gilbert was both, proclaiming his belief in spirit communion to any who asked, but still "a very zealous advocate of the Methodist Episcopal mode of worship. . . ." Dr. Gilbert invited Samuel Watson and other "prominent members of the church" to his home to meet Mansfield.[569]

[569] Warren Chase, *The Life-line of the Lone One; or, Autobiography of the World's Child* (Boston:

Rev. Watson was the first to arrive, and was shown to Mansfield's room. They had never met. "He was alone," Watson related, "and I gave no name, but wrote the names of the persons I wished to communicate with privately, and folded them over several times." Mansfield laid the folded papers on the table and began to write. The message was from a recently deceased Methodist clergyman, followed by one from Watson's mother and then one from his father, who had died in 1857. All the spirits told Watson he was destined to be a leader among Spiritualists, but "These things were absorbed by others of a material nature during the war."[570]

Watson was still editing the Memphis *Christian Advocate* when it was forced to suspend publication in April 1862, "in consequence of the failure of paper and suspension of the mails," and the *Daily Appeal* said it was regrettable as the *Advocate* was "deservedly a general favorite, and under the able management of the Rev. Mr. Watson, has sustained a high character."[571] We do not know where Watson spent the remainder of the war years, but he was back in Memphis editing the *Christian Advocate* in 1866. His wife died that year and is buried in Memphis.

Bela Marsh, 1865), 282; *Banner of Light* (January 16, 1859), 6; *History of Howard and Cooper Counties, Missouri; Written and Compiled from the Most Authentic Official and Private Sources Including a History of Its Townships, Town and Villages Together with a Condensed History of Missouri; a Reliable and Detailed History of Howard and Cooper Counties—Its Pioneer Record, Resources, Biographical Sketches of Prominent Citizens; General and Local Statistics of Great Value; Incidents and Reminiscences* (St. Louis: National Historical Company, 1883), 715–716, 228; "Dr. Samuel G. Gilbert," *Elmwood: Charter, Rules, Regulations and By-laws of Elmwood Cemetery Association of Memphis* (Memphis, Tenn.: Boyle & Chapman, 1874), 119; Rachel Swayze O'Connor, *Mistress of Evergreen Plantation: Rachel O'Connor's Legacy of Letters, 1823–1845,* ed. Allie Bayne Windham Webb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 275–276; "Dr. S. Gilbert," *Daily Delta* (January 13, 1853), 4; "Letter from Mr. Mansfield," *Banner of Light* (March 17, 1860), 5; *Clock Struck One,* 150.

[570] *Clock Struck One,* 150–152.

[571] "Suspended," Memphis *Daily Appeal* (April 25 1862), 2, http://www.uttyler.edu/vbetts/memphis_appeal%20ja-je%2062.htm (accessed December 28, 2008).

Watson remarried in 1867. His second wife was Ellen Perkins, the daughter of a Methodist minister, whose first husband had died in Confederate service in 1862. Mrs. Perkins, a widow after only eight months of marriage, had devoted herself to the southern cause, visiting prisoners and nursing sick and dying soldiers. After the war, she accepted a position as governess for the family of a Methodist minister near Memphis. As the wife of prominent churchman Samuel Watson, she bore five children and "during those years the most important work of her life was done." She supervised the sewing of clothing and distribution of food for the destitute, and employed Bible readers for the poor and ignorant. Later she would be prominent in the Women's Christian Association, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Women's Foreign Missionary movement, and inaugurate a home for "self-supporting and unprotected young women." A biographical sketch praising her accomplishments and piety does not mention that Mrs. Watson was also a believer in spirit communication during the years her husband was the acknowledged leader of the Spiritualists of the South. Her belief in "the present ministry of spirits" was no secret, yet she remained a member of the Central Methodist Church. In the spring of 1876, Ellen Watson developed as a home medium for her husband.[572]

Samuel Watson's thoughts had returned to Spiritualism by 1871. He read a piece in the St. Louis *Christian Advocate,* commenting on an article clipped from the Lexington, Virginia *Gazette* about a man whose father's old clock, which had not run for years, struck one when he entered the room. The man thought little of it until it happened again, whereupon he told his wife he felt sure he would soon die; he did. The St. Louis editor, Reverend Thomas Emerson Bond, was also a member of the Methodist Episcopal

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[572] *A Woman of the Century*, 752–753; "Southern Notes," *American Spiritual Magazine* (March 1876), 81; "Spirit Communication," *American Spiritual Magazine* (July 1876), 212–213.

Church, South. Bond remarked that "There is nothing singular nor mysterious in it. Such results of panic in persons of superstitious imagination are familiar to all who have paid any attention to the morbid relations of mind and brain." Watson read this, and wrote to ask Dr. Bond's opinion of the fact that an old, unused clock on the mantel in their home in Woodruff County, Arkansas had struck one before the deaths of four family members. In 1866, his wife's health was precarious so they had gone to the Arkansas place for a change of air. The clock struck one the day before she died. A year later, their four-year-old son Robert E. Lee got sick, "lived a few days, the clock struck one, and the next day he died." The next summer his daughters visited one of his brothers, a physician near Memphis, with their youngest brother Durell. A healthy lad, Durell was taken sick and died within hours. "The clock on the mantel in Arkansas struck once again, and in a few hours we received a dispatch that Durell was dead." The following autumn, the clock struck again and infant Lillian died. "I have given you the facts, Mr. Editor, even at the risk of being called superstitious. I need not give you my explanation or theory, but I would like to have yours. The epistolary skirmishing commenced. Bond reminded readers that he had denied "that the clock struck because the man was about to die, and *struck* by miraculous interposition of the power and prescience of God." Bond suggested that Brother Watson need not be so sensitive about being thought superstitious. "He has the great majority of people with him—perhaps there are a few who could show themselves clear of superstition upon close examination. The term is offensive, but the condition is almost universal."[573]

[573] *Clock Struck One,* v, vi.

Watson countered that he had not actually theorized that whenever an old clock strikes, a member of the family would die. He had never heard of such a coincidence before, "but have heard of several since, as well-authenticated as human testimony can make them." He accused Bond of erecting a man of straw and using "nearly three columns of your massive sheet to destroy him." Then Watson tipped his hand. "I would ask the Doctor if the Scriptures do not teach, under every dispensation, that there have been angelic ministrations to mankind?" He cited John Wesley, Adam Clarke and other learned early Methodists who had said clearly that they believed in a spiritual world and that spirits could, according to some not-yet-understood laws of God, "have intercourse with this world, and become visible to mortals." Watson saw no reason why moving a clock hammer would be difficult for a heavenly spirit, and he did not believe it was done by any agency "superior to man" in his spiritual state. "It is simply one of the thousand ways that those who minister to us manifest their presence and the interest they feel in our welfare." Watson cheerfully said he appreciated Bond's "manly, Christian reply" and should Bond wish to respond he would be delighted to leave the clock behind and look at inexplicable occurrences from a "Bible stand-point" and "as Christian ministers wishing to ascertain the truth."[574]

In fact, spurred on the one hand by new scientific awareness and on the other by the interest in Spiritualism, many Methodist clergymen were trying to distance themselves from the sort of palpable spirit world that was a reality to John Wesley. Bond was clearly among them. He said he could not understand Watson's assertion that something could be supernatural but not miraculous. Then Bond came right out and accused Watson of believing "the spiritist assumption, that disembodied spirits are

[574] Ibid., ix, x–xi, xiii.

‘superior to man’ in knowledge; and that while they can in a small way act upon matter, they are not obstructed by it.” He did not call Watson a Spiritualist, but he demanded an explanation of Watson’s notion that the clock could have been struck by ministering spirits “not superior to man in his spiritual state.” What Watson was saying about man in his “spiritual state” sounded almost identical to Andrew Jackson Davis’s description of his experience of the “superior state.” Exasperated, Bond finally made his position clear. “ *Teraphim,* whatever their form,” had been employed for divination in the Bible, “to satisfy the craving for supernatural information that God has refused to satisfy.” To those schooled in theology, *Teraphim* was a word fraught with contested meanings but signified idolatry. One contemporary scholar had explained: “We have most remarkable proofs that the worship of Teraphim co-existed with the worship of Jehovah even in pious families. . . . The teraphim were consulted by persons upon whom true religion had no firm hold, in order to elicit some supernatural *omina. . . .*” Bond went on to conjoin Watson’s position with the most suspect of all faiths, Roman Catholicism. “It is painful to confess that, even in our days, people are found to wear amulets and charms, blessed by the clergy or manufactured by nuns, in which they trust implicitly for protection. Even Protestants,” he went on, expanding the critique to include Watson and his ilk, “seek communication with the ghosts of the dead, and information of future events in the sounds of old clocks and other magical phenomena. So Micah had his *teraphim,* and yet worshiped Jehovah, as Laban and Rachel did.” The gauntlet was thrown, and Watson felt personally insulted. He had resources and was by then a practiced journalist. He wrote and published a book. *The Clock Struck One, and Christian Spiritualist* began with a full recounting of the communication between Watson and Bond, ending with Bond’s

statement about amulets and old clocks and *teraphim.* "When I saw the above," Watson explained, "I determined upon the course I have adopted."[575] The title page bears a quote from St. Paul: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Watson seemed to think he had many Christian friends who shared his beliefs in spirit communication. As a clergyman in Memphis since 1839, he had in the course of his pastoral visits "met with a considerable number of persons in the proper exercise of their mental faculties, who have assured me that for weeks before their dissolution, they saw, recognized, and conversed with their friends, who were in the spiritual world." He started naming names with the unimpeachable Bishop Otey, who "years before he died told me that he had always believed in the doctrine of 'ministering spirits,'" and that he "knew they were around him" and conversed with them; his spirit daughter played for him when they were alone on the guitar and harp. Brother Hillary H. Tippett of the North Carolina Conference was ill in Memphis for a long while before his death in 1857, and Watson a frequent visitor. "He used to tell me that his spirit friends came to see him daily. He saw them, not with the natural, but with the spiritual eye." It was not only dead clergymen Watson invoked. "There are a number of gentlemen and ladies in this city now who have told me that they see and converse with their relatives daily. They are not what are called Spiritualists, but they are influential members of the different churches, with as clear heads and as good hearts as others." Watson still disclaimed connection with the movement known as "modern spiritualism, as it is understood. . . . I never go to such places, have nothing to do with such things, and have not the slightest reference to them

[575] Ibid., xiii, xiv; *The Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature,* Volume II, ed. John Kitto (New York: Mark H. Newman & Co., 1851), 845; *Clock Struck One,* 151.

in what I have said; nor do I know that any of the parties I have mentioned do. Our discussion must be, as I said before, from a Bible stand-point, the standard authorities of the church, and the testimony of reliable witnesses."[576] Watson and his Memphian friends were not allying themselves with the Spiritualists of the North nor their political agendas. Watson was launching a new movement, Christian Spiritualism, born in the South, that would offer believers Bible-based arguments. Others shared his views and others had claimed the name Christian Spiritualist, but never with such vigor and commitment.

The discourse around spirit communication had for years vaguely conflated spirits and angels, just as the language of evangelical understanding of the afterlife did. It was time to sharpen the definition of "angel." Watson professed to use the term "as the Scriptures do, as synonymous with man. The term simply means messenger, and is applied to man under every dispensation in the Scriptures." There was nothing miraculous about angels, who "are in perfect accord with the laws of the spiritual world in which they live; and it is part of their employment and enjoyment" to minister to "those who shall be the heirs of salvation."[577]

Bond accused mediums of leading people away from Christian faith "for a superstition as groveling as confidence in an African fetisch" and claimed "That Bishop Otey was deranged before he died is certain." Bond believed "The spirits seen by the sick and dying are certainly not admissible testimony. . . . Spectral appearances are common phenomena of disordered senses. Swedenborgianism and spiritism are prevalent opinions

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[576] Ibid., xxi; "Hillary H. Tippett," *The Meriwether Society, Inc.,* http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=tmsidb0&id=I15658 (accessed June 22, 2010); *Clock Struck One,* xxii, xxiii.

[577] Ibid., xxii.

secretly disordering the minds of thousands." This was an extension of the proof-texting begun in a small way by Ferguson and his detractors. Bond claimed that "The Bible nowhere authorizes such a belief. It leaves the state of the dead in profound mystery, giving consoling assurance of their rest. That they are angels or messengers, is nowhere revealed to us."[578] Watson and others would find Scripture to counter that claim, but proof of angelic visits in the Old Testament was less important to evangelicals than proof from the Gospels. Watson's new direction would rest on the assumption that it was truly a new dispensation, and finally that Spiritualism was identical with primitive Christianity—complete with apostolic gifts.

Watson's new direction did not spring forth fully formed, but as people began to respond to his public focus on Christian Spiritualism it would quickly cohere into a movement with him as its ministering spiritual leader. The things he was saying about God, Christ Jesus, angels and spirits as scriptural entities resonated for many evangelicals and even a few outside Protestantism. Watson was a preacher and an editor, so he used both skills to develop his Christian Spiritualism, explore its meaning, and take it to the people. In the first phase of this new ministry, Watson shared the excitement of his own unfolding understanding with readers. He reached out to all Christian Spiritualists, those who shared basic articles of Christian faith and his scriptural interpretation of the activity of angels and spirits, but it is apparent from the letters he received that his geographic focus was initially the South, the upper Mississippi Valley, and a coterie of Spiritualist editors and authors in the Northeast. Any number of people writing to and about Watson

[578] Ibid., xxiii; Bond's stridency may or may not have been related to his battle with stomach cancer. He died August 18, 1872. "Bond, Rev. Thomas Emerson, M. D.," *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1872* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873), 68; *Clock Struck One,* xxv.

emphasized that his was a southern voice and many saw that as a crucial component of his success in reaching southerners. Watson did offer a new way of looking at the Bible to Southern Methodists who were dealing with social, political and religious efforts by white northerners to reconstruct them and black southerners to leave them. As a young "movement" with a clear focus on Biblical authority and no other social or political agenda, Christian Spiritualism held out only positive possibilities to Christians willing to accept that the nineteenth century's outpouring of spiritual gifts and messages from the spirit world might be a new dispensation—or that such things had been a reality throughout human history. Such alternative interpretations might appear to be contradictory, but posing them seemed to offer innovation based on experiences Christians had been having for almost nineteen hundred years.

The Clock Struck One outlined Watson's understanding of the meaning and reliability of spirit communication, both placing it in a Biblical context and citing the writings left by respected scholars of antiquity, Methodism and other faiths. Watson was hardly the first to note the presence of otherworldly entities in all religions and in all ages, but he invoked them anew. Egypt's "wise and profound" had believed "the earth was surrounded by aerial circles of ether, and in these ether regions the souls of the dead lived and guarded mortals." The ancient Greeks' understanding of "controlling or guardian spirits" was the same as that of the modern nineteenth century. Plato had taught that invisible spirits live between God and man, "always near us, though commonly invisible to us, and know all our thoughts." Socrates claimed his familiar spirit had "stood by me from my infancy." Moving on to the "Christian Fathers," whose opinions were taken as "next in authenticity to the Scriptures," Watson examined the apostles of

Christ's Apostles and their pronouncements on angels and spiritual gifts. Watson pointed out that Tertullian in 160 A.D. had described "a sister among us who possesses a faculty of revelation" and often during worship would fall into a trance, "holding communion with the angels—hearing divine mysteries explained. She declared she had seen a soul in bodily shape, that appeared to be a spirit neither empty nor formless, but so real and substantial that it might be touched." Watson would have called her a medium. Emperor Constantine had seen "a luminous cross in the heavens" which angels told him follow "forth to victory." Watson in his catholicity even included a Roman Catholic "Prayer to Our Guardian Angel." He concluded that "enough has been given to show that it [spirit communication] was the general belief in the earlier and purer days of Christianity, as well as of the best men of the Reformation."[579]

The "best men" as well as the best women of Methodism also shared this belief, beginning with John Wesley and his family. Wesley had been away at school during the unusual occurrences at his father's Epworth parsonage in 1716 and 1717, but the family letters were preserved and in 1720 John Wesley himself interviewed everyone who had observed the manifestations of the spirit his sister Hetty had named Jeremy. John Wesley absolutely believed in the supernatural, and that it had been an active presence in his father's house. The family had at first thought the rappings and groanings were a harbinger of death in the family. "Whatever may be the design of Providence in permitting these things, I cannot say, *Secret things belong to God,*" Wesley's mother wrote at the time. She was certain "that it is our wisdom and duty to prepare seriously for all events." As she considered the things that were happening in her home, Mrs. Wesley

[579] *Clock Struck One,* 59–64.

was "rather inclined to think there would be frequent intercourse between good spirits and us, did not our deep lapse into sensuality prevent it. . . ." Mrs. Wesley held iconic status among Methodists, particularly Methodist women. It was her methodical piety, housekeeping and instruction that molded John and Charles Wesley; in a sense, she was the mother of Methodism. Adam Clarke, the early Methodist leader who collected memoirs of the Wesley family, claimed that "such a woman, take her for all in all, I have not heard of, I have not read of, nor with her equal have I been acquainted." Paraphrasing Solomon in Proverbs, Clarke said, "Many daughters have done virtuously; but Susannah Wesley has excelled them all." Her opinions about Jeremy and the world of spirits would still be persuasive to many nineteenth-century Methodists. Whatever the raps and other noises meant, they did mean *something.* John Wesley's sister Emily was certain it was witchcraft.[580] Wesley himself never lost his sense that God and His unseen agents were active around him, and that belief suffused his understanding of Christian faith and the Bible. That was the way in which Watson read him.

A book of John Wesley's sermons published in 1825 included one "On Good Angels," in which he set forth the historical structure of spirit belief and cited Socrates and Hesiod and Scripture in arguments that would be widely echoed by Christian Spiritualists. The sermon was based on Hebrews i:14, the passage that Watson later chose for the title page of his book: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation?" Not denying that there were both "good

[580] The complete text of these records is included in Robert Southey's *The Life of Wesley; and the Rise and Progress of Methodism, in Two Volumes,* Vol. I (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 432–465; Robert Southey's *The Life of Wesley; and the Rise and Progress of Methodism, in Two Volumes,* Vol. I (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 437; *Life of Wesley,* 435–436; Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family; Collected Principally from Original Documents* (New York: Lane & Tippett, 1848), 420; *Life of Wesley.* 448.

and evil angels," Wesley focused on the former. In a statement that presaged Sarah Morgan's sense that the dead might be watching her or even know her thoughts, Wesley had asserted that "we cannot doubt but his angels know the hearts of those to whom they more immediately minister. Much less can we doubt of their knowing the thoughts that are in our hearts at any particular time. What should hinder their seeing them as they arise? Not the thin veil of flesh and blood."[581]

Wesley called these wise and powerful angels the "first-born children of God," who in addition to knowing the hearts and minds of men have great power over the human body, "either to cause or remove pain and diseases; either to kill or to heal." Deviating briefly from his focus on good angels, Wesley reminded his audience that even an evil angel has this power, as was learned by Job when one of them "smote [him] sore with boils." Daniel, on the other hand, was healed when a good angel "came and touched me, and said, . . . Peace be unto thee: be strong, yes be strong." Good angels were also detailed to "counter-work evil angels," in the cosmic battle between good and evil. "And who can hurt us, while we have armies of angels, and the God of angels, on our side?" Christian Spiritualists like Samuel Watson would insist, as had others before him, that the "ministry of angels" was part of God's plan for man. As Wesley had put it, "Whatever assistance God gives to men by men, the same, and frequently in a higher degree, he gives to them by angels." Of course, God could do it with no help at all. "He has always wrought by instruments as he pleases: but still it is God himself that doeth the work." Thus, the "glory redounds to Him, as if he used no instruments at all." Wesley wrapped up the sermon with a reminder that Jesus was a vital part of this equation, quoting "that

[581] "Sermon LXXVI: Of Good Angels," in John Wesley, *Sermons: On Several Occasions, in Two Volumes,* Vol. II (London: Published and Sold by J. Kershaw, 1825), 242, 243.

admirable Collect of our Church:—'O everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful manner; grant that as thy holy angels always do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succor and defend us on earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.'"[582]

Wesley understood that the Bible also described malevolent angels. He began his sermon "On Evil Angels" with a passage from Ephesians: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." All Creation was of God, and part of "one chain of beings, from the lowest to the highest point, from an unorganized particle of earth or water, to Michael the Archangel."[583] Wesley deemed it "highly necessary" that we understand what God has revealed about evil angels, "that they may gain no advantage over us by our ignorance; that we may know how to wrestle against them effectually." All angels had been created good, and the Bible did not tell us exactly how some of them, led by Lucifer, offended God and became fallen angels—the "evil angels" of Wesley's discourse. These evil angels were the demons of Emanuel Swedenborg's fears and nightmares. Wesley described them as "full of cruelty, of rage against the children of men, whom they long to inspire with the same wickedness themselves, and involve in the same misery." Wesley lived in a world where "Satan and all his angels are continually warring against us, and watching over every child of man." It was frightening to imagine, but Wesley suggested that many diseases people ascribed to natural causes might in fact be "preternatural" in origin, the work of evil angels.

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[582] Ibid., 245, 248, 249.

[583] "Sermon LXXVII: Of Evil Angels," in John Wesley, *Sermons: On Several Occasions, in Two Volumes,* Vol. II (London: Published and Sold by J. Kershaw, 1825), 250–260.

Mankind's only protection was "the shield of faith," a constant "consciousness of the love of Christ Jesus. . . ."[584]

Wesley firmly believed in hell, "the fire that never shall be quenched," but also that Paradise is "only the porch of heaven; and it is here the spirits of just men are made perfect" before entering the "fulness of joy" in heaven. Here in one of Wesley's sermons is the germ of a Christian Spiritualist definition of eternal progression in the "future state." Wesley's understanding that "they that bring the most holiness to heaven will find most happiness there; so, on the other hand . . . the more wickedness a man brings to hell, the more misery he will find there" corresponded to Spiritualist and Swedenborgian beliefs about the character of a person on earth determining his starting point in the afterlife. Swedenborg, like Wesley, assumed some people would not make the cut in the end but Swedenborg at least offered everyone the chance to travel to the afterlife and make choices there. Wesley's faith demanded that the choice be made in the world of flesh. "And what but the tender mercy of God," he asked, "hath spared us week after week, month after month, and given us space for repentance?"[585]

Watson accepted Wesley's views on salvation, but imagined "hell" rather differently. Watson's view corresponded with that described by the spirit "Mystery" in Bishop Otey's 1855 séances: the endless suffering of remorse for the wrongs they had done while in the flesh. The damned had chosen their fate by their actions in life, and would not go on to heaven. "Our life and conduct on earth," Watson averred, "will fix and determine our external surroundings to all eternity." In the world of spirits, "All are

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[584] Ibid., 253, 254, 258, 259.

[585] "Sermon LXXVIII: Hell," in John Wesley, *Sermons: On Several Occasions, in Two Volumes,* Vol. II (London: Published and Sold by J. Kershaw, 1825), 264, 65–266, 270.

seen in their true character—there are no hypocrites there." The regenerate soul could look forward to moving " *Onward, upward,* forever rising, forever perfecting, forever nearer the Lord." What Wesley called Paradise, a sort of heavenly porch, Watson referred to as the "intermediate state," and was not alone in his conviction that none had yet progressed beyond the intermediate state to heaven. He cited John Wesley's pronouncement that "It is very generally supposed that the souls of good men, as soon as they are discharged from the body, go directly to heaven; but this opinion has not the least foundation in the oracles of God." Watson revisited the text Jesse Ferguson and others had interpreted as a signifying universal salvation, in which Christ "went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which are sometimes disobedient." (1 Peter, iii. 18). Swedenborg believed that all would have a second chance at salvation in the spirit world, but accepted that some would still make choices that would consign them to hell. Watson cited "Bishop Morris, the senior Bishop of the M. E. Church," agreeing with him that "No one has yet been saved in heaven; no one sent to hell. These states and conditions will not be awarded till the judgment, and it will not take place till the resurrection."[586] The end of time, when all this would happen, was not yet come.

Watson also recalled a funeral sermon preached thirty years earlier in New Orleans by the Reverend Mr. William Winans for a minister who had died ministering to yellow fever victims. Winans said the departed clergyman had "entered upon a much larger field of usefulness. He can now, with the rapidity of thought, go, as a pure ministering spirit, to the same great work in which he sacrificed his life. Whenever God has more use for his servants in the spiritual world, than he has here, he takes them to labor in the same glorious cause, with greatly enhanced facilities, doing his will on earth

[586] *Clock Struck One,* 103, 105, 110, xx.

as it is done in heaven." Whatever Winans, who had been born a Quaker, meant, Samuel Watson believed that he meant that the world of spirits was all around us. "This spiritual world I believe surrounds and permeates the natural world," he wrote, and "it is as real and, to spirits, as tangible as the natural world." And where is this world of spirits? "From all I have been able to learn of it, from the Bible, it is very near us. . . . We are now in this world, though we may not be conscious of it." John Wesley's mother had been "rather inclined to think there would be frequent intercourse between good spirits and us, did not our deep lapse into sensuality prevent it. . . ." Watson, like Ferguson, understood the power of the mesmeric trance to allow embodied spirits to commune with disembodied spirits. "How wonderful, how beautiful it is," Watson rhapsodized, "that both kinds of senses, the spiritual and the natural, can be kept open at the same time!"[587]

We cannot overstate the influence of John Wesley's thought on the generations of Methodists Samuel Watson ministered to in his long career. John Wesley was the founder of Methodism. Wesley's sermons were read by Methodists throughout the nineteenth century. Stories about his life and family were essential to the folklore of early Methodism. In America, the Methodist Episcopal Church Conference held at Baltimore in 1784 adopted the Twenty-five Articles of Religion, which were Wesley's modification of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. His sermons "were the source of Methodist doctrinal emphasis," and the Twenty-five articles were "dogmatic guides." Since "All Methodist ministers were supposed to be agents of the Methodist Publishing House, selling these and other books to literate followers," explains historian Donald G. Mathews, "I suspect that all Methodist itinerants as well as local preachers, local

[587] *Clock Struck One,* 112, 109, 128; *Life of Wesley,* 435–436.

exhorters, and class leaders read the 44 sermons."[588] American Methodists would have been familiar with Wesley's ideas about angels and hell, and many would have accepted them as authoritative. His family's experience with Jeremy and his own receptivity to the world of the supernatural were presumably well known. Wesleyan Methodism, as far as Samuel Watson and those like him were concerned, was the foundation for a Christian Spiritualism. Watson had constructed his arguments to demonstrate that Methodists in the tradition of John Wesley could in good conscience be open to spirit communication. Indeed, Methodist sensitivity to the Spirit and to evidence of connection with the supernatural could lead rationally to Christian Spiritualism.

Henry Gerard Hall of Shreveport, Louisiana was very much like Watson. Hall was an educated professional and, like others who followed Watson's spiritual development with interest, a devout member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Hall's journal, and the record of his consideration of Spiritualism in the context of his faith, gives us some idea of how a southerner like Hall could be persuaded to entertain seriously the notion that communicating with the dead was a part of God's plan for him. It also helps us understand how and why Spiritualism took root in Shreveport and perhaps in other small communities in the South. As we have seen with Jesse Ferguson and his family, Spiritualist ideas were conveyed through connections of kinship, friendship and community as new and potentially important ways of reconsidering faith and the Bible developed in a time of burgeoning scientific knowledge—enhanced by the era's stunning mortality in the South, due in large measure to yellow fever. As Margaret Humphreys has pointed out, "Like the North and West, the South suffered from cholera, typhoid, and

[588] Henry Wheeler, *History and Exposition of the Twenty-five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1908), xii; Personal communication, May 5, 2010.

intermittent fevers, but it was yellow fever that distinguished it from the rest of the nation as a region where life and health were particularly endangered."[589] The disease would cut short the life of Henry Gerard Hall in 1873. Although it is not clear exactly how they were related, Hall referred to Samuel Watson as "Uncle Sam" in the journal he kept from 1870 until his death during the yellow fever epidemic that had already claimed his wife. Hall was an 1851 graduate, with honors, of Princeton University. He and his cousin Jesse Fuller had been officers in the Confederate army together. Fuller had become a ward of Hall's father after his own father died in 1836, and Fuller had married the younger sister of Hall's wife Eugenia; he was already a widower when Hall first mentioned him in the journal. Hall was an attorney.

Rev. Samuel Watson was the editor of the *Memphis, Arkansas and Ouachita Advocate* in 1870, having renamed the former *Memphis Advocate* to include Arkansas and northern Louisiana when it resumed publishing after the Civil War. In early January, Hall noted that he had had his cistern plastered and "canvassed the barber for Uncle Sam's paper." Drinking water was an ongoing problem in Shreveport because the Red River was not potable, so Hall made a point of keeping his cistern in good order. A progressive thinker, he was studying plans for hexagonal houses. Hall likely was reading North Carolinian Harriet Irwin's plans, patented in 1868. Irwin's ideas probably built on the work of phrenologist Orson Squire Fowler, whose 1848 book explained why octagonal structures provided the greatest livable space at the lowest cost.[590] The

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[589] Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999 [c. 1992]), 45.

[590] *History of the Arkansas Press*, 377; Henry Gerard Hall, Dairy, 1870–1873, Louisiana Tech University Special Collections; typescript 1870, 1872 and 1873 at http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/m/c/a/Jane--D-Mcashan/index.html (hereafter HGH Diary),

nineteenth century offered a seemingly endless array of ways for people to improve their lives, and sober, educated men such as Hall looked into those they thought might have merit. A wise person did not dismiss a potentially valuable idea without giving it a fair examination.

Faith and family were always at the center of Hall's life. Serving the former, in May, he spent three weeks serving as a lay representative to the 1870 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, held at Memphis. Shortly after arriving he met Uncle Sam, and the next evening after a committee meeting Hall walked in the park with his cousin Allena, Watson's daughter. Allena was twenty-one and unmarried. "We sat on a bench & I told her the story of my courtship." The biggest question before the Conference was an overture from the northern branch of the church to reunite, and on May 10 Hall reported, "There will be no union." After supper he called for Allena and went to church with her. He spent time visiting with the Watson family. Near the end of his stay he mentioned "a talk with Bro. Cottingham - wonderful revelations of mental experience & spiritual dreams &c." John Wesley had written that dreams may arise from "the present constitution of the body" or "the passions of the mind," but "we are clearly informed in Scripture, that some are caused by the operation of good angels; as others are undoubtedly owing to the power and malice of evil angels." Wesley conceded that it was sometimes impossible to determine which dreams were natural in origin, and which were supernatural. Hall did not say what he thought about "mental experience & spiritual dreams" but his calling them "wonderful" is a clue. Such things had long been part of the fabric of Methodist tradition. Weeks of immersion in church business and conversation

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Wednesday Jany. 19, 1870; Orson Squire Fowler, *A Home for All, or a New, Cheap, Convenient, and Superior Mode of Building* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1848).

and worship with his coreligionists renewed Hall's conviction of sin and his resolve to live a purer life. "It has come into my mind that I can, I ought, I must, I will cut loose from the lingering sins that so easily beset me sometimes - soon - even now I will begin. So much better to be rid of everything that obstructs the exercise of faith. Questionable indulgences - habits of thought - inordinate or sinful affections. Let them all go & do better without them."[591]

When Hall left for home, he took Allena Watson with him for a visit. Henry and Eugenia had buried two daughters between 1860 and 1870, and on June 17 the Halls lost their infant son. "After sinking gradually all night our little son Oscar died about fifteen minutes before six o'clock. They buried him "at sunset after a shower of rain." Oscar had been the namesake of Hall's younger brother who had enlisted in the 28th Texas Cavalry at fifteen and died of disease in 1864. One daughter, five-year-old Hally, remained to them. A few weeks later, Allena boarded a steamboat, returning to Memphis with Jesse Fuller and his father-in-law, Mr. Cooke. Romance had blossomed between Allena and Jesse, and his late wife's father chaperoned their journey to her family in Memphis. In August, Hall filled the pulpit one Sunday in place of the minister, and in early September was invited to deliver a temperance lecture. Jesse Fuller returned from Memphis on September 10, and the next day Fuller visited Hall and told him "a good deal in confidence." Fuller was making plans for his future. Always busy upgrading his home, Hall installed a pipe to bring water from the cistern into the house. Robert E. Lee died in October, and Hall noted that "all the town was in mourning." In late December, Hall

[591] HGH Diary, Memphis May 4th 1870; Tuesday May 10th 1870; Saturday 21st 1870; *Sermons,* 714; HGH Diary, Thursday May 19th 1870.

wrote that Jesse Fuller was "to start the 29th to Memphis to take to wife our handsome cousin Allena Watson."[592]

Life proceeded apace. Hall's diary is mostly a record of work, improvements to his home and garden, church attendance, social calls, and births and deaths. Its brief entries show the rhythm of life in a small southern city, where ordinary days included business and errands and visits. The Halls welcomed a son, Henry Gerard Hall, Jr., on New Year's day 1871. Jesse Fuller had two sons from his first marriage, and in early 1871 Jesse and Allena added a daughter to their family. By early 1872, she had conceived a second daughter. Her father, meanwhile, had written *The Clock Struck One* and asked his nephew, Henry Gerard Hall, to write a review. As a learned man, an attorney and a respected member of the Methodist Church, nepotism aside, Hall was an eminently credible reviewer. Hall wrote in his journal on July 14, 1872 that he had "lately read Rev. S. Watson's book in regard to spirits &c. I begin reviewing today." The manuscript he mailed two weeks later was fifty-one pages long, a detailed point-by-point analysis of Watson's book.

Hall took the position that, "Those incredible results which physical science has accomplished in the material world, have prepared the minds of men for revelations of equally marvelous character in the spiritual world." He was also quick to point out that Watson made no claims not attested to by "Moses and the Prophets and Apostles." There is a world of spirits, and those who were there preserved their identities and could watch

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[592] Ibid., Friday June 17 1870; M. Jane Johansson, *Peculiar Honor: A History of the 28th Texas Cavalry, 1862–1865* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 17; "The Estelle Barlow Story as Told to William Bailey Peyton, III, 10 April 1956," http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/m/c/a/Jane--D-Mcashan/FILE/0006text.txt (accessed April 10, 2009). Estelle Barlow was a granddaughter of Henry Gerard Hall; HGH Diary, Sunday August 7th 1870, Tuesday Sept 6th 187; Saturday Sept 10th 1870, Sunday Sept. 11th 1870; Monday Sept 19th 1870; Thursday Oct. 13th 1870; Wednesday Dec. 28th 1870.

over loved ones on earth. "They visit the scenes and the people of this earth and communicate with men. . . . In all this, there is nothing new or strange to any one who is acquainted with the Old Testament, the New Testament, or the Koran." Watson took exception to the belief of some in their own time that spirits "take no part in secular human history, or in the present age." On this point, wrote Hall, Watson defended himself according to the principles of logic and human understanding. On many points, Hall agreed with Watson, "But it is not so clear that all the angels who minister to mankind are the spirits of men, as Mr. Watson maintains." Hall's reading of scripture found that "in many passages, angels, spirits, and men are distinguished from each other." Hall turned to the necessity for contemporary tests of spirit communication that offered proof beyond the Biblical, and went on to discuss situations in which a medium might have gleaned information from research or clairvoyance. He ruled out these possibilities in Watson's case, since "the known characters of the mediums to whom Mr. Watson applied, renders this supposition untenable. The medium through whom they come, and the person to whom they are directed, say they are genuine and true." Hall admitted that just because he personally had never seen a ghost or attended a séance or heard raps that might have been made by spirits did not mean such things were impossible. They were not, he insisted, in "any disagreement with the teachings of the Bible." He concluded, as had so many before him, that "Perhaps future discussion and investigation will enable us all to know whether these things are so."[593] Hall was not convinced the claims of Modern

[593] *The Clock Struck Three, Being a Review of Clock Struck One, and Reply to It; Part II, Showing the Harmony Between Christianity, Science, and Spiritualism* (Chicago: Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, 1874), 24–27, 46, 50–51.

Spiritualism were an extension of events in Scripture, but he absolutely believed the stories of angels and spirits interacting with men in the Bible.

Watson's life and beliefs were in a time of transition. In August, his daughter Allena gave birth to a second daughter. That November, when he was found guilty by the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, of "writing a book in defense of Spiritualism," it was deemed newsworthy by the *New York Times.* The article reported Watson had acknowledged authorship, "made a full apology," and promised "to withdraw the book from circulation as far as possible."[594] Henry Gerard Hall's journal is probably the best source for tracing Watson's struggle to find his true path. Methodism was the life he had chosen, and he believed Christian Spiritualism was consonant with that faith. Methodism was also hierarchical, and he had been censured for writing *The Clock Struck One.* Watson may have apologized initially because life outside Methodism was unimaginable to him, but he continued to wrestle privately with his beliefs.

Hall received his commission as judge of Caddo Parish on the first day of the new year, and Judge Looney—who would soon become a Spiritualist—administered the oath of office the next day. Hall closed his law practice, but violent resistance to the policies of Congressional Reconstruction continued to destabilize life in northern Louisiana. Jesse Fuller had business problems, and "Political matters are kept in a state of excitement & some uncertainty by persistent efforts of the fusionist to keep up a legislature & government." Hall's Princeton friend and fraternity brother Alexander Field—who would witness spirit communications at the home of Jesse and Allena Fuller a few years later—lived nearby in east Texas. Hall and Field remained close after college, and saw each

[594] "Tennessee. A Methodist Clergyman Censured for Defending Spiritualism," *New York Times* (December 1, 1872), 4.

other frequently. Both were family men, getting on with their lives after serving the Confederacy. On January 7, 1873, Hall wrote, "[W]e had our birthday dinner together again. We are each 40 years old today." Field had named a son born in 1872 Oscar, probably to keep alive the memory of the son his friend had lost in 1870 and of Hall's dead brother.[595] Hall was facing lean times, for he soon learned that because of the unsettled nature of politics his judgeship was tenuous; the situation would remain unresolved for months.

We don't know if Hall had thought much about spirits since he reviewed *The Clock Struck One,* but he was about to. In February, Samuel Watson brought his wife and infant son Sammy to Shreveport. Watson had more than meeting his new grandchild and introducing Allena's new brother to her family on his mind. The day after they arrived, Hall noted, "Found Uncle Sam in my office, talked & went with him to dinner." The next day Watson called and talked, and they went for a walk "to the depot & round the new railroad track - to Fuller's & there I dined." We can infer what Hall and Watson had been so earnestly discussing by Hall's final notation for the day: "At night I read R. D. Owen's 'Debatable Land.'" Robert Dale Owen was the son of Robert Owen, the friend after whom Marcus Winchester of Memphis and his first wife had named one of their sons. It was Robert Owen's "system of communities in parallelograms" that had inspired Abijah

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[595]Zeta Psi Fraternity, *Directory, '46–'93* (New York: Published by Press of John C. Rankin Co., 1893), 28, 30; HGH Diary, 3 - 7. Jany 7th night [1873]; Frederick Clifton Pierce, *Field Genealogy: Being the Record of All the Field Family in America, Whose Ancestors Were in This Country Prior to 1700. Emigrant Ancestors Located in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Virginia. All Descendants of the Fields of England, Whose Ancestor, Hurbutus De la Field, Was from Alsace-Lorraine,* Vol. I (Chicago: Published by W. B. Conkey, 1901), 1092, 1096.

Alley's patented bee house in 1831.[596] Mary Chesnut had made reference to Robert Dale Owen's first Spiritualist book, *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (1860), in her Civil War journal.

In *The Debatable Land Between This World and the Next* (1872) Owen argued that people were living in a rational age, and the "civilized world is gradually settling down to the assurance that natural law is universal, invariable, persistent." The miracles in the Bible were not really miraculous. Owen believed they were "performed under natural law, and if natural laws endure from generation to generation, then, inasmuch as the same laws under which these signs and wonders occurred must exist still, we may expect somewhat similar phenomena at any time." Owen's premise was that religion as taught by Christ was "sure to prevail in the end" but "experimental evidence of the existence of modern spiritual phenomena, if it can be had" would be immeasurably useful in helping people to believe. The book combined a history of religious beliefs and reforms, moving toward chapters on "Christianity, Shorn of Patristic Creeds, a Progressive Science," and "Spiritualism Necessary to Confirm the Truths, and Assure the Progress, of Christianity." Watson would take up Owen's contention—as Protestant Episcopal Bishop Otey may have believed all along—that investigating spiritual communication was a "sacred duty."[597] That point established, Owen discussed the history of spiritual phenomena, their characteristics and manifestations, the identity of spirits and spiritual gifts appearing in the present age. He saw two kinds of Spiritualists, Christians and Radicals. Watson would have concurred with Owen's claim that

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[596] HGH Diary, Feb. 11th [1873]; Feb 12 [1873]; "Beehives," *Western Tiller,* reprint in May 14, 1831 *Genesee Farmer.*

[597] Robert Dale Owen, *The Debatable Land Between This World and the Next* (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1872), vii, ix, 180.

"Spiritualism is the complement of Christianity. All thoughtful believers in the epiphanies of Spiritualism will be Christians as soon as they learn to distinguish between the simple grandeur of Christ's teachings" and the "Augustinian version of St. Paul's theology, as adopted in one form by the Church of Rome, and in another indorsed by Calvin and Luther: a system associated with infallibility and known, among Protestants and Romanists alike, as Orthodoxy." Owen concluded that the reader had to decide "whether, when prudence and reverence preside, a Spirit of truth, from an ultramundane sphere speaking not of itself but from the knowledge which a heavenly residence imparts, may not be the medium, promised by Christ, for the regeneration of mankind."[598] Watson's verbal thrusting and parrying with Dr. Bond of the St. Louis *Advocate* had pushed him to publish his views on spirit communication, and the Memphis Conference's reaction to *The Clock Struck One* had forced him to apologize. Robert Dale Owen's book presented similar views in a similar historical and Christian context. Watson valued Hall's opinion as a fellow Methodist and perhaps also as an attorney.

Hall and his Uncle Sam talked late into the night, and Hall returned home with a gift of marbles from Watson for little Henry. Hall probably told his wife about the conversation, and "Eugenia read to me from R.D. Owen's Book." Henry, and especially Eugenia, would have been thinking about Christian faith and the afterlife just then. She gave birth less than a week later to their daughter Ruby. Hall continued to read and discuss Owen until the Watson family departed for Memphis by way of Marshall, Longview, Galveston and New Orleans. On March 11, Hall wrote that "It seems probable that I will be allowed to enter quietly on the duties of my office as Parish Judge. This will

[598] Ibid., vii, ix, 180, 235, 540.

give me a more settled feeling & my pursuits will be more regular. The weather is bright & mild & things seem fair." Hall's review of *Clock Struck One* had been rejected by the *Southern Methodist Quarterly,* and he took time to write additional comments and sent them to Watson for publication. Both pieces would appear in Watson's *The Clock Struck Three* (1874).[599]

In the first review, Hall had analyzed the book eruditely, ending as most open-minded people did by saying that further investigation might provide answers. By the time Hall wrote the second article, Watson had withdrawn from the Methodist connection and published a small book he called *The Clock Struck Two,* which attacked his critics and reprised his arguments. Hall came to Uncle Sam's defense, observing that "Mr. Watson shows conclusively that John Wesley and Adam Clarke were heretics equally with himself, if it be heresy to believe in the manifestation of spirits after their departure from the body." Hall had been reading more about Modern Spiritualism, and felt "constrained to concede some points as fully settled which I treated before as questionable." Robert Dale Owen, in his opinion, was as unimpeachable a witness as Samuel Watson. Having read the accounts of séances in *That Debatable Land,* Hall was satisfied that the "test of personal, intellectual identity which seemed requisite, has been fully given" with credible "precautions taken to exclude the possibility of deception by any artful human contrivance[.]" Of course, if one believed in the Bible one had to believe this was possible, and if not from good spirits then from "evil spirits of almost unlimited power and knowledge. Some religious persons do assume this position," Hall observed. He had to admit that the manifestations came from spirits, so it remained only

[599] HGH Diary, Feb 12 [1873]; [Feb] 24 [1873]; *Clock Struck Three*, 15–50, 86–121.

to decide "whether they are true or false spirits." Hall pointed out that the Biblical injunctions against consulting spirits were perhaps no more reasonable to Christian Spiritualists of his time than the Biblical restrictions on eating pork or praying outside the temple. Apparently Watson had already adopted the sobriquet of Christian Spiritualist, for Hall used it repeatedly. Christian Spiritualists, he said, were firmly convinced that what was happening was "in fact a renewal, in a more abundant measure, of those spiritual messages to men which were anciently of frequent occurrence," and though such communications had been rare since Biblical times they had never really ceased. The traditions, poetry, superstitions and fables of all nations were full of examples.[600] Christians like Hall and Watson were driven by no other agenda and thinking within no other intellectual framework than the Biblical and Christian authenticity of Spiritualism.

Hall followed this with several pages of the Biblical citations and stories from the classicists that were familiar fodder to Spiritualists who constructed arguments in defense of modern spirit manifestations. Watson and Hall agreed with Owen's assumption that spirit communication must be in accordance with natural and unchanging laws. Hall trotted out the argument that meteorological phenomena that had once been regarded as miraculous were now explained by natural laws, so perhaps spirit communication worked by a law not yet understood. Another thing that impressed Hall was the Spiritualist principle of progression, shown in the rapid evolution of spirit communication from the crude raps to materializations. "Faces and figures now appear and are recognized. Conversation is held in audible language." Ultimately, for Christian Spiritualists like Watson and Owen, and for Henry Gerard Hall, the contention that everything that

[600] *Clock Struck Three*, 87, 93, 95, 96.

happened had to have an explanation in natural law must find a way to make the birth of Christ both exceptional *and* in conformity to natural law. Owen had suggested that "The germ of the Godlike lies, indeed, deep down in our common nature; but ere it fructify, there must be divine breathings from regions purer than ours." A spirit had told Owen that "Christ's mortal body was the result of Mary's perfect faith,"[601] an explanation sufficiently reverent, vague and chaste for Hall and supported by the recent scientific experiments in parthenogenesis (reproduction without impregnation) conducted by Professor Henry Hartshorne. And there, rather abruptly, Hall left the discussion on March 30, 1873.

We have no record of Hall's thoughts until August, when residents of the Mississippi Valley and Gulf South were unaware yellow fever was about to kill thousands of them. Some who survived would consider the comforts of spirit communion. In 1873, yellow fever was epidemic in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. The disease came to New Orleans on a Spanish ship that had sailed from Havana with infected passengers and probably transported in its bilge the larvae of the mosquito that carries the disease. River steamers carried the disease and its vectors to Memphis (two thousand deaths) and Shreveport (seven hundred fifty-nine deaths); a refugee from Shreveport introduced the disease to Calvert, Texas where one hundred twenty-five died. Refugees also brought yellow fever to Marshall, Texas (thirty-six deaths). Another ship introduced the disease at Pensacola (sixty-one deaths), and from there it spread to Montgomery, Alabama and killed one hundred thirty-two people. It had already been a bad year for Memphis. "Seldom or never was city so severely scourged

[601] Ibid., 105; *Debatable Land,* 268–269.

with pestilence during one short twelvemonth," opined a contemporary physician. "January brought with it an epidemic of the small-pox; then came the epizootic, speedily followed by the cholera, which appeared in May and protracted its stay through two and a half months, and on the retreating footsteps of this scourge a mild and beautiful September ushered in an epidemic of the yellow fever."[602]

In Shreveport, Hall opened his first term of the Caddo Parish Court in early August, found the work satisfying, and liked "the exercise well of making up judgments on questions of law." Within a few weeks, people in Shreveport were dying of yellow fever and court was suspended. Jesse Fuller took his family to the country. Hall remained at his post; even when court was not in session the parish judge had business to attend to. His journal is a running account of the disease, deaths and burials until Eugenia and their daughter Hally became ill. People continued to stop by to discuss legal business during the day, leaving him "alone all night with 2 sick & 2 babies. Was called up every few minutes." In two days Eugenia was dead. Before she developed any symptoms, Henry and Eugenia had discussed "the greater earnestness & constancy of our prayers since the sickness has been around us," and he and was assured that "her preperation was made calmly, in full exercise of her faculties before the disease began to affect her."[603]

Samuel Watson, meanwhile, had left the country. Unable to settle on a satisfactory course of action at home, he embarked from New York on June 21, 1873 with a Cook's tour of Europe and was writing about it for the Memphis *Avalanche.* Those articles—and the subsequent book, *A Memphian's Trip to Europe* —did not mention the

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[602] George M. Sternberg, *Report on the Etiology and Prevention of Yellow Fever* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), 48, 44, 45; Lucius Morse, "The Recent Yellow Fever Epidemic in Memphis," *North American Journal of Homeopathy* (May 1874), 425.

[603] HGH Diary, September 11th 1873; Tuesday 23d. [September 1873], Written 27th. [September 1873].

séances he attended while abroad. The party did not return to New York until early September. Coming to home to pestilence in Memphis and terrible news from Shreveport, Uncle Sam Watson sent Hall some meal and a card "anxiously inquiring which I answered." Hall's daughter Hally was getting well.[604] On October 7 Hall made the final entry in his journal. He died of yellow fever three days later, but would continue to advise his Uncle Sam from the spirit world. The worst yellow fever epidemic lay ahead in 1878, and Watson would lose a brother.

The years between the 1873 and 1878 outbreaks of yellow fever would coincide with Samuel Watson's most effective leadership and the heyday of Christian Spiritualism in the South. Watson busied himself preparing the book about his trip to Europe, which was printed for him by the Methodist Publishing House in Memphis, and writing *The Clock Struck Three,* which was published by the Religio-Philosophical Publishing House of Chicago. Watson had been studying Spiritualist literature and making contacts. He had looked into the matter in London, where at one séance he had seen a spirit that "floated about in the air, talking to us as familiarly and as natural as any man." Since returning from Europe, he had been subscribing to Spiritualist publications from London and the United States. He was also cultivating Spiritualist connections in Memphis. When Marcus Winchester's old friend Dr. Erasmus T. Rose died in 1874, Watson preached his funeral sermon.[605]

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[604] Samuel Watson, *A Memphian's Trip to Europe with Cook's Educational Party* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Methodist Publishing House, published for the author, 1874), 5, 346; HGH Diary, Monday Sept. 29, 1873

[605] "John King," *The Spiritual Magazine* (June 1875), 259–260; "Materialization," *The Spiritual Magazine* (January 1875), 3; "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (May 1875), 215.

Watson saw evidence of a groundswell of Christian Spiritualist interest and activity in harmony with his own beliefs. He decided to start a monthly of his own. The *Religio-Philosophical Journal* printed his prospectus, most enthusiastic not about the proposed content or even Watson's character and editorial experience, which it commended almost in an afterthought, but because Watson was "a man of large capital and unlimited credit; this gives to the project, from its inception, a financial standing deserving the entire confidence of the public." A financial collapse in 1873 had been the culmination of many factors. Scandals had plagued the presidency of Ulysses Grant, elected in 1868 and re-elected four years later. The economy was brought to its knees by overly-ambitious and under-capitalized railroad building; banks failed. S. S. Jones, editor of the Chicago-based *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, had witnessed the fallout and had good reason to appreciate the benefits of adequate capitalization. His paper was probably more compatible with the views of southern Spiritualists than any still published in the Northeast, and when the Methodists turned their ire on Watson over *The Clock Struck One,* the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* had given sympathetic front-page coverage to Rev. Watson's story.[606]

The Spiritual Magazine

In January 1875, Watson launched his new Christian Spiritualist monthly, *The Spiritual Magazine.* Below the banner was a quote from Ephesians: "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Watson was staking out a centrist position between two extremes: the reformist

[606] *The Spiritual Magazine* (January 1875), 4; "Clock Struck One," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (January 25, 1873), 1, 5.

and what he thought was the sometimes irreligious agenda of northern Spiritualists ("not sufficiently radical to suit the views of many") and Christians too timid to think and study the Bible for themselves and try the spirits ("those who adhere to creeds and catechisms"). He knew of no paper advocating Spiritualism "in the Southern States." Watson immediately distanced himself from the "free love" taint attached by some to Spiritualism. "Many suppose it gives license to the animal part of our nature, while the reverse is true." Watson staked out the moral high ground. "It shall be our aim to inculcate the strictest morality and obedience to the laws of our physical, mental and moral nature, as being conducive to man's happiness in this life, as well as to his capacity for enjoyment of the other life in the spirit world."[607]

The first article was about "Materialization." Watson had read about new materializing mediums developing everywhere, and had found the materializations he had seen to be the "most satisfactory and demonstrative" of all the spiritual manifestations. Another article, "What Is Spiritualism?" explained that it did not start with the "Rochester Knockings" but had existed in all ages and in all religions. "Protestantism alone has apostasized from the faith and experience of the universal world," but fortunately "through Protestantism daily facts are restoring the empire of Spiritualism to its natural throne in the heart and intellect of man."[608] Spiritualism was "a power sent by God to destroy the greatest curse of modern times—that deadly materialism" begun by "infidel philosophers" and spread by men of science and learning. Materialism had been permitted to "damp the vitality of faith," and left its adherents in "despair in regard to man's future destiny."

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[607] *The Spiritual Magazine* (January 1875), 2, 4–5.

[608] Ibid., 2, 5.

An article on "Bible Spiritualism" by D. Winder of Ohio also emphasized the Christian origins of Spiritualism; he began his discussion with biblical evidence of evil spirits in the story of Saul: "The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him (1 Samuel, xvi, 14)." Like Saul's friends, the author proposed using soft, harmonious music to dispel "all evil feelings and influences" and facilitate "intercourse with pure celestial messengers." Winder closed with a pointed example of how *not* to approach the spirits: "Nothing could be more repulsive to pure and refined spirits, whether in the body or out of it, than the discordant sounds and noise of horns, bells, tambourines, etc., and the communications received under such circumstances, and the phenomena attending them, are all of a character corresponding." Winder was a proponent of quiet home circles, deploring the devolution of public Spiritualism at the hands of professional mediums who produced phenomena for personal gain and were repeatedly accused of fraud. He would become a regular contributor. Watson's publication was distancing itself not only from radicals and creedalists, but also from Spiritualistic showmanship. He favored prayerful family séances. "Our recommendation," wrote Watson, "is for all to have their home altars, and loved ones will meet and commune with them.[609]

Such stories, along with the tremendous popularity of *The Gates Ajar* and the efforts of local and professional mediums, helped revive interest in Spiritualism. Letters that had begun coming in from all over the country as soon as Watson sent out his prospectus were the beginnings of a new created community of Christian Spiritualists, and he published some of them in his first issue of the *Spiritual Magazine.* Robert M.

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[609] D. Winder, "Bible Spiritualism," *The Spiritual Magazine* (January 1875), 14, 18; "An Interesting Visitor," *The Spiritual Magazine* (January 1875), 19.

Cubley of Corsicana, Texas was sixty-seven years old when he wrote to Samuel Watson, saying he had been a "Methodist local preacher thirty-five years." Cubley was attending spiritual circles where they received "sermons from Mr. J. Wesley, our father, at every regular meeting[.]" He had read Watson's books, "One, Two, and Three" and was "deeply interested." Cubley asked for a copy of the first issue of the magazine, and offered to do all he could to promote it. A grandson, Sammy Hurlock, left reminiscences that paint a vivid picture of Cubley. These have been handed down in his family.[610]

Sammy Hurlock remembered a dour old man. Robert M. Cubley's early life had been given over to privileged dissipation before he came to Christ. Sammy's depiction of his grandfather's youth was somewhat reshaped by years of retelling and remembering, but apparently as a young man Cubley had developed consumption and decided to go to Texas, taking along his faithful personal slave. Somewhere in Alabama, Cubley became too weak to continue and his servant ran to the nearest house for help. The family took Cubley in, and one of the daughters nursed him back to health. They married some time after the "fall of the stars" in 1833. "Many times," remembered Sammy, "I have heard him give an account of that memorial event." Revival preachers had been holding camp meetings in the woods throughout the preceding summer, and "religious feeling was running high." Late on the night of November 12, 1833 the household was aroused by loud sounds of agony from the slave quarters. The heavens were ablaze, and the "stars" were coming down like snowflakes. "It did not take Grandpa and the other white folks long to realize the importance of this event." It was the end of times the preachers had warned them about. "It did not take them long to join the Negroes in praying and

[610] I am grateful to Mary Turney of Rusk, Texas for sharing parts of Sammy Hurlock's memoir, and for her permission to use them.

beseeching the great God to save them and take them to Heaven. Grandpa was doing his full share of praying. At the same time he kept one eye open to see the Lord when He came." Despite his aversion to associating with slaves on earth or in heaven, Robert Cubley was converted that night by two slave preachers from the quarters, "and in a loud voice proclaimed his change of heart." Just at that moment, Cubley saw something kick up dust. He found a very hot object as big as a marble. Ever after, Cubley used to take it out of his pocket and say, "See this little rock, it made a preacher out of me. The night I got religion, the Lord sent it to me from the Heavens, I have had it ever since."[611]

When the Lord did not come, people crafted a postmillennialist rationale. They had been given a warning—and a last chance—to put their spiritual houses in order. "A great wave of religious excitement and enthusiasm swept the country. The preacher was everywhere and in his glory leading the sinners to repentance," and Cubley was among the most zealous of the itinerating revival preachers. He never let go of the faith he had found the night the stars fell, and "believed in the Bible from Kiver to Kiver." When Sammy learned at school that the earth rotated around the sun, he was amazed. Sunday school lessons taught that Joshua had stopped the sun, so it *must* go around the earth. He mentioned it to his grandfather, who was quiet for a long time before roaring, "Wasn't it in the Bible? If it is in the Bible, it is true. Anyone who for a moment doubts the Bible is surely bound for hell and eternal fire." Cubley was a praying man, leading as the family knelt in prayer morning and night. "The night after I suggested that maybe Joshua didn't really stop the sun, Grandpa prayed long and loud for me." We might characterize Cubley as having required an act of God to bring on his conversion, and then never wavering

[611] Mark Littmann, *Heavens on Fire: The Great Leonid Meteor Storms* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5, 8, 10

from his calling to spread the old-time revival message of hellfire and repentance. Sammy as an adult described his grandfather as "a Methodist preacher of the most earnest and severest school of the religious bigots." How, then, did Robert Cubley become a Spiritualist? Sammy never mentioned the subject, but there is evidence of Spiritualist activity that Cubley would have found in harmony with his belief system in the counties adjacent to Navarro, where he lived, by the early 1870s. He may have been influenced by Henry and Alice Pierce, themselves homegrown southern Spiritualists who relocated to Waco by early 1872.

Henry Pierce of Nacogdoches had been listed as a speaker and his wife as a "test, writing and clairvoyant" medium in a national Spiritualist directory for 1871. He had begun writing to the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* from Waco. He sent a list of questions and answers for Sunday schools that suggests he was both a Spiritualist and a Christian just like Robert Cubley: "The Bible is sufficient for us, and all who doubt it, or give heed to reason and present inspiration, will be burned in hell forever." A month later Pierce wrote, "The more we investigate this subject in the light of our magnetic and psychological relations, the firmer become our convictions, that the presence and agency of spirits furnish the only rational solution of these mysteries." By June, Waco resident G. P. Dutton wrote that the cause "was never in as flourishing a condition as at this time," and they had just had lectures by Mrs. Torrey and Mrs. Talbot, both Texans. It was almost certainly the Pierces who had renewed interest in Waco. Farmer and former Confederate John S. Haley wrote in August that there were three large circles in his neighborhood, and Mrs. Pierce "gave several wonderful and soul convincing tests which made some of the skeptics yield." Dr. Pierce had been the speaker at a local Spiritualist

picnic. "Our meeting was some twelve miles from the town of Waco, in a neighborhood whose atmosphere is becoming very much spiritualized." The only location answering that description is the town of Marlin, where by the late 1870s the residents left evidence of a good deal of Spiritualist activity. Waco was the only place near Cubley's home where there is a record of Spiritualist circles and speakers before he began trying the spirits. He did mention reading Watson's books, so perhaps they were the genesis of the séances in Corsicana. However he came to spirit communion, Robert M. Cubley curiously seemed to have a Fundamentalist frame of mind that dictated how one must believe and behave, but was open to the Spirit wherever it was made manifest.

Watson knew he had an influential friend in Robert Dale Owen, who shared his belief that Spiritualism and Christianity were compatible and that Christian Spiritualism more closely approximated the Apostolic Church than did any modern denomination. Dr. Watson's second issue ran a laudatory review of the first volume of his friend Eugene Crowell's *The Identity of Spiritualism and Christianity.* Crowell dedicated the book to "all liberal minds in Christian churches who are disposed to welcome new light upon the spirituality of the Bible. . . ." Crowell was a New Yorker, the son of a Presbyterian minister, and a close friend of Robert Dale Owen. Watson had enjoyed Dr. Crowell's "princely hospitality in his palatial residence" in Brooklyn, "at different times."[612]

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[612] *The Yearbook of Spiritualism for 1871,* spirithistory.com; H. C. Pierce, "Questions for Sunday Schools," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (April 27, 1872), 7; Dr. H. C. Pierce, "Doubles—Do We Leave the Body?" *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (May 18, 1872); "Voices from the People," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (June 6, 1872), 6; *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (August 3, 1872), 6. "Dr. Crowell's Book," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 39–42; Eugene Crowell, *The Identity of Primitive Christianity and Modern Spiritualism,* Vol. I (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1874), iii; Richard William Leopold, *Robert Dale Owen: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 413; "The Obituary Record: Dr. Eugene Crowell," *New York Times* (October 30, 1894), 2; "Dr. Crowell's Book," *American Spiritual Magazine* (February 1876), 60.

Under the title "Christian Spiritualism," Watson made note of the *Banner of Light*'s recent announcement that there was a meeting of Christian Spiritualists in New York, who called it "our new movement." This seems to have taken Watson by surprise; he and Owen and Crowell and others in his sphere thought they were the "new movement" of Christian Spiritualists, and Watson saw his *Spiritual Magazine* as its periodical voice. He printed a letter he had written to tell the *Banner* how glad he was to learn that they had Christian Spiritualists in New York, to remind them why southern Spiritualists could not in the past make common cause with them, and to wave a small olive branch. Spiritualists, meaning northerners who claimed to represent the cause, had been "antagonistic and radical," Watson told them, but "I believe there are persons in different parts of the country who are controlled to promote that kind of Spiritualism in which we believe. This I have from both worlds." It was a carefully worded gambit, suggesting they might be able to work together if New York's Christian Spiritualists could avoid being "antagonistic and radical."[613] Watson might be seen as evidence of the southern need to cloak innovation in traditional appeals and authentic sources, particularly in the context of Reconstruction. He had seen Northern Methodists alienate his southern brethren in the church, and knew he had to prevent any of the North's "isms" from attaching themselves to the Christian Spiritualism he preached. They had no place in his religious agenda, and would subvert his ability to convert southern Christians to Bible-supported Spiritualism. The South was his base, and he needed to solidify it. Letters from readers continued to encourage him.

T. H. Peck wrote to Watson from Harrisburg, Arkansas to say that he and Dr. J. A. Meek had been the only advocates of Spiritualism a year earlier, but there were not

[613] "Christian Spiritualism," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 42.

less than two hundred now in their two counties and more were added every day. Opposition from organized denominations was at first open. "Dr. Meek held several public discussions with the clergy, but meeting with overwhelming defeat, they have changed their mode of warfare" and switched to tactics of a "sly, cowardly and hidden nature." Peck's eight-year-old son was a developing medium, and "If we had only a good physical test medium, we could sweep Arkansas. Can you not send us such a medium?"[614] Nothing in this letter specifically mentioned Christian Spiritualism or the Bible or angels, but it told Watson there were hundreds in Arkansas prepared to think for themselves and receive his teachings.

Watson found the discourse heartening. "Though the moderate phases of Spiritualism have been known and commented upon for over a quarter of a century, they have had a fair discussion in print only about two years." Everyone knew public discourse had focused on Spiritualism's relationship to radical agendas and legerdemain. Watson credited Robert Dale Owen for generating much of this new discussion, and was delighted to see that "The illustrated papers of the country are giving pictorial representations of 'materialized' forms—Katie King and others." The news that Philadelphia mediums Mr. and Mrs. Holmes and their spirit "Katie King" had been exposed as a frauds in late 1874 and that Robert Dale Owen had withdrawn the endorsement that was about to appear in the *Atlantic Monthly* came too late for Watson to pull this editorial, but he managed to insert a notice near the back of the issue saying

[614] *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 43–44.

"there are Katie Kings in all organizations, whose existence does not affect the genuine article."[615]

Watson praised the sanctity of the home séance, but did not have a "home medium." Before emancipation, he had apparently relied on one or two of his servants. There had been two young women of color in his household in 1870, but by 1880 they were gone. Without a medium in his family circle he had no choice but to rely on the professionals.

The most fascinating thread in the magazine is Watson's reports on his own investigations of Spiritualism. It was a very personal quest for truth that he shared in those pages. Annie C. Torrey Hawks would be *The Spiritual Magazine's* in-house medium, furnishing readers with "communications from the first minds on the other side." As in the *Banner of Light* and the *Herald of Progress,* which featured regular

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[615] "A Faith Which Progresses," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 45; "The Katie King Fraud," *New York Times* (December 29, 1874), 4. ". . . Many people, probably, will read the exposure of the fraud as made in the Philadelphia papers before they see the remarkable contribution to the *Atlantic Monthly* by Mr. Robert Dale Owen. . . . Mr. Owen not only saw a great many things which the impostors desired him to see, but he saw, or thought he saw, many which his faith made it desirable to be apparent. . . . It now turns out that "Katie King" was personated by a young woman who thought she had no honest way of earning a living. The cabinet from which her appearances were made communicated with a back room, by means of an artful contrivance covering the door into that room against which the cabinet was placed. A boarded-up window in the rear of the cabinet also afforded a place of retreat in certain cases. The vanishings and apparitions were managed by the skillful use of a black cloth. The cabinet was painted black inside; no light penetrated it; the room was dimly lighted, and the "spirit," by retreating into the gloom of its closet, gradually enveloping itself in black cloth, uncovering itself, mounting a black-covered stool, produced all the effects of dissolution, reappearance, and levitation which so deluded the spectators. A partial obscurity favored the deception, and an imaginative faith supplied all deficiencies. For example, Mr. Owen firmly believed that he saw the spirit of "Katie King" emerge from the floor of the cabinet. The young woman who personated the materialized spirit on that occasion explains that she rose up from behind a black cloth while crouching on the floor. Obviously she did not even come up through a trap, but Mr. Owen *thought* she came up as if *through* the floor, It is interesting to see how faith in the supernatural agency assists the physical senses. Mr. Owen began by conceding that this could not be the work of human agency; he satisfied himself that a human being could not be introduced into that cabinet; therefore no part of the subsequent performances was too gross to convince him that the whole thing was a fraud. Egyptian priests managed their followers on precisely the same principle."; *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 67; *Spiritualism, a Popular History*, 156, says the debunking was the work of a man who became suspicious when he "one night noticed that Katie King had singularly foul breath for a spirit[.]"

columns of spirit messages, Watson would have one too. Annie C. Torrey Hawks, formerly of Texas, had married Mathew Hawks. Hawks had been a hardware merchant in Memphis before the Civil War, and an active layman in the Episcopal Church there when James Hervey Otey was bishop of the diocese, but we do not know how or when he became a Spiritualist. We know a little more about the medium. Watson printed a brief biography of her mediumship. "As she will be associated with us in conducting the Magazine, we thought its readers would like to know her antecedents." Annie C. Taylor Wier of New Braunfels, Texas was the child of a Scottish father and an Irish mother. She married Jacob Tudor Torrey, called Tudor. The first of several Torrey brothers had come to Texas by 1838, and as Indian traders Torrey and Brothers "became vital to the success of Houston's Indian policy." Tudor Torrey died in 1864, and their only child, a three-year-old boy, within a year. "My church afforded me no consolation in my great trial. I prayed as only the heart-stricken can pray. But no light came," she wrote of that time. Mrs. Torrey spent four years "in seeking, not finding; in knocking, the door remaining closed." Then she met a Spiritualist who lived in New Braunfels, and joined the woman and her children around a table. "The daughter was the medium." After fifteen minutes the table began to tremble and rise. Mrs. Torrey assumed it was electricity, "gathered from the atmosphere through the magnetic principle of our beings, we forming the chain which aided us to throw off this vapor." Once that connection was established, "the intelligence that governs this and causes the answers," she thought, was "nothing but our own minds acting upon the electric chain."[616] In other words, the electrical connection enabled clairvoyance and allowed the mind in some way to act upon the table.

The public had for decades been gleaning bits of "scientific" explanation for mesmeric and spiritual phenomena from the press and books, and Mrs. Torrey's was a common understanding of how people could convince themselves spirits caused something that actually had a scientific explanation. The medium began to write: "My wife, I am glad to meet you. Tudor." Mrs. Torrey was not, she said, impressed, since her husband had been well known throughout the state and had lived for a number of years in New Braunfels. But something drew her back to try again, and she visited frequently and gradually came to believe. While at the home of another friend, a good Baptist, she showed him a copy of the New York *Sun* with instructions for making a planchette, and her friend made one. At home, she fashioned one of her own. Her first success as a medium was in 1868, sitting with her parents, and she wrote to the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* about it. Mrs. Torrey moved to Houston with her parents in 1870, and soon found a mentor. Once she was more fully developed as a medium, she visited Mobile, where Mathew Hawks was working as a cotton buyer. She spent time in Galveston "as a private medium in social circles," and was again invited to Mobile. Colonel Hay, formerly of Texas, requested that she stop in Atlanta on her way back to Texas. Mobile and Atlanta asked her back, and she received invitations from Chattanooga and Memphis, where she settled down with Mathew Hawks and worked as a medium.[617] Landing the position of

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[616] "Mrs. Annie C. Torrey," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 79; "A Medium's History," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 69; Myra Lee Adams Goff, John Torrey Important Businessman in Early NB," *Around the Sophienburg* http://sophienburg.com/blog/?p=1120 (accessed March 30, 2010); Henry C. Armbruster, "Torrey, John Frink (1817–1893)," *Handbook of Texas Online* http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/TT/fto22.html (accessed March 30, 2010); "A Medium's History," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 69.

[617] "A Medium's History," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 69–74.

conduit to wise spirits for Samuel Watson's paper brought her name to national prominence.

On an icy January day Watson slipped on the steps and broke two bones in his leg. By late January he had begun having séances to seek wisdom from the spirit spheres every Friday in his bedchamber, since he was still immobilized. Mrs. Hawks was the medium, but we do not know who else was in attendance. The identity of the spirits who appeared at séances says a great deal about the people who sought them. Most who tried the spirits were seeking consolation; they wanted to hear from parents, spouses, siblings, children who had crossed over the river. Samuel Watson was one of these. But Watson was also seeking above all validation and encouragement, and much of it came from the spirits of liberal northern theologians. At the first séance, the spirit of Unitarian theologian William Ellery Channing was the conductor, guiding other spirits to the medium. Watson asked questions, the spirit responded, and all was published in a column Watson dubbed the "Inner Life Department." The spirit of Dr. Channing, whose liberal theology had influenced New England's Transcendentalists, initially advised that "free thought" should express only "the more exalted ideas of the pure spirit of progression. The words free love must not wind their poisoned fangs around the leaves that are to receive the pure teachings of Spirituality." Jesse Babcock Ferguson was the spirit who came to answer questions at the second séance, but this was preceded by a lengthy invocation and then a message from the spirit of an Irish patriot that included this admonition: "The beautiful religion of Spiritual Christianity that is now dawning for the first time in the Southern States of America, must be advanced by the laws of charity, made perfect by works." Ferguson's spirit advised, "Live to love thy neighbor as thyself,"

and "Let your lives be so pure that the world may know there is no evil in you; abiding by those laws that promote perfect health; the purity of your spirit perfecting your body."[618] These early spirit messages were focused on purity of body, mind and action. Watson must avoid all that had tainted Spiritualism in the past. At the same time, the affirmation of the spirits of men such as Channing and Ferguson created a usable, religious Spiritualist past on which Watson could build.

Watson's actions sometimes belied his avowal of the superiority of home mediums and sacred family circles, and the magazine's own efforts to offer insights from the "best minds" in the world of spirits. He had a seemingly unquenchable curiosity about what new wonders the spirits might next display at public séances. Because he was known and trusted, Watson's was frequently asked where one might go in Memphis to see a good medium. He wrote an enthusiastic article about the performances of a local public medium, Mrs. Miller, who is elusive in the historical record. Watson reported that Miller, firmly tied, sat in a chair behind some blankets that had been hung. "Several bells, iron rings, an accordeon and chair were placed inside of the curtains." Soon a rattling was heard and a light called for, and the rings and chair were hanging on her arms. As soon as the front blanket fell, the things fell from her arms." The marvels were repeated, the accordion played. Watson and his friends returned another night, and "wonderful manifestations occurred." Mrs. Miller's main "control," or controlling spirit, was an Indian named Redface. Redface spoke from behind the curtain, commanding Watson to sing "On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand." Others joined in, and as they sang faces began

[618] "Report of the Proceedings of the First Séance, Held at the Residence of Dr. Watson," *The Spiritual Magazine* (March 1875), 116–117; "Inner life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (March 1875), 120–121.

to appear at the aperture in the blanket, "sometimes two or three at a time." A woman's arms and torso were visible, nearly reaching the ceiling, playing the accordion. The spirits called her Frances. Mrs. Miller slipped down in her chair, and Redface called her husband to come and pull her up. Watson asked Redface to show himself, as he had promised he would. "Me coming out soon," was the reply, and the spirit said he thought he would be able to the next Friday night. Redface said there was a squaw with a papoose who wanted to come out, and that it was "Mollie Watson, your wife." More hymns were sung, and Redface shouted out his agreement with their promises. Watson was deeply moved. He had been through the ceremonies of the Church, the Masons, the Knights Templar and the Odd Fellows, but none had ever given the feeling of nearness to the spirit world he had just experienced. "The time has come spoken of by Jesus, when we shall see the angels. Before another number of this periodical is issued, we expect much greater wonders, of which our readers shall be informed."[619]

Watson stressed that the blankets that comprised Mrs. Miller's "cabinet" were used to exclude the light and were held up by a "light frame[.]" The room was on a lower floor, "plastered on the four sides and ceiling, with but one door. There is no possibility for any kind of deception."[620] At a subsequent séance, the first spirit to emerge from behind the blankets had been Watson's late wife Mollie, who "took a chair, but soon got up and took the chair to the other side of the room." The first Mrs. Watson was at least a foot taller than Mrs. Miller, as was the materialized form, which moved around the room and clapped her hands. "Two others came out who were not seen so distinctly, but talked

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[619] "Two Seances with Mrs. Miller. Spirits Show Themselves, Talk, Sing and Play," *The Spiritual Magazine* (January 1875), 20–22.

[620] "Recent Materializations," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 67.

to their friends in a full, clear voice. Redface says next time they expect to sit down and talk with us freely." The thrill of seeing his dead wife overwhelmed him, and he would keep going back to Mrs. Miller, hoping for more and better materializations.

After Mollie materialized, he was anxious to know what she would say about the séance, so he sat down with a medium who knew nothing of what had transpired. Mollie's spirit wrote that she had his second wife's "little babe" with her and it had taken several tries to appear in more than partial form. The medium Watson consulted was probably Annie C. T. Hawks.

Watson also recommended Miss Clara Robertson, who did slate writing, as "one of the best with whom we are acquainted." In addition, Miss Robertson materialized hands in open daylight, "and once they took our pocket handkerchief from us. Our opinion is, if Miss Clara would go into a cabinet, the materialization would be wonderful." Mrs. Miller also used slate writing, where a blank slate was written on by spirits under test conditions. The writing was "sometimes done between two slates together," Watson testified, "both the inner sides being filled with writing." Slate writing tests could be very convincing, but often involved simple trickery—a clever device "absurd in its simplicity" as one author put it.[621]

Miss Clara Robertson was the daughter of a Memphis lawyer, another home-grown southern medium. Most of the first layer of information about her is found in books of ghost lore. As the story goes, on February 21, 1871 Miss Clara was practicing the piano in an upstairs room at Brinkley College, a Memphis school for girls. A young

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[621] "Memphis Mediums," *The Spiritual Magazine* (January 1875), 23; William E. Robinson, *Spirit Slate Writing and Kindred Phenomena* (New York: Munn & Company, Scientific American Office, 1898), 5–8.

girl in a pink dress appeared. Clara screamed, ran into the adjoining bedroom, and dove under the covers with a girl who was ill. Both girls saw the form come across the room, place a hand on the pillow, and pull Clara's hair. The episode created quite a sensation, and Clara was interviewed by the Memphis *Avalanche.* The ghost told Clara where a cache of valuable items was buried under a stump, but said that Clara would have to find it herself. The *Avalanche* story about it, "Brinkley Female College Haunted in an Uproar of Terror and Confusion," spooked some people and reportedly sent "thousands" to the grounds of the school with shovels. Nothing was found. The ghost appeared to Clara and directed her to go to the school and dig. As her shovel hit something in the already deep hole, she collapsed in exhaustion but her father was able to retrieve the jar. The jar was later stolen, but Clara parlayed the episode and publicity into professional mediumship.[622]

Watson believed the experiences he had with these mediums meant he was on the verge of new revelations, and entertained the hope that they would be of profound religious importance. He wanted to share the good news from the spirit world, and his excitement about what lay in store was evident to his readers. He thought the most important manifestations were those in which spirits materialized because they gave the most convincing evidence of spirit return to seekers; those required a specialized medium. Watson was no stranger to materializations, but probably had never expected to see them in Memphis. He had encountered a spirit called John King more than twenty years earlier "in Boston with the Davenport children, and talked to him freely in one of their seances." Then in 1873 Watson *saw* the spirit John King "in London, where he floated about in the air, talking to us as freely as any one could." The Kings had first

[622] Alan Brown, *Haunted Places in the American South* (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2002), 197–202.

spoken and partially materialized at John Koons's spirit room in Ohio; John King was spirit Katie King's father. Since the first raps from the Fox sisters, people had wanted something more and better. New forms of mediumship had developed. There were reports at both public and home circles of disembodied hands in the 1850s. Leah Fox Fish Underhill seems to have pioneered full-form manifestations in 1860, when visitors to her séances would see a "veiled female figure leave the cabinet and walk about the room." In the darkened room, the figure seemed luminous. Messages from loved ones were wonderful, but how much more reassuring to actually see them reappear. Katie Fox had the first of more than four hundred séances for a New York banker in 1861, and sat for him for six years. The man believed he touched and talked to his dead wife at the séances just as he had done while she was alive. Later Benjamin Franklin appeared for him. Not surprisingly, the power to materialize spirits spread quickly to other mediums.[623] Public mediums had different specialties but used many of the same techniques. Mrs. Miller of performed some of the same tricks done by the Davenport brothers and physical medium Charles Read (of the iron ring), who continued to convince believers even after being caught in the act of faking manifestations. She had the spirits invite her sitters back, promising more in the future, just like the Fox sisters. And she absolutely convinced Samuel Watson, just as other mediums induced thousands of other reasonable, educated people to believe they could not only communicate with but also be physically reunited in this world with their dead.

Most private and public mediums in Memphis were females. Mrs. Hawks's mediumship was important to *The Spiritual Magazine*, but initially all the articles were

[623] "Mr. and Mrs. Holmes," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 248–249; *Spiritualism, a Popular History*, 156, 137–139.

written by men. Watson's stable of contributors included men who shared his focus on Christian Spiritualism. He did not require that they live in the South, only that they espouse no agenda besides Christian Spiritualism. Long-time Ohio Spiritualist Hudson Tuttle contributed articles to *The Spiritual Magazine.* Tuttle's father, who sounds much like Robert Cubley, had corrected Hudson's childish laughter with a reminder that "Christ never laughed. He wept. You had better cry than laugh." Hudson Tuttle said his mother, "true to her Highland blood, had the gift of second sight; her predictions were remarkably correct[.]"[624] Tuttle's family, like that of many Americans north and south, had brought supernatural beliefs and traditions from the British Isles that were still a component of how they interpreted the world around them.

Women sent a few letters, and slowly began to write for the magazine as well. The first such submission was from Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, who had visions and believed that the spirit of her dead brother had brought her to her dying father in Memphis during the war. She sent a poem on the subject of "Ministering Angels."

Submissions came from friends and occasionally from total strangers. Someone from Okolona, Mississippi contributed an article on "The 'After-Life' of Elijah the Prophet." Watson's friend T. B. Taylor identified himself to readers as a graduate of McKendree College and, like Watson, "brought up a Methodist of the 'strictest sect.'" Taylor had been for twenty-five years a member of the clergy. He thanked God and "the angel world" for finally freeing him from the fear of death.[625] Taylor, Watson, Tuttle and

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[624] Hudson Tuttle, *Arcana of Nature* with an Introduction by Emmet Densmore (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1909), 41.

[625] "Introductory Letter: Life Experiences,--First Steps in Spiritualism," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 61–62.

many of their fellow Christian Spiritualists had been raised in a Protestant, often Methodist, rigor. Spirit communion offered a new light on faith that fused the strict Biblicalism of their religious tradition with the stories of the supernatural in their own families. As long as Watson remained focused on drawing together a movement of Spiritualists with Christ and the Bible as its foundation, his new movement prospered.

More publications had printed favorable notices of Watson's new paper, and he shared these with readers. The *Masonic Jewel* of Memphis, whose editor Andrew Wheeler had attended a séance in 1859 with Jesse Ferguson and Lucy Lenore Winchester, wrote to endorse Watson's endeavor, saying "Perhaps there is no man living that has embraced Spiritualism, that has created so much of a sensation in the religious world as the conversion of Br. Watson to this new doctrine." Other Spiritualist publications clearly understood that Watson was a southerner and his focus was religious, but were hopeful that he might influence other Christians—and perhaps southerners—to be more receptive to their philosophy. The *Banner of Light* wished "the fullest measure of success may attend our Southern contemporary," and applauded Watson's "commendable boldness" in severing his connection with the Methodist Church. The *Religio-Philosophical Journal* opined that Watson's monthly would "supply a vast want in spiritual literature," by appealing to "a large class of Spiritualists who are honest seekers for truth, but have a hereditary predilection for the Christian limitation of our heaven-born Philosophy of Life." A California paper announced that Watson planned to "advocate Spiritualism from a Christian standpoint, and may possibly enlist a large class

who would not read ordinary spiritual publications," noting that *Gates Ajar* had sold well because it was "a Christian story with a Spiritualist squint[.]"[626]

Watson had a lot of business to clear away in the first few issues. A friend from Helena, Arkansas, where Watson had family and property (once home to an old clock that occasionally struck one), wrote to ask if it were true that Watson had recanted. "Many of my Methodist opponents will stick to it that you have not only apologized, but renounced Spiritualism." Watson had done precisely that according to the *New York Times,* but he assured his readers there was not a word of truth to those rumors, and reprised the story of his séances with Bishop Otey. Time and circumstance were tweaking Watson's memory, and except for his reminiscences and Henry Gerard Hall's journal there is no record of Watson's spiritual struggle between his recantation and becoming the South's spokesman for Christian Spiritualism. He declared that once convinced in Otey's circle "beyond the possibility of a doubt," he had professed his belief from the pulpit and "From that day to this we have never for a moment doubted."[627]

The magazine's organizing principle was Christian Spiritualism, with articles explaining how the Bible was in harmony with both Spiritualism and science. Letters of appreciation came from all over the country, especially from Methodists. These Watson happily excerpted, but he endeavored to remain open minded about Spiritualists who had a different perspective. Former Virginian William Emmette Coleman, Richmond's original non-Christian Spiritualist, subscribed. He wrote encouragingly that a magazine conducted by an able Christian like Watson "may be able to accomplish much more in the propagation and advancement of *the essential truths* of Spiritualism among those

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[626] "Complimentary," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 64; Ibid., 65–66.

[627] "Recantation," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 78–79.

affiliated with the churches than could be effected by us Spiritualists of a more radical, and (as your *Christian* friends call us) 'infidel' standard." Coleman reminded Watson that "like yourself, I was a Methodist" but that once he learned the truths of the "harmonial Philosophy" he abandoned all sectarian religion, "Christianity, as a system, included." Coleman was a religious relativist, for whom all "truth is alike sacred and divine, and all reverenced by me alike," and who followed only the dictates of his conscience. He proposed to Watson that "the essential principles of the *Christian* Spiritualists and the rational Spiritualists are very much the same, and both are working for the same end[.]" Watson published Coleman's letter, reaffirming that he was steadfastly Christian but admitting he did not believe "that any human organization has all truth. Each may have some, but truth and error are mixed together. The more we become developed, the more charity we will have for those who differ with us."[628] Watson was inviting dialogue, and witnessing his faith through his actions, but the key word was "human." Watson still believed God and Christ *were* perfect, even if man's interpretation sometimes erred. Surely he understood that Christian Spiritualists and rational Spiritualists were not "working for the same end." Nor were their "essential principles" the same. Perhaps he hoped to bring people like Coleman to Christ.

Modern Spiritualism had been around for a quarter of a century, but as new people became interested the same old questions had to be answered again. Watson filtered the answers through Christian Spiritualism. The second issue had a piece on "Mesmerism, or Animal Magnetism, and Clairvoyance." People wanted to know how to go about communicating with the spirits. The writings of leading Spiritualists were

[628] "Letter from a 'Rational' Spiritualist," *The Spiritual Magazine* (March 1875), 90–92.

revisited and discussed and the writers themselves sometimes joined these conversations. And Watson continued to extend the hand of fellowship. He averred there was by 1875 "a good state of feeling in the South toward Northern people." Any who came to live among them were welcome if they "come to make an honest living," but he reiterated the longstanding message that a man from either section who "favors the *Free Love* doctrine, 'no matter what his abilities or literary attainments are,' will find no favor, we think, in our Southern country." Yankees were welcome if they did not come to take advantage of the South or inflict their "isms" upon it. Most important was moral purity. "Spiritualism should cleanse us from all filthiness of flesh and spirit here, that we may be qualified for the society of the good."[629] His message was Christian Spiritualism but he was an evangelist and open to dialogue with those did not share his religious perspective. So long as Watson kept Christ and the Bible as the focus of a regional ministry, all was well.

Having spent his life working within Methodism's clearly structured and very effective organization, Watson was receptive to suggestions that organizing would be just the thing for his new movement. While he believed the home was the proper place for circles, he endorsed creating community associations that would find a place to meet "as often as practicable" for "conferences and lectures. In this way a bond of union would be formed by which concert of action might be obtained, and spiritual interests promoted." Watson consulted his friends in the spirit world, who sent their support. The spirit of Judge Henry Gerard Hall promised to gather some others and "give you something upon any topic you desire." Watson's first father-in-law, his old family physician Erasmus. T. Rose, his father and a brother were among the spirits who sent comfort during his "forty

[629] "Mesmerism, or Animal Magnetism, and Clairvoyance," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 34–38; "An Erroneous impression," *The Spiritual Magazine* (March 1875), 102.

days and forty nights" of suffering in bed as his broken leg healed, and helped Watson bear it "patiently and cheerfully, as all should do under similar circumstances."[630]

Watson was willing to believe the spirits capable of using any means to reach out and give comfort to those still in the flesh. Arkansan James N. Austell wrote to Watson about a wonderful spirit photographer who had produced "a perfect likeness of my wife and baby, who but a few months before had been laid away in the ground." Austell had organized a small circle that met twice a week, and hoped to develop a medium.[631]

In addition to promoting localized Spiritualist activity, Watson's movement drew like-minded Spiritualists to Memphis. J. M. Peebles, who had begun writing for *The Spiritual Magazine* in 1875, lectured there on "Spiritualism the Base of All Religions;" Watson regretted that they could not keep him there longer, but Peebles had an engagement in New Orleans. Dr. McFall, a Nashville physician who had become a medium, visited and held a séance in Watson's home. Watson invited S. S. Jones, editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal,* to be his guest and speak in Memphis. Jones's published remarks about that trip began in a way not calculated to win southern hearts and minds, suggesting the South should raise less cotton and more on which it could feed itself. He made it clear that Memphis had many Spiritualists of "influence and affluence" and needed an organization because "the burden of public meetings falls on a few heroic souls," by which he probably meant Samuel Watson. Jones said many of Watson's friends in the Methodist clergy continued to visit him and would preach Spiritualism

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[630] "Organization," "Inner life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (March 1875), 122; "Our Spirit Friends Interested," *The Spiritual Magazine* (March 1875), 124; "Our Sad Mishap," *The Spiritual Magazine* (March 1875), 125–126; "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (May 1875), 215.

[631] "Spirit Photography," *The Spiritual Magazine* (May 1875), 218.

openly "if they could afford it financially!" Jones mentioned Mrs. Hawks and Miss Clara Robertson favorably. One thing that particularly impressed editor Jones was a materializing séance conducted by starlight in an open lot. Mrs. Miller became clairaudient, hearing spirit voices, and through her they instructed the observers to move back "two or three rods," or at least 30 feet. They could see Mrs. Miller distinctly, Jones reported. She knelt in prayer, and when she rose there was a spirit form by her side, clothed in white. Another spirit appeared, then another who looked like a soldier in a dark suit. Jones did not say if the three spirits appeared simultaneously, nor if they vanished as the exhausted medium fell to the ground. Jones also met Dr. McFall in Memphis, describing him as "clairvoyant from childhood" and "formerly a medical practitioner as well as Representative and Senator in the Tennessee Legislature." A few months later Mary Dana Shindler wrote to Watson, saying that the spirit of her husband wished her to come to Memphis "for the purpose of pursuing her investigations."[632]

J. M. Peebles wrote for the magazine that he was beginning a second month of speaking engagements in New Orleans. He had recently made a trip to Galveston where he lectured twice and visited Col. J. S. Thrasher of the Galveston *Civilian,* in which he "ably edits the Spiritual department." Thrasher had settled in Galveston before the war and married a Spiritualist. She was the widow of Michel B. Menard, founder of Galveston and associate of Moseley Baker. During the Civil War, Thrasher had superintended the Confederate Press Association. He and other Galveston Spiritualists had engaged Mrs. Sarah A. Talbot, "the wife of Judge Talbot" appended to her name

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[632] "Hon. J. M. Peebles," *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1876), 31; "Personal," *American Spiritual Magazine* (February 1876), 61–63; "Southern Notes," *American Spiritual Magazine* (March 1876), 81–83; "Spiritualism in 'The Church'," *American Spiritual Magazine* (October 1876), 307.

guaranteeing her respectability, to lecture each Sunday evening during the winter. In Houston, the Spiritualists had organized with Paul Bremond as their president. Peebles planned to travel in Mexico and Central America. "Returning by way of New Orleans," he promised Watson, "I shall soon find my way to your library room in Memphis." In fact he returned to Memphis with a stop first in Chattanooga, where he lectured for four weeks on his travels and on Christian Spiritualism. Chattanooga was to become a center of Spiritualist activity in the South in the early 1880s, and Peebles no doubt helped prepare the way. As a reporter for the Chattanooga *Times* said, Peebles had given "the adherents of Spiritualism in this community much useful information, and taught all classes that one may be 'peculiar' in his belief, and still be a Christian gentleman and scholar."[633]

Watson was trying to convince people there was nothing peculiar at all about Christian Spiritualism, and Peebles was an important ally. Watson turned to the consolation of spirit communion when his son John Wesley, twenty-two, succumbed to consumption in February 1876. Within a few hours, John's spirit had appeared to three persons, "one of them two miles distant." Watson reminded readers that "Mr. Wesley gives a number of such in his journal, and says a spirit finds no difficulty in traveling thousands of miles in a moment." At the grave, Mrs. Hawks, "who is clairvoyant, saw a host of spirits, and John was supported by his grandfather Dupree and his mother." Watson was sure he would hear from John soon.[634]

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[633] "J. M. Peebles, Letter of Travel," *American Spiritual Magazine* (April 1876), 105–107; "J. M. Peebles in Chattanooga," *American Spiritual Magazine* (April 1876), 191–192.

[634] "Gone Before," *American Spiritual Magazine* (April 1876), 107–108.

In April, the Watsons' son Sammy died. Ten days later, with their daughter May and Mrs. Hawks, they boarded a steamboat for New Orleans. On the second day, May came down with the disease that had carried off her brother. There was no doctor on board, but the spirits of a former family physician and one of Watson's brothers prescribed through the medium. When they arrived at New Orleans, little May was "quite out of danger." They found many Spiritualist friends in the Crescent City during a visit of six days. One evening, they attended a "meeting of Spiritualists at Mrs. Hyer's, 470 Magazine street, to inaugurate the opening of a Spiritual bookstore and Spiritual publications by this lady."[635] Frances Hyer had signed the 1854 petition in St. Louis, then become a traveling medium in the 1850s and written for the *Christian Spiritualist.* Watson said little more about their time in New Orleans.

Sammy's death and May's dangerous illness may have been what led Ellen Watson, though still a Methodist in good standing, to begin thinking about her own possible mediumistic powers. Watson did not say, "My wife is now a medium," but it would have been clear to Memphians who read that "Soon after our home medium, recently developed, returned from the Central Methodist church on Sabbath (June 4), she was controlled to write. . . . " Henceforth he referred to Ellen not as "our better half," but as "our home medium." He promptly began printing communications "Through Our Home Medium." By the middle of 1876, Watson had raised the price, lowered the number of pages, and the articles had begun to seem somewhat repetitive, probably because he was away from home "four out of six weeks" speaking and organizing. Mrs. Watson's spirit messages were well written and theologically interesting, so they were a welcome addition. Ellen Watson was thirty-one years younger than her husband, and it is

[635] "Visit to New Orleans," *American Spiritual Magazine* (June 1876), 188–189.

difficult to imagine how she conceived of an afterlife with Sam Watson and his first wife and children. She attended materializing séances with her husband and hobnobbed with his spirit wife, and frequently was the medium for Mollie's messages from the spirit world. In one, Mollie told her two surviving children, Ella and Allena, that though they lived far apart, they could stay close in spirit communion. "Your mother will be the connecting link. The distance will be spanned by spirit telegraph. The vibrations of that connection will find a responsive motion in your hearts, and you will feel your mother controls the battery which sends the electric fluid." Ellen Watson filled the role of medium and stepmother for the remnants of her husband's first family while giving birth to five children of her own and doing a superlative job of "civic housekeeping" as well.[636] Somehow her association with Spiritualism seems not to have affected her relationship to her church or the effectiveness of her leadership of religious and reform organizations. Her relationship with Samuel Watson, apparently harmonious, reflects the ambiguities and even contradictions of belief in spirit communion. Assuming that she believed herself a medium, fully supported her husband's cause and generated material for his magazine, it is interesting that she chose and was able to remain a member in good standing of the Methodist Church. Perhaps it was easier for a pious woman who was not seeking a public role in Spiritualism to maintain Methodist fellowship, and perhaps the Methodists feared losing more members to Christian Spiritualism.

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[636] "The Entrance of Spirits into the Spheres, and Mission to Earth," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 231–232; "Spirit Communication," *American Spiritual Magazine* (July 1876), 212; *American Spiritual Magazine* (July 1876), 223; "Labor," *American Spiritual Magazine* (December 1876), 369; Jane Addams had used the term "civic housekeeping" to point out the aspects of city maintenance in which male leaders had shown insufficient interest: clean streets, parks, libraries, sanitation and social welfare. Jane Addams, "Women and Public Housekeeping," in *Selected Articles on Woman Suffrage,* compiled by Edith M. Phelps (White Plains and New York City: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1916.), 70.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Samuel Watson: The Waxing and Waning of Southern Christian Spiritualism

The Methodism Samuel Watson had grown up in was built on the work of circuit riders who took their message to the people. Watson wanted to travel and proselytize. Communicating with spirits was a staple of his new interpretation of Christianity, but he had a scattered earthly flock to gather in. He had planned a trip to Arkansas, and although his broken leg would keep him on his back for over a month, "we think we have enough philosophy and Spiritualism to keep us cheerful." He promised visits soon to several southern states. Watson was on a mission. "While we know that the cash system is the only safe one financially, yet this is not our object." He wanted to do good, to share truth, and the times were "unprecedentedly hard all over the country. Hundreds of thousands are out of employment. Many are suffering for the necessities of life." Watson invited anyone who wanted to subscribe but lacked the means to send him a personal note, giving a date when they would send him the $1.50 subscription price, and he would start sending the magazine immediately. From any too poor to afford the price, he would "not look for our pay until we meet on the other side."[637]

Once he was up and about on crutches, Watson made the deferred trip to Arkansas, where the cause was flourishing in the White River towns of Des Arc and Augusta. He planned to head farther south, reaching Jefferson in early May and making

[637] "Our Prospects," *The Spiritual Magazine* (February 1875), 78.

several stops including "Shreveport, Marshall, Dallas, Corsicana, Brenham, Bryan, Houston, Galveston, and perhaps other places in Texas. When the people desire it, we will give free lectures on Spirit Communion."[638] Methodist minister-turned-Spiritualist Frank Patillo was in Jefferson, Allena and her family in Shreveport, another old Methodist friend lived in Marshall, and in Corsicana Robert Cubley was receiving sermons from the spirit of John Wesley. Watson wanted to see his grandchildren, meet with his far-flung new disciples and, of course, evangelize. He had been a preacher and editor propounding the truth of his beliefs for decades; that was who he was and what he was called to do.

Watson also traveled to Texas and Louisiana. His Memphis materializing medium, Mrs. Miller, had for the time being relocated to Dallas. Within an hour of arriving there he and several others saw the materialized form of his late wife, who again moved around the room and rearranged chairs. Then the spirit went into the cabinet and came back holding one of their children, "who looked as natural as any other child. When she shook hands with us, her hand felt as natural as ever it did in earth life." Watson lectured at the Odd Fellows' Hall, and went on to Corsicana where a large crowd awaited his arrival. At Houston he saw something in a private circle with a private medium that he had never seen before. They sat around a table in the parlor; there was no cabinet. "The spirits came out," he wrote, not explaining how or from where, "doing many things as natural as mortals. It was very warm, and they took fans and fanned us. We saw and talked to them, and every one around the table felt the beating pulse, which was as natural

[638] "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (May 1875), 217; *The Spiritual Magazine* (May 1875), 210.

as our own." In New Orleans, he delivered lectures.[639] Watson also had supporters in the Midwest, so when invited he made a quick trip to Wisconsin, Indiana and Illinois.

Back in Memphis, Watson began hearing reports that his travels had borne fruit. At Jefferson, Texas, four primary circles had been organized since his visit, "all working successfully but not very maturely yet." Texas railroad magnate Paul Bremond, who had long believed he was guided by the spirit of Moseley Baker, wrote for *The Spiritual Magazine* about manifestations he had seen in New York, a message from the spirit of Napoleon, and a visit six years earlier to spirit photographer W. H. Mumler in Boston. Bremond's father had been one of Napoleon's surgeons, and his family claimed kinship with the Empress Josephine. While Watson was in Houston, Bremond had showed him "a large number of spirit photographs of his relatives and friends[.]" Bremond ended by assuring Watson that "the young medium that you saw while here, Bro. Watson, promises to be a very superior one for physical Manifestations. I will give you an account at an early day of what is being done here in the way of materialization." From New Orleans came a resolution of thanks to Watson for "the able lectures delivered by him before this Association and the public," and the writer added that "some will date their investigation of spiritual truths from that Sunday." Frank Patillo wrote to say that "Some twelve miles from here there is great excitement on the subject of Spiritualism. The circles are conducted by a Baptist preacher. They have writing, music, etc., and partial materializations."[640]

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[639]"Our Texas Trip," *The Spiritual Magazine* (July 1875), 289–291; *The Spiritual Magazine* (July 1875), 289; *The Spiritual Magazine* (August 1875), 320.

[640]"The Cause in Jefferson, Texas," *The Spiritual Magazine* (September 1875), 383; "Second Letter from Napoleon," *The Spiritual Magazine* (October 1875), 449; "Communication from the Spirit of Napoleon," *The Spiritual Magazine* (September 1875), 396–397; "New Orleans Association of

Dr. J. A. Meek wrote from Jonesboro, Arkansas to share the news that "Spiritualism is gaining ground here. Invitations are pouring in from all points. I have immense turnouts at all my appointments, and the people listen attentively to the new gospel." Meek, as had Jesse Ferguson decades earlier, had joined the Christian Church because it rejected creeds and believed Scripture was divinely inspired. When many of his Christian "brethren" began to regard Meek as a "vile heretic," he would use *The Spiritual Magazine* as a forum, issuing a challenge to some of the same men who had attacked Ferguson to prove Meek's interpretations of specific passages from the Bible were erroneous. Watson reprinted a piece from the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* that said "Spiritualism is daily drawing upon the membership of the churches," and "thousands who might otherwise have been converted have drifted into the vortex of Spiritualism. Will the clergy insist upon it that this is a mere temporary delusion?"[641] Watson also began to receive more requests to travel and speak than he could fill.

Amidst such optimistic reports and expectations, Watson learned that the Methodist establishment was denouncing him. The Nashville *Christian Advocate,* the "official organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," ran a letter from a reader concerned about the success of Watson's new cause under the headline, "Necromancy." The letter mocked Watson's contention that "*Spirit-doctors cured his broken leg*" and lamented the fact that *The Spiritual Magazine* "parades many Methodist preachers who have renounced their faith, and given adhesion to necromancy." The writer felt he had to

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Spiritualist," *The Spiritual Magazine* (September 1875), 407; *The Spiritual Magazine* (September 1875), 407.

[641] "Dr. J. A. Meek, of Jonesboro, Ark.," *The Spiritual Magazine* (September 1875), 415; "Spiritualism Not Heresy," *The Spiritual Magazine* (November 1875), 470; "Spiritualism as a Religion," *The Spiritual Magazine* (November 1875), 478.

speak out because Watson's "pretending to build on the Bible has hurt many unstable minds[.]" The editor, Dr. T. O. Summers—a formidable Methodist veteran and influential spokesman—found Watson's actions "humiliating beyond expression. When men choose such delusions their case is almost hopeless. . . . All we can say in regard to them is, let them severely alone. Keep away from them. Attend none of their so-called *seances*." Watson wrote to ask for the name of the anonymous writer, which Summers claimed to have forgotten. Summers took the opportunity to beg his "dear old friend" to "give up that fascinating delusion" and "Come back to your old friends, who will receive you with open arms." Watson thanked his "old friend and confrere" for his advice, but reiterated that "If it be a sin to receive communications from loved ones, then we have been a great sinner for a long time; yet it has brought us more comfort than we ever found from any other source." The *Western Methodist* picked up the item in the Nashville *Christian Advocate,* so Watson wrote to that paper as well. Someone wrote from Augusta to name the anonymous writer who started the discussion. Frank Patillo sent a letter of support.[642]

He admitted he had overtaxed his strength in trying to make up for the months lost to "the fracture of our limb," and clearly felt old, tired and a little discouraged. "The success of this MAGAZINE is to us the great object of our life," and he was certain of the need for "an organ to represent Spiritualism from a Christian standpoint[.]" Spiritually, the magazine had succeeded "beyond our most sanguine expectations." But he was losing money. He would continue the magazine until the end of the year, and hoped readers would find means to pay for their subscriptions.[643]

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[642] "Slander Refuted," *The Spiritual Magazine* (July 1875), 305–312.

[643] "Advice from Our Father," *The Spiritual Magazine* (August 1875), 353–355.

Watson did have reason to be pleased with the spiritual success of his mission. He was emerging as the leader of the Christian Spiritualist movement. "A lady of culture who is the cousin of a most distinguished Presbyterian minister in the South" wrote for the magazine of her wonderful experience in New York with medium James Mansfield. The lady was Mary Dana Shindler, the widow of an Episcopal clergyman and the daughter of Charleston, South Carolina Congregational minister Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Her cousin was also named Benjamin Morgan Palmer, and was the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans for most of the last half of the nineteenth century. He had been an eloquent defender of secession and a chaplain in the Confederate army. Mrs. Shindler was traveling in the Northeast, visiting Spiritualists, and would publish a book of her experiences called *A Southerner Among the Spirits.* She had already established her Christian *bona fides* as a writer. Following the deaths of her first husband and their son in 1839, she moved back to Charleston and consecrated her grief by writing religious poetry to go with popular tunes. *The Southern Harp* was published in 1841; *The Northern Harp* and *The Parted Family and Other Poems* soon followed. Her books sold well, and she kept writing. Both her parents died in 1847, and the next year she married Rev. Robert D. Shindler, an Episcopalian. They lived in Maryland and Kentucky before moving to Texas in 1865. Rev. Shindler died in Nacogdoches in 1874, which put Mary Dana Shindler on the path to Spiritualism. Seeing an ad for the *Banner of Light,* she "surreptitiously" subscribed for three months and determined to go to New York alone and investigate the subject. By September she would be sending Watson signed accounts of her visits to well-known centers of Spiritualist activity in the Northeast, and had been at a séance where the "materialized form of my husband appeared five times, and was

always instantly recognized by a great many who had seen his picture."[644] Mrs. Shindler seemed confident her experiences with the North's professional mediums were genuine.

Watson believed he was endorsing absolutely reliable professionals when he recommended Mrs. Miller and J. V. Mansfield, Clara Robinson and Annie Torrey Hawks to his readers. He printed testimonials from Dallas, attesting to Mrs. Miller's wonderful materializations. He also began receiving requests for her services. When she returned to Memphis, he notified readers that she planned "to remain in the city for some time, and give seances three nights in each week. Those who wish to attend them should see her husband in regard to them." Watson himself found Miller very useful in advancing his own understanding of spirit communion, especially when the late Mrs. Watson materialized again at a séance. When her spirit returned to the cabinet, Watson was asked to approach it. They shook hands, "she kissing ours several times. Our eyes were not more than six inches apart, and her eyes looking as natural as in earth life." He asked if she could talk to him and her response was a whispered "No," as she "rather pressed us from her." He returned to his seat, and she came out and advanced toward him. "We met and kissed her, seemingly as natural as we ever did." He found it the most satisfactory

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[644] "Dr. James V. Mansfield," *The Spiritual Magazine* (August 1875), 335; Mary Dana Shindler, *A Southerner Among the Spirits: A Record of Investigations into the Spiritual Phenomena* (Memphis, Tenn.: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1877); Benjamin Franklin White and Elisha J. King's famous shape-note hymnal, *The Sacred Harp,* was published in 1844. It collected sacred texts that had been adapted to traditional melodies since the time of the Second Great Awakening, and published in books as early as 1816. *A Selection of Shape-Note Folk Hymns From Southern United States Tune Books, 1816–1861,* Ed. David W. Music (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2005), ix–x. Mrs. Shindler's books used standard musical scoring rather than shape notes; Julia Deane Freeman, *Women of the South Distinguished in Literature* New York: Derby & Jackson, 1861), 371–372; Elizabeth Brooks, *Prominent Women of Texas* (Akron, Ohio: The Werner Company, 1896), 116; "Dr. James V. Mansfield," *The Spiritual Magazine* (August 1875), 335–336; Mary Dana Shindler," Spirit Photography," *The Spiritual Magazine* (October 1875), 445.

séance he had ever witnessed.[645] We are left to wonder what the second Mrs. Watson thought.

The materialization of the first Mrs. Watson cemented Watson's absorption in this phase of spirit manifestation, and in the first issue of 1876 he reprinted a communication from a spirit that had appeared in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal.* The spirit had posited three classes of Spiritualists: the Christian Spiritualist, the Scientific Spiritualist, and the Radical or Fanatical Spiritualist. The Christian Spiritualist "adopts it into his life and carries it into his dealings with his fellow-men as unfolding a noble view of this own religion, and making him more perfect and secure in soul." The Scientific Spiritualist accepts the phenomena as facts; that they are a result of universal laws does not for these people lend religious meaning to the manifestations. The Radical Spiritualist is of course the "most deplorable." The writer might have been thinking of abolitionists and/or free lovers when he wrote: "If they find an edifice with a flaw in any part of it . . . we must tear it down forthwith; and if it is asked what they will erect in its stead, they answer that they do not know exactly, but they will be able to build something." He was probably thinking specifically of free love when he alluded to the "abominable theories which they desire to foist upon the community."[646] Watson agreed wholeheartedly.

Watson was trying to bring all possible Christian Spiritualists into the fold. He tried to make common cause with the New Church. In a lengthy piece he titled "Swedenborgianism," Watson reprinted a "Summary Statement of the Doctrines of the

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[645] "Mrs. N. D. Miller," *The Spiritual Magazine* (November 1875), 502; "Materialization," *The Spiritual Magazine* (November 1875), 513–514.

[646] "Zadock Humphrey, He Visits Earth to Express His Views," *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1876), 1–5; "Classification of Spiritualists," *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1876), 28–29.

New Church" and showed how similar they were to the beliefs of Christian Spiritualists. Watson added that he had once asked a New Church minister to "point out the difference between the teachings of Swedenborg and Christian Spiritualists." The minister had declined to do so, saying he was "not sufficiently acquainted with Spiritualism."[647] Since the New Church hierarchy had officially been trying to distance itself from Spiritualism from the outset, it is curious that the minister did not point out the most salient point of official disagreement. Either Watson's question was disingenuous, or he honestly did not know the answer. If the former, he wanted to spar on Biblical grounds; if the latter, it was symptomatic of the New Church's losing battle to separate itself from Spiritualism in the public mind.

Swedenborgianism was not the only competition for Spiritualists' allegiance, but at least the New Church was Christian and not involved in politics. Some people outside the South still coalesced around "isms," and the agenda-driven activities of Northern Methodists in the South were a cautionary tale for Southern Methodists and for Watson. Other seekers were drawn to occult mysteries and Eastern religions, which exerted a much stronger fascination in the North than they ever did farther south. Watson printed excerpts from Emma Hardinge Britten's *Ghost Land. Or, Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism.* He never mentioned her, but Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steele Olcott (whose published experiences at the home of the Eddy family in Vermont had enticed Mary Dana Shindler to seek them out during her Spiritualist quest in the Northeast) had in 1875 begun a new movement that would be known as Theosophy and would attract some from the ranks of Spiritualists. Watson had written favorably of

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[647] "Swedenborgianism," *American Spiritual Magazine* (June 1876), 201–203.

Olcott and shared excerpts from his book, *People from the Other World* (1875). Watson also frequently mentioned another newspaper, *The Spiritual Scientist,* if not Blavatsky or Theosophy. Madame Blavatsky was becoming known "mainly through her contributions to *The Spiritual Scientist* of Boston and *The Daily Graphic* of New York."[648] Theosophy differed in two important ways from Spiritualism; it combined esoteric mysteries from Oriental and Western traditions, and it was not easily accessible or democratic.[649] There is no evidence that Theosophy made any noticeable inroads in the post-war South. Watson's Christian Spiritualism was a better fit for southerners, but most Christian Spiritualists remained comfortable if circumspect in the more liberal Protestant denominations.

Watson even found reason to believe that official Methodism was not so censorious of his new direction as Summers's criticism had indicated. Mrs. Watson remained a member of the Central Methodist Church. Texas Association president William L. Booth wrote about a woman in his town who was called on by Bishop George F. Pierce, who was probably the most influential bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, at the time. Pierce wondered at her not having maintained her active membership in the Methodist Church, and she told him she was a Spiritualist and had been reading Samuel Watson's books. The bishop did not lecture, but emphasized that Watson was a good man and she was still welcome in the church. Early in his investigations of Spiritualism, Watson had traveled with Pierce to a Methodist

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[648] "Ghost Land," *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1877), 27–28; Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: Collected Writings, 1877,* ed. Boris de Zirkoff (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1972; original edition 1877), 14; John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian and Sex Magician* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 525.

[649] Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead,* 263.

Conference and had discussed the subject freely. The ever-hopeful Watson had been sending the bishop his books and magazine.[650]

Dr. A. C. Martin wrote from Hill County, Texas to express his delight with the magazine, and his opinion that "just *such* a publication, from *such* a man, and *from Memphis*," would "meet the approbation and convince the judgment" of thousands both within and outside the churches who were "slowly but surely drifting into a fatal materialism."[651] Martin understood the three factors that were crucial to reaching people like him: the publication was grounded in Christianity, Watson was well known as a sincere and religious man, and the magazine came " *from Memphis.*" That it was edited by a religious southerner and published in the South made it credible for many Reconstruction-era southerners like Martin.

Watson's "new movement" received most of its grassroots support from the South and Midwest. Names gleaned from *The Spiritual Magazine* provide data to reconstruct the southern Spiritualist networks of friendship and kinship, as well as local leadership, that shared ideas and reinforced each other's beliefs. Not a few local activists were very much like Watson himself. Frank J. Patillo, for example, submitted a piece on "Spiritual Existence" that revealed his Wesleyan background. Patillo was a former Methodist minister who had been the chaplain of the Confederate regiment in which Henry Gerard Hall and Jesse Fuller served. During the war Patillo had organized revivals among the anxious men that were reportedly so popular that they lasted into the night, eliciting an order to stop. When he refused, he was sent home. Patillo spent the rest of the war

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[650] "Extracts from Letters," *American Spiritual Magazine* (November 1876), 347.

[651] *The Spiritual Magazine* (November 1875), 506.

soliciting donations for soldiers' needs. He lived in Jefferson, Texas, the town founded by Abijah Alley's nephew Daniel, who with his mother had joined Alley at Union Village, Ohio and become Shakers; all of them left by 1830. Coincidentally, Patillo's grandfather had joined the Shakers at South Union, Kentucky and taken some of his children with him. It is probable Frank Patillo's father was among them; Frank's grandfather was a Shaker when he died and one of his father's brothers "spent most of his youth with the Shakers" before he left and married.[652] Seeking something more and better, clearer answers to the mysteries of life and death and faith, is a component of the stories of many American families, generation after generation.

Frank Patillo had been in the newspaper business before becoming a minister, and by 1860 he was married and had a young son. They lived in Marshall, Texas. The 1870 census found Patillo in Jefferson, a widower, the Methodist preacher in charge of the circuit and editor of the *Home Advocate.*[653] His father died in 1872, his mother two years later.[654] Patillo's sister admitted to him after several months that she had visited a medium and received a message from their father. Rev. Patillo was shocked but curious. A friend in Marshall had told him they received "communications from spirits at his

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[652] M. Jane Johansson, *Peculiar Honor: A History of the 28th Texas Cavalry, 1862–1865* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 30.
; Biographical Souvenir of the State of Texas, Containing Biographical Sketches of the Representative Public, and Many Early Settled Families (Chicago: F. A. Battey & Company, 1889), 657; "Vitals: Shaker Births & Deaths (1811–1892) South Union KY," http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/OHBROWN/2001-08/0999224676 (accessed September 10, 2006); Julia Neal, *By Their Fruits: The Story of Shakerism in South Union, Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 246; Melba C. Crosse, *Patillo, Pattillo, Pattullo and Pitillo Families* (Fort Worth, Tex.: American Reference Publishing Company, 1972), 150, 154, 155.

[653] John Howell Mc Lean, *Reminiscences of Rev. Jno. H. McLean, A.M., D.D.* (Nashville, Tenn.: Printed for the author by Smith & Lamar, 1918), 171.

[654] "Oakwood Cemetery," http://www.rootsweb.com/~txmarion/resources/cemeteries/OakwoodCemP.html (accessed May 5, 2010)

house," so Patillo visited to try the spirits. It changed the course of his life. "My theories adopted in ignorance," he said, "were scattered to the winds. It set me to thinking—thinking as I had never thought before." All the ways he had heard manifestations explained away seemed insufficient. "Although my means of investigation have been imperfect and limited," wrote Patillo, who had never sat with a professional medium, "yet the demonstrations which I have had have been wonderful and overwhelming. If I do not know that I have communicated with spiritual beings—that is, exchanged thought with them—then I am not sure of anything."[655] Patillo, who gave up his pulpit and his magazine for his new beliefs, became a regular contributor to *The Spiritual Magazine.*

Judge Wiley P. Fowler of Smithland, Kentucky, like Patillo and Watson, was deeply religious and a Spiritualist. An original member of the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge in 1854 and a member of the Methodist church since early manhood, Fowler wrote to Watson to say he concurred fully with "the views entertained and to be advocated" in the publication. "'Life and immortality are brought to light in the Gospel,'" he wrote, "and for centuries have been within the reach of a rational belief and a living faith by the Christian devotee." Fowler became a contributor to *The Spiritual Magazine*.[656]

The area around Shreveport, where Watson's daughter and her family lived, was a center of spiritual seeking. A former Baptist minister, W. P. Fortson, became a lifetime subscriber. Fortson apparently began thinking seriously about immortality after his

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[655] F. J. Patillo, "Spiritual Existence," *The Spiritual Magazine* (April 1875), 241–243.

[656] "Letter from Judge Fowler," *The Spiritual Magazine* (April 1875), 143; W. P. Fowler, "Evidences of Immortality," *The Spiritual Magazine* (June 1875), 257–259; "The Future Life," *The Spiritual Magazine* (December 1875), 525–527.

mother died in 1856. He had found earnest study of the Bible a slippery slope, since "so much faith was required to believe the Bible, and because there were no tangible evidences of inspiration. From skepticism I soon went into infidelity; from infidelity to deism; from deism to atheism. I finally settled down as a materialist." Fortson, who had been an officer in the Confederate army, married when he returned from the war. Their first two children died in 1871, and a baby born that year died in 1872. Mrs. Fortson followed them to the grave May 1, 1875, just as Watson was beginning to travel again. Fortson had heard of Watson's lectures in Shreveport, and talked to reliable people who had witnessed Mrs. Miller's materializations. He sent for Watson's magazine, and was "Now a firm believer in Spiritualism, and in the Bible from a spiritualistic view." Christian Spiritualism had restored Fortson's faith, and he pronounced himself "happier than I have been for fifteen years. I am going to form a circle this week and try what we can do."[657] For years people had been claiming that Spiritualism, *proof* of the afterlife, had restored their faith. Christian Spiritualism anchored that proof in the Bible and encouraged people to try the spirits in home circles; these were all that many southerners would ever have access to. As if to confirm this point, Allena wrote from Shreveport that her stepson had borrowed his sister's doll table to have a séance. He and two other little boys called the adults to come and see that they were getting raps and the table was moving. She asked questions that were answered by raps from the mother of one of the boys. The mother's spirit also would move the table in any direction Allena requested. Witnessing this with her were her husband Jesse Fuller and Mr. Field, the Princeton

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[657] John Hugh McDowell, *History of the McDowells, Erwins, Irwins and Connections* (Memphis, Tenn.: C. H. Johnston & Co., 1918), 77; "What Good Does Spiritualism?" *The Spiritual Magazine* (October 1875), 3.

friend and fraternity brother with whom Henry Gerard Hall had celebrated his fortieth birthday in 1873.

Appreciative letters from southern Christians continued. Marmaduke Gardner wrote to Watson from McDade, Texas. He was sixty-four years old. At twenty-six, he had been disfellowshipped for becoming a universal restorationist. Eight years later he became a Universalist preacher, and had for many years been a contributor to the *Universalist Herald* in Notasulga, Alabama. Gardner had never witnessed spiritual manifestations, but "Your Spiritualism and the Bible read and look to me so much alike, that it is living bread to my soul." Like Watson, he believed the Spiritualism of the time was "synonymous with primitive or ancient Christianity," and Erexine Yerger of Vicksburg wanted Watson to know that the magazine "expounds to me on the Bible, in so many ways, that I now feel, that my life has been spent reading it with a vail over my senses, or mind[.]" Mrs. Yerger had become a writing medium three years earlier. When her "angel children" wrote through her of their "homes, schools, progress" and that heaven's architects were helping them to build a home for her, she said, "I paid no attention to it" until seeing so many similar accounts in Watson's magazine. The Yergers had been a wealthy and influential family before the Civil War. Erexine's husband was a Vicksburg businessman and they had lived comfortably, although not in the style of his fabulously wealthy planter brother. Her son Lemuel had enlisted with Nathan Bedford Forrest at sixteen; one of Lemuel's Yerger cousins had killed a Union officer in Jackson in 1869 over an heirloom seized for disputed taxes. A widow, Mrs. Yerger felt she was approaching the time when she would join those who had gone before to the spirit world. Watson's magazine validated her Christianity and her spirit communion, and helped her

to face what lay ahead with something like pleasant anticipation. "My ministering spirits I knew and loved on earth, parents, brothers and sisters, knew them pure and good, intellectual and refined," she wrote, communicated their "noble and grand thoughts of heaven, holiness, bliss, work, arts and travel until I feel more conversant with heaven's works than earth's."[658]

Just after Mrs. Yerger's letter was one from J. S. Norton of Harrisburg, Texas, about the death of Mrs. M. C. Halsey. Norton described her as a "progressive Methodist" who had for years been a believer in Spiritualism, "but bound towards the Swedenborgian doctrine, still holding her place in the church of her early choice, the Methodist Episcopal." A clock in the next room had just struck eight when Mrs. Halsey breathed her last. The clock leapt from the shelf, "jumped over the end of a lounge, and over a baby's buggy, (baby in it) and struck on its face near the middle of the room," and Norton said to his cousin, "Bro. Watson's clock struck one, as our aunt's clock struck eight and jumped besides." John Norton was an educated man of good family, born in Connecticut. Mrs. Halsey's husband, William Halsey, was president of Soule University, an early Methodist institution for men in Chappell Hill.[659] They somehow made room for Christian

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[658] *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1876), 21; Adam Nossiter, *Of Long Memory: Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers* (Cambridge, Mass.: De Capo Press, 2002, c. 1994), 113. Erexine Yerger's son Lemuel was the grandfather of Byron de la Beckwith. For confirming that John Kemp Yerger and George Shall Yerger were brothers, I am grateful to Jim Winklejohn, personal communication May 17, 2010; *American Spiritual Magazine* (April 1877), 125.

[659] "Extracts from Letters," *American Spiritual Magazine* (April 1877), 125–126; Norton had been unlucky in love, becoming engaged to Kate Jackson, a wealthy industrialist's daughter who had come to Texas to teach at the Methodist women's school at Chappell Hill in the early 1860s. When war came, Kate went home to New Jersey and John enlisted in the Confederate army. Though still engaged to John, Kate formed a deep attachment to Frances Willard. When John came north in 1867, though her father encouraged the match, Kate found that she could not bring herself to leave Frances, who had grown to be "bone of my bone." Frances Elizabeth Willard, *Writing My Heart Out: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855–96,* ed. Carolyn De Swarte Gifford (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 25, 243, 250–253. Norton returned to Texas and married someone else; *Handbook of Texas Online,*

Spiritualism and Swedenborg's visions of the afterlife while being firmly embedded in the Methodist establishment.

Not all "Christian" Spiritualists were from a Wesleyan background, of course. We have already seen how Benjamin Morgan Palmer's cousin embraced Spiritualism. And there were Baptists as well. Benjamin A. Hallett of North Carolina had been a Baptist when he went North late in the summer of 1872 "to examine the subject of Spiritualism" and visited several well-known mediums. He was convinced. His wife died some time after the 1870 census and he was remarried by 1880, so it may have been his first wife's death that turned his thoughts to the mysteries of the afterlife. He submitted a paper to Watson that he had read "before the Standing Committee of the First Baptist Church of Wilmington, N. C." after being "cited before them to explain his position on Spiritualism." Hallett told the Baptists that the spiritual world is "around and about us," and that "The manifestations of Spiritualism have satisfied my mind that those who were near and dear to us in their earthly life can at times read our thoughts, and may so impress us that we may know that they are present with us." Hallett and John C. McRae would have known each other well in the small community of Wilmington Spiritualists. Before the Panic of 1873 Hallett had been in the naval stores business, distilling turpentine, but an 1877 city directory shows him employed by one of the McRae family businesses.[660]

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s. v. "Soule University," http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/SS/kbs24.html (accessed February 9, 2007).

[660] B. A. Hallett, "How My Brother Was Made a Spiritualist," *American Spiritual Magazine* (May 1876), 148–149; B. A. Hallett, "Why I am a Spiritualist," *The Spiritual Magazine* (September 1875), 376–379; Haddock's Wilmington, N.C., Directory, and General Advertiser, Containing a General and Business Directory of the City, Historical Sketch, State, County, City Government, &c., &c. (Wilmington, N.C.: P. Heinseberger, Publisher, 1871), 38, http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/haddock/haddock.html (accessed May 19, 2007); *Sheriff's Wilmington, N.C. Directory and General Advertiser for 1877-8: Containing a General and Complete Business Directory of the City* (Wilmington, N.C.: P. Heinsberger, 1877), 76.

Hallett would write again the following year. John C. McRae also would become a regular contributor to the magazine.

The Spiritual Magazine's readership was also expanding its reach beyond the South. Subscriptions came in from New England, New York and even London. A reader in Philadelphia wrote to give Watson the particulars of the organization of a new society there, with plans to meet every Sunday morning. Letters and submissions came from Colorado, New York, Australia. A virtual community of like-minded Spiritualists was coming together around Samuel Watson, and he would draw on them as he urged organization. In June he printed the text of a lecture John McRae had delivered to the Spiritual Society of Wilmington, North Carolina. McRae had always taken the lead in Spiritualism there, hosting Emma Hardinge before the war and joining the epistolary skirmishing between northern and southern Spiritualists over abolitionism on the eve of hostilities. Now, it seems, he had organized a society in Wilmington.[661]

There was talk of the Spiritualists being a presence at the 1876 Centennial celebration in Philadelphia. Watson endorsed the call for a meeting "whose object shall be to discuss and decide the question whether an Association for the Advancement of Christian Spiritualism in America shall, at present, be formed?" He and several notable Spiritualists from all over the country signed the statement inviting "all who are in sympathy with this call and who feel that, sooner or later, a formal movement for the defence and advancement of Christian Spiritualism must be made" to join them in Philadelphia. Watson felt certain that "some organization will be formed during the

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[661] "A Model News Dealer," *The Spiritual Magazine* (October 1875), 454; "The Magazine in England," *The Spiritual Magazine* (October 1875), 456; John M'Rae, "Forgiveness of Sin," *The Spiritual Magazine* (June 1875), 251–253.

expiring year, by Spiritualists, of a national character," and he and his friends wanted to make it an organization that championed their Christian Spiritualist agenda. Watson's prominence in the "New Movement" should ensure that his southern constituency would be receptive. The New Orleans Association of Spiritualists had adopted a Declaration of Principles, which Watson printed as a model other societies might use. All past efforts at national organization had failed; Spiritualists had proved too diverse to remain long under one tent. There was much chatter in letters and submissions about organization and its benefits. Walter Roger Hinckley of Dallas suggested publishing a monthly list of monies received from readers on deposit for "spirit friends who might seek to communicate with the depositor." Watson though that was a splendid idea, and took the opportunity to enlarge on the great need for "some kind of organization all over this Southern country." People were coming to Memphis to learn more about Christian Spiritualism, and "we have no organization, no hall for any kind of meetings, no place for the thousands who visit the city to go where they can learn anything respecting mediums, or be admitted to seances." This was followed by notice of the formation of a Christian Spiritualist society in Oregon.[662]

Dr. J. E. Bruce wrote from Massachusetts that he knew of a only couple of small localized groups of Christian Spiritualists in his state when he resolved to launch a new Christian Spiritualist movement in his own city. Imagine Bruce's surprise when a friend told him there was "a magazine devoted to the formal advocacy of Christian Spiritualism down in Tennessee" and gave him some back issues. Dr. Bruce was impressed with the number of clergymen who wrote to express solidarity with the cause from the East, the

[662] "Movement in America in Favour of Christian Spiritualism," *The Spiritual Magazine* [London] (August 1876), 378; "Declaration of Principles," *The Spiritual Magazine* (October 1875), 435–437; "A Suggestion," "Organize," *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1876), 21.

Middle States, the West and the South. "God's work for souls is never done piecemeal," enthused Bruce. "When he is about to bring a new epoch in man's spiritual history, he writes it across the heavens, for whomever has eyes to see." To him, finding Watson's magazine was "like the sight of reinforcements moving unexpectedly into view to aid some leader of a forlorn hope." Watson replied with uncharacteristic sourness. "Our friend is behind the times. We have had Spiritualism which we considered in perfect harmony with the teachings of the Founder of Christianity for more than twenty years."[663]

Nonetheless, Watson would encourage Bruce's leadership in the Northeast and happily work to organize with others who shared his Christian interpretation of Spiritualism. Watson promoted and attended the 1876 national Spiritualist conference in Philadelphia. While there he lectured at Lincoln Hall. Watson described the meeting as "influential, if not large[.]" When the delegates met in general session, Watson was elected to the chair. The main purpose of the convention was "the organization of Spiritualism in America,"[664] and Watson and other southerners were willing to work shoulder to shoulder with their northern counterparts to make it happen. Several of the vice presidents who were not from the South had written for Watson's magazine, including Eugene Crowell, author of *The Identity of Primitive Christianity and Modern Spiritualism;* J. M. Peebles; Hudson Tuttle and Robert Dale Owen. Watson had reprinted the texts of several trance lectures by Cora L. V. (Scott Hatch Daniels) Tappan, also a vice president. Among those from southern states were Prof. J. R. Buchanan of Kentucky, John McRae of North Carolina, General Smith and Annie C. T. Hawks of Tennessee, Dr.

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[663] "Christian Spiritualism," *American Spiritual Magazine* (June 1876), 177–179.

[664] "Organization," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 253–256.

J. A. Meeker and R. H. Righten of Arkansas. Joseph Rodes Buchanan was an eclectic physician who in 1842 discovered the science of psychometry, based on his belief that "humans leave psychic energy on objects they touch as a kind of residue," and that a sensitive medium could discern these energies and describe the people who had handled the items and their actions. Psychometry could also be put to use diagnosing the illnesses of people by mail if they sent a lock of hair. General William J. Smith of Memphis had served the Union, but now represented the South. Mrs. Hawks had risen to prominence as a medium through her association with Watson. Dr. James A. Meeker of Arkansas kept Watson's readers updated on Spiritualism in his region. "R. H. Righten" of Arkansas was almost certainly the William R. Rightor who had been a zealous supporter of phrenology in 1848. He was from Helena, the town his father had laid out and home to several of Samuel Watson's relatives, and would in 1877 be the president of Association of Spiritualists and Liberalists of Helena.[665]

The enthusiastic James Edward Bruce of Massachusetts chaired the Committee on Declaration of Principles, working with J. M. Peebles, S. P. Kase and Samuel Watson. Afterwards they consulted the spirits for feedback. The first communication was addressed to Peebles. The second was from Judge Henry Gerard Hall, and the third from Watson's first father-in-law. The committee's declaration recognized "Jesus of Nazareth the spiritual leader of men," and accepted "his two great affirmations of love to God and love to man as constituting the one ground of growth in the individual, and the only and

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[665] Alfred Taylor Schofield, *Modern Spiritism: Its Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, 1920), 130; Todd Jay Leonard, *Talking to the Other Side: A History of Modern Spiritualism and Mediumship: A Study of the Religion, Science, Philosophy and Mediums that Encompass this American-Made Religion* (Lincoln, Nebr.: iUniverse, 2005), 114; "National Conference of Spiritualists," *American Spiritual Magazine* (September 1876), 274; "State Organization of Spiritualists and Liberalists in Arkansas," *American Spiritual Magazine* (May 1877), 146.

sufficient basis of human society." Many delegates wanted to use the phrase "Christian Spiritualists" in the organization's name, but one person urged the omission of "qualifying adjectives" and the body—agreeing that "the Declaration was explicit enough"—adopted the name "The National Convention of Spiritualists." [666]

A committee of twelve was selected, including Samuel Watson, to "oversee the work of local organization," but J. E. Bruce was the chair and asked that "all communication respecting the movement in general" be addressed to him. Samuel Watson was the membership and organization representative to be contacted by parties in the South, and was to name two members from the South to the committee of twelve. His first choice was Paul Bremond of Texas, who declined because he was busy building a railroad. Watson then chose John McRae of North Carolina and William L. Booth, president of the Texas State Association with local societies in Hempstead, Bryan, Hearne, Towash, Waco, Marlin, Mexia, Corsicana and Terrell and organizations forming soon at Denison, Sherman and Dallas. Watson wanted a national organization, and he led other Christian Spiritualists of the South in the effort to make it happen. The *Banner of Light* approved what some were calling the "New Movement," and had long endorsed the idea of organization. Other efforts had failed, and the *Banner* warned of pitfalls to avoid. "But, on the other hand, if it work harmoniously with spiritual order and law, and present spiritual truth to the world in its heavenborn beauty, then humanity will be the better for the united effort."[667]

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[666] "Organization," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 253–254; "National Conference of Spiritualists," *American Spiritual Magazine* (September 1876), 275.

[667] "National Conference of Spiritualists," *American Spiritual Magazine* (September 1876), 276–277; *American Spiritual Magazine* (October 1876), 302, 320; *American Spiritual Magazine* (September 1876), 288.

Philadelphia offered convention attendees a tempting array of the most advanced mediumistic talents to put them in touch with the spirit world. Watson called at James A. Bliss's "circle hall" to see Mrs. Bliss's cabinet materializations and went by invitation to the home of S. P. Kase, a Philadelphia financier who claimed he had been present at a séance with Abraham Lincoln. Watson arrived with Dr. Bruce too late to be admitted, but they stood by the séance room door and listened. Everyone who had been inside reported that the "Father of His Country" had appeared "some eight or ten times," not in a darkened room but "with as bright a light as the gas could make." At Kase's, Watson met Mrs. Thayer, who invited him to attend her séances. "They are of a character," he wrote, "that taxes the credulity of those who witness them, to say nothing of those who only hear or read of them. We are told we shall have similar manifestations in this city, but who can believe them to be what they are represented? Our people are not ready for them; they must have the rudiments first[.]" Mrs. Thayer had made a name for herself materializing flowers and small animals. One Mrs. Lewis, a medium, told Watson the spirits had directed her to go to Memphis, so of course he "tendered her the hospitalities of our home[.]"[668]

In company with Dr. Child, a Philadelphia medium who wrote for the Watson's magazine, he called on Mrs. Katie Robinson. Child told the medium Watson was "a friend from the country," and Watson assumed Mrs. Robinson did not know who he was. That Child might have colluded with her, or that she might have seen Watson's likeness,

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[668] "A New Medium," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 245; Jay Monaghan, "Was Abraham Lincoln Really a Spiritualist?" *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 34:2 (June 1941), 214–215; "A Wonderful Medium," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 252–253; "Materialization of Washington," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 246–248.

included in all his books, did not occur to him. Mrs. Robinson's controlling spirit, called White Feather, "seemed to know a great deal about us and our antecedents. We have never had so many incidental tests given in so short a time." Then she was controlled by Jesse Ferguson and afterwards by Watson's late son John. Watson described such séances as a "glorious privilege" and Mrs. Robinson's mediumship a "God-given power" as great as "any we have ever seen." Watson's spirit wife told him to "go to see the Holmeses. You may see some one you will recognize." Alone on his last night in the city, he made his way to their home a bit early for the séance. This gave him time to examine the cabinet, which he was sure would thwart imposture. Several figures materialized, the last being John King. Watson had been introduced to this spirit more than twenty years earlier "in Boston with the Davenport children, and talked to him freely in one of their seances. We met him three years ago in London, where he floated about in the air, talking to us as freely as any one could." As Watson held Mr. Holmes's hand, "he put an iron ring on one arm." The spirit Katie King also made an appearance, apparently revived after having been proven nonexistent. Watson said he had given careful specifics "because of a cloud that has hung over these mediums," alluding to their Katie King exposure. On the basis of the testimony of "a prominent official member of the Methodist church," Watson never questioned the mediumship of Mrs. Holmes. Samuel Watson sat for a spirit photographer on this trip, and the result is one of the most ubiquitous of all such images. It is a picture of Watson with his spirit mother.[669] Watson wrote glowing accounts of these séance

[669] "Mrs. Katie Robinson," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 250; "Mr. and Mrs. Holmes," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 248–249; "Jay J. Hartman, Spirit Artist," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1876), 251–252.

experiences and optimistic reports of the work of the convention and the potential for a harmonious national organization.

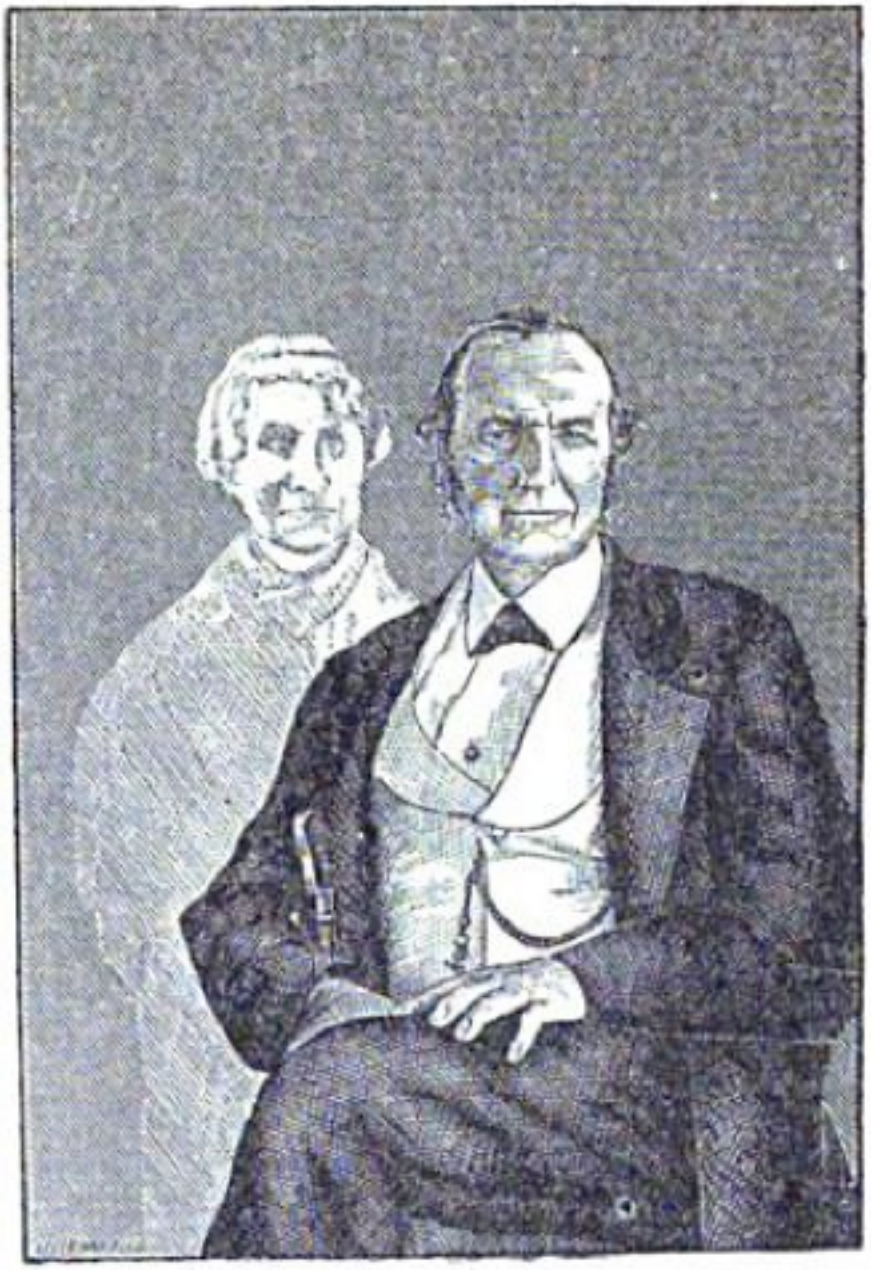

Figure 13. Photograph of Samuel Watson and His Spirit Mother by William Mumler (1876).

In point of fact, however, it did not work harmoniously. John McRae wrote to the *Banner of Light* to try to clarify the issues. A veteran of past attempts to keep Spiritualists focused on Spiritualism and not allow other issues to divide them, McRae wondered

"why may not we differ, and yet all be Spiritualists, without torturing and burning each other, as the Christians did in the past, or abusing each other, as they do now?" McRae's opinion was that there were at present two basic factions, those who view Spiritualism as "a science only" and others, "in whom the religious feeling is more fully developed, [to] whom it becomes a religion." Apparently the Radical Spiritualists had shown no interest in the new organization. Everyone was entitled to an opinion, and "until the whole subject of Spiritualism is better understood than it is at present, it is not likely that all Spiritualists will be of one belief." The call had been for a convention of Christian Spiritualists, and their only error had been in assuming that those who accepted the invitation "had similar views to theirs, and nominat[ing] them to positions which it appears they are unwilling to occupy."[670] The national organization was not off to the start Watson and his friends Eugene Crowell, J. M. Peebles, Hudson Tuttle and Robert Dale Owen had envisioned. Already there were vocal objections to limiting organizational focus to Christian Spiritualism.

The Convention had sparked local organizing, though. Watson and Peebles wrote a joint open letter about the need for missionaries to travel and form societies. The letter also acknowledged the fissures that would become fractures in the new movement. "It is a painful reflection that any could have misunderstood or misconstrued our purpose," they said. The indefatigable Peebles traveled to Shreveport and organized a society there. They elected as their first president Judge R. J. Looney, who had administered the oath of office to Henry Gerard Hall in 1873 and whose wife had also died in the yellow fever epidemic. Jesse W. Fuller, Watson's son-in-law, was a vice president. "You, Dr.

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[670] John McRae, "The New Departure," *American Spiritual Magazine,* Vol. II (Memphis: Boyle and Company, Publishers, 1876), viii.

Watson," wrote Peebles, "sowed the first seed in this city. Springing up, it has blossomed into organization."[671] Peebles returned to Memphis, and chaired the first convention of Spiritualists held in Tennessee. Mathew Hawks was appointed secretary, and a state organization was constituted. The announcement in the *American Spiritual Magazine* reflected the tensions within the national organization. Watson admitted he had used the term "Christian" when he proposed the Philadelphia Convention, but that among Spiritualists "there is an almost universal wish . . . not to use the term in any sense whatever." The Tennessee organization adopted a constitution that did not "prescribe any article of faith or belief as a condition of membership" but required of its members morality, "religious culture" and "being good and doing good to humanity." Samuel Watson was elected president, and Mathew Hawks secretary. The Board of Managers included General W. J. Smith, and introduced some new names to the public record. Among them were John Zent, Minor Meriwether and P. R. Albert. Zent, husband of medium Clara Robertson, was president of the Memphis Board of Aldermen and a Mason.[672] Minor Meriwether was a relative of the Kentucky Meriwethers with whom Jesse Ferguson had first investigated mesmerism in the 1840s. Meriwether, a railroad man, had been a Lieutenant Colonel of engineers in the Confederate army. Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, great with his child, had been ordered out of Memphis by General Sherman in 1862 for her outspoken Confederate partisanship. After the war, Col.

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[671] "The Philadelphia Conference of Spiritualists," *American Spiritual Magazine* (October 1876), 351; "Another Spiritualist Organization," *American Spiritual Magazine* (October 1876), 3.

[672] "Tennessee Spiritualists—First Convention of Spiritualists Ever Held in the State—Organization—Address of Hon. J. M. Peebles, " *American Spiritual Magazine* (December 1876), 373–375; *Boyle & Chapman's Memphis Directory for 1876* (Memphis: Boyle & Chapman, 1876), 436; "Called Off," *Masonic Jewel* (March 1876), 64.

Meriwether became an attorney. The Meriwethers were an activist family. Minor Meriwether worked with Nathan Bedford Forrest to establish the Ku Klux Klan in Memphis. Elizabeth became a leading suffragist.[673] Paul R. Albert of Chattanooga would be instrumental in establishing a Spiritualist camp meeting on Lookout Mountain in the 1880s.

The last sentence of Watson's December 1876 issue left readers with this thought: "May we not learn some useful lessons from the founder of Methodism, who was not only a Spiritualist, but one of the best organizers ever known?"[674] Tacit was the fact that Wesley had founded a new Christian denomination despite his earlier intentions of merely reforming the Anglican Church from within. The controversy over the name and purpose of the new national organization continued in the *Banner of Light* and *Religio-Philosophical Journal.* Watson wrote a short article for the latter, and the editor printed a lengthy reply. "We declined to answer," wrote Watson, "for the obvious reason that we have no strength to expend in controversy with each other about a name." When Eugene Crowell decided it was in the best interest of the cause of Christian Spiritualism to "abandon all attempt to accomplish any useful purpose by united, organized action," Watson printed his letter and pointed out that Crowell had come to his belief that Spiritualism was identical to the primitive Christianity of the Bible not from a background of faith but from materialism. Watson asserted " *that Spiritualists agree upon*

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[673] *W. H. Rainey & Co.'s Memphis City Directory and General Business Advertiser for 1855 & '6* (Memphis: D. O. Dooley & Co., 1855), 148; *Edwards' Annual Directory to the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms, etc., in the City of Memphis, for 1872* (Memphis: Southern Publishing Company, 1872), 276; Louisa A. H. Minor, *The Meriwethers and Their Connections: A Family Record, Giving the Genealogy of the Meriwethers in America Together with Biographical Notes and Sketches* (Albany, N.Y.: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1892), 125, 157; *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture,* s. v. "Meriwether, Elizabeth Avery (1824–1916), http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=M086 (accessed April 29, 2005).

[674] "Wesley and Whitfield [sic]," *American Spiritual Magazine* (December 1876), 377.

more cardinal principles than do the hundreds of sects who claim the Bible as the basis of their belief." Crowell thought the cause would best be left to individual action, guided by spirits. Watson hoped Crowell and others would change their minds, and come together in 1877 in a national convention on a platform "ignoring creeds as a condition of membership, broad enough, on which Spiritualists may stand united in an organization which we think is necessary for the accomplishment of the mission this glorious Harmonial Philosophy is intended to effect in science, philosophy and religion."[675] Watson had rhetorically switched direction, invoking the early pronouncements of Andrew Jackson Davis and for the moment leaving Christ out of the discussion. Eugene Crowell grasped the nature and importance of personal relationships to the spread and maintenance of Spiritualist practice in a way of which Watson, who had given so much of his efforts to organizing, had somewhat lost sight.

Watson wanted an alternative church structure as robust as Methodism, an entirely unrealistic vision. A minister wrote that he believed in the ministry of angels and discussed it with his congregation, but hoped he would not have to leave the Methodist church. In "straitened financial circumstances and somewhat impaired health," the minister felt he must go slowly in these matters. Watson was sure there were hundreds of other ministers in similar situations. "If we were properly organized and prepared to support them as the churches are," he opined, "they would gladly throw off the restraints of their creed-bound dogmas and unite with us."[676] Not only was there evidence that many who believed as Watson did had no need to leave their denominations, previous

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[675] "Organization," *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1877), 232 [12]; *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1877), 18–19.

[676] *American Spiritual Magazine* (April 1877), 215–216.

national organizational gambits by Spiritualists had all faltered. Local societies, though, continued to function.

Watson believed that he, assisted by legions of angels and departed spirits, had been tasked at the time of Bishop Otey's séances with breaking ground and sowing the seeds of Christian Spiritualism. At their final circle, Mystery's parting admonition to Watson had been, "Do not put your hand to the plow and then look back, but move on, and a glorious harvest shall be yours, and a crown at the right hand of His Majesty on high shall be yours." Watson called for another convention where Spiritualists could meet and find a basis for organization without "any appellation other than Spiritualists." He proposed a national meeting in the nation's capital in late October 1877, because Jesse Ferguson's spirit had told him to wait no later. "We think the South and West will be pretty well represented," Watson wrote, and hoped that the "Middle and East will meet us at the capital and organize."[677] Watson thought he could rally his forces, and hoped for the best when imagining what Chicago (represented by the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*) and the Northeast (led by the *Banner of Light*) might do. A message through his home medium from "Sehon" (probably the late Methodist minister Edmund Sehon) sympathized with "the trials martyrs to any cause must suffer," and though Watson must pass through a dark period he should "remember the disciples forsook their Master when he needed their sympathy." Spiritualists often admitted that spirit communications were imperfect, and reflected something of the medium. It is tempting to speculate that Mrs. Watson, who shared her husband's most intimate thoughts, was injecting something of herself into messages such as this one.

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[677] *Clock Struck One,* 144; "Organization," *American Spiritual Magazine* (July 1877), 218–219.

J. M. Peebles had put half a world between himself and the internecine squabbles of American Spiritualism, and was sharing the message of Christian Spiritualism with Australians to good effect. Peebles thought Washington a splendid choice for the National Conference, and hoped Dr. Crowell and "other old and substantial Spiritualists" would be present. "I shall be with you in spirit," wrote Peebles, "and that spirit breathes peace, love and charity for all."[678] Watson may have wished himself on the other side of the globe as well; peace, love and charity for all are sometimes easier maintained at a distance.

Joseph Rodes Buchanan of Louisville wrote an article for the *American Spiritual Magazine* to point out that if they were to have an organization it must be founded on a "vital principle." His emphasis was on acting locally, beginning with establishing a "social center" where people could meet several times a week to explore their shared interest in spiritual truths. Every Spiritualist should subscribe to at least one spiritual paper, and have access to as many as possible at the social center. He recommended a weekly contribution of at least twenty-five cents per member to sustain the endeavor, which should include musical and social entertainments. Buchanan understood that it was the bonds of faith and friendship—created through shared songs and prayers and seeking—on which organization must be built.[679]

Peebles wrote from Ceylon. He wanted to see the oldest Buddhist temples in the world, as "we all know Pauline Christianity is greatly indebted to Buddhism." Then he was off to India to see the "Fakiis, Wonder-workers and Magicians" and settle in his own mind "how much is genuine, how much is trickery and how much is the work of

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[678] "Letter from J. M. Peebles," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1877), 236–237.

[679] "Spiritual Organization," *American Spiritual Magazine* (August 1877), 244–246.

demons." Peebles sent newspaper notices from Australia and New Zealand about the success of his efforts.[680] It was much easier to eloquently preach the gospel of Christian Spiritualism than to build an institution upon it.

From the outset, departed Spiritualists and religious leaders had been more uniformly supportive of Watson's magazine and ministry than the living, offering their encouragement through the "Inner Life Department" séances with Annie Hawks as medium. Transcriptions of these séances were printed in Watson's magazine like sermons from the other side. The spirit of Judge J. W. Edmonds, one of the most influential of the early converts to Spiritualism, said he had never before visited his friends at the South, and assured Watson that "From the celestial shores many friends watch with interest the little bark freighted with spiritual truths that you have launched upon Southern waters." The eminent Universalist divine Hosea Ballou, who had once taken William Ellery Channing to task for using the term "incorrigible sinners" because God, infinitely loving, could consider none of his children incorrigible,[681] explained from the other side that his spirit was acting upon the spirit of the medium by magnetic laws, causing her brain to "lessen its action upon the soul-principle of her existence" and enabling him to "infuse from the spiritual plane that aura that by natures laws go to meet the aura that is formed from the brain of her being[.]" The spirit of Universalist minister. L. F. W. Andrews, who had published *The Christian Spiritualist* and hosted medium Emma Hardinge before the war, wrote through Mrs. Hawks. Andrews wanted his band and his circles to know he

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[680] "Personal," *American Spiritual Magazine* (September 1877), 306–307.

[681] *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography,* s. v. "Hosea Ballou," http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/hoseaballou.html (accessed June 2, 2010).

would always be with them, "for my powers will be needed with the beginners." From this we may infer that Watson's magazine reached Andrews's friends in Augusta, Georgia. In the coming months, the spirits of Emanuel Swedenborg, Lucy Lenore Winchester, English evangelical writer Hannah More, and liberal theologians Hosea Ballou, William Ellery Channing and Jesse Babcock Ferguson would share their wisdom or help other spirits to speak.[682]

After pleas in each issue to subscribers to send in their money and a few schemes for reorganizing and adjusting the price, Samuel Watson had begun a second year of the publication under a new title, *American Spiritual Magazine,* to differentiate it from the *Spiritual Magazine* of London which "has been using this name for ten or twelve years." Beneath the banner it said, "A Monthly Journal, Devoted to Spiritualism, its History, Phenomena, Philosophy and Teachings FROM A CHRISTIAN STANDPOINT." The Inner Life Department started the year 1876 with more messages from William Ellery Channing and Judge Edmonds. By February, Watson had moved it to page one of every issue, highlighting the importance of the content of the messages and of Mrs. Annie C. T. Hawks as the medium. Other spirit participants in the magazine's second year would include Theodore Parker, Henry Bacon and Jesse Ferguson. Powhatan would be the first Indian spirit to visit.[683]

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[682] "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (May 1875), 211–212; "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (April 1875), 170; "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (May 1875), 217; "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (June 1875), 265–267; "Half-Hours," *The Spiritual Magazine* (June 1875), 268–272; "Spiritual Encouragement," *The Spiritual Magazine* (June 1875), 272; "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (July 1875), 319; "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (November 1875), 508; "Inner Life Department," *The Spiritual Magazine* (December 1875), 545–547.

Watson soldiered on. Two significant changes marked the first page of the January 1877 issue of the *American Spiritual Magazine.* First, the price was "$2.00 per Annum, in Advance." Watson had a family to support and could no longer blanket the South with free copies. The Inner Life Department was replaced by "The Inner Life of Man. Through Our Home Medium." Mrs. Hawks was traveling more and enjoying her new prominence in the movement, so Mrs. Watson's spirit messages would be the first thing readers saw in 1877. The magazine continued to print credulous reports of materializations from correspondents, but it was impossible to ignore the spate of stories about fraudulent mediums in the national and local press. A letter from New Orleans may have planted the idea for a change of direction in Watson's mind, but it would be a while before he internalized the wisdom of the suggestion. "Here, where unfortunately the people have been more than once deceived by false mediums," wrote the subscriber, "material manifestations have not the value of those which are of a spiritual order—of those which men cannot falsify, and which each one can himself control or verify." Watson's home medium gave him a message from his first wife: He must stop spending his time "testing mediums in your midst" and secure a hall. "You are becoming weaker every day you postpone this matter. Some will attend church, while others feel just like wanderers, not knowing where to go, or what to do."[684]

The "naming issue" and the national organization continued to take up space, but Watson could not stop trying to find points of agreement that would permit it to go

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[683] "Inner Life Department," *American Spiritual Magazine* (March 1876), 66–67; "Inner Life Department," *American Spiritual Magazine* (April 1876), 101–102; "Inner Life Department," *American Spiritual Magazine* (March 1876), 66.

[684] *American Spiritual Magazine* (January 1877), 221 [1]; *American Spiritual Magazine* (March 1877), 81; "Our Home Seances," *American Spiritual Magazine* (March 1877), 85.

forward. Nor was he ready to follow Mollie's advice from the spirit land. He invited the press and some judges and lawyers, but no Spiritualists, to a materializing séance in his home on February 22. Mrs. Lewis, who had made a success of materializing George Washington, was visiting. Washington appeared and dematerialized, as did Martha Washington, but conditions were not good and both spirits were "obliged to remain too near the cabinet."[685] It was an interesting experience, but something of a disappointment.

Watson continued to write about his experiences with mediums. After the materialization of Washington, he thought he would suspend his "investigations in that direction," but then he accepted an invitation to be present at the baptism of an infant by the spirit of Mary Dana Shindler's late husband through the mediumship of Mrs. Miller. Watson held the baby while the spirit, in his Episcopal robes, conducted the ritual. The next night, Mrs. Miller came to Watson's house. Several spirits materialized; being a careful investigator, Watson asked a gentleman present to measure their height and remarked on the wide variance in their sizes. Another evening, the same group came together to witness the marriage of C. Stillman and his "Spirit Bride," again with Mrs. Miller as the medium. The Spirit Bride walked out "in all her loveliness" and stood beside Stillman, and Watson took his place in front of them and performed the ceremony, "with their right hands joined, as naturally as any two willing hearts plighting their solemn vows of fidelity to each other before Hymen's altar." Watson anticipated the ridicule the story might elicit, but "the Author of the Christian religion performed his first miracle at a wedding[.]" As interesting as it was that was not what had mattered most to Watson. His son Sammy, dead less than a year, had come out of the cabinet. When

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[685] "Materialization of Washington," *American Spiritual Magazine* (April 1877), 115–117

someone handed him candy he had "jumped up as in earth life, showing that he was not in Elmwood Cemetery, but with us still, around our home circle, and able to manifest himself to us as in other days."[686]

Watson's June editorial was about materializations. He claimed he had spent so much time investigating this phase of Spiritualism because "Mankind," like doubting Thomas of the Bible, "wants something tangible—something of which the senses can take cognizance." The essay proceeded through the Bible, citing instances of spirits materializing in the sacred text. Watson's conviction was that materialism would be exterminated, and "this materialization phase of Spiritualism will be the instrument by which this glorious work will be accomplished."[687]

We can only speculate about Ellen Watson's awareness of how much of her own thought comprised the spirit messages she gave to her husband, and what she thought of the materializations. Memphis Spiritualists did secure the meeting place Mollie had urged, through Ellen, from the spirit world. They called it Harmonial Hall. Mrs. Hawks was giving inspirational trance lectures. Mary Dana Shindler was pleased that both the local and state organizations were "in good working order," and hoped that Memphis would soon "shed light and joy in an ever increasing radius throughout the whole of our beloved Southern land." The question of whether Spiritualism is a religion had been under discussion for four consecutive Sundays in the summer of 1877, and before leaving for the Harmonial Hall the next Sunday Watson received a message through his home medium suggesting that the question was not if it is a religion but "whether its advocates

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[686] "Three Seances with Mrs. Miller," *American Spiritual Magazine* (May 1877), 125–126.

[687] "Materializations," *American Spiritual Magazine* (June 1877), 187–189.

will make it a religion."[688] Watson seems to have become more and more certain that the movement, Christian Spiritualism, needed the sort of institutional structures that made Methodism effective. He was the leader of the South's Christian Spiritualists, but it was too ad hoc an arrangement of individuals and weak local organizations to ensure the sort of united effort required to form congregations, support clergy and undertake missionary work. The question seems to have been how to get enough people under the tent of Christian Spiritualism to create the necessary momentum to advance the cause.

Samuel Watson continued to cast all his séance experiences as religious, and was unable to resist new manifestations offered by the spirits. He accepted an invitation to a strawberry festival to be hosted by the spirits. It was well attended and "several times during the night there were two forms outside in white" at the same time, and people who had recently "passed over the river, were seen and recognized by those present, thus giving ocular demonstration that there is no death, but only a birth to a higher life."[689]

In June, Watson had called attention to the prospectus for a new weekly paper, "to be edited by Mrs. Shindler and Mrs. Hawks." The October issue reported that Mrs. Hawks was holding séances to raise money to launch her new weekly, the *Voice of Truth.* Watson must have thought this paper would supplement his own rather than compete with it, bringing Spiritualist news in a more timely way than his monthly was able to. Perhaps he hoped Shindler and Hawks would rally more women to the cause, knowing that it was women whose support had enabled the fledgling Methodist organization in America to operate effectively. A few pages later was a notice that the *Texas Spiritualist*

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[688] Mary D. Shindler, "Our Anniversary," *American Spiritual Magazine* (April 1877), 151–152; "Is Spiritualism a Religion?" *American Spiritual Magazine* (September 1877), 280.

[689] "A Novel Invitation," *American Spiritual Magazine* (July 1877), 216–217.

would soon begin publication at Hempstead. New publications, a weekly originating in the South and a paper in Texas, were promising signs for the growth of Spiritualism in the South. Watson was also proposing in October 1877 to make his own magazine one third larger for the coming year. One of the things he had had no room for was reports on his own extensive lecturing trips over the past three years. Watson was giving mixed messages, and on the same page declared that were he "so situated, we would like to spend the remnant of our days in proclaiming the glad news of salvation over our world." Watson's editorial in the December issue struck an optimistic note about the magazine, claiming it had "succeeded far beyond our expectations. Its costs exceeded its receipts considerably the first year. The second year it about paid its expenses [if not its editor]. This year it has done much better." However, if the magazine was to make the planned expansion, the "cash system" would have to be adopted. Nearly a thousand subscribers owed for the past year, and "a considerable number" for two years. At the same time, a "specimen number" of the *Voice of Truth* had been sent out. "It must be sustained," he maintained, "We need a spiritual weekly paper in the South, and we know of no two ladies whom we can more fully endorse than we can Mrs. Shindler and Mrs. Hawks."[690]

Reliance on materialization as a more convincing proof of spirit return had proved to be a diversion from the purity and simplicity of uplifting spirit communion, just as efforts to create a national organization without Christian Spiritualism as its core principle had caused Watson to lose sight of his movement's necessary grounding in Scripture. He had not been to a materialization since summer, and on the last page of the

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[690] *American Spiritual Magazine* (June 1877), 192; "Memphis Mediums," (November 1877), 350; "Our Prospective Enlargement, etc.," *American Spiritual Magazine* (October 1877), 313; "To Our Subscribers," "The 'Voice of Truth'," *American Spiritual Magazine* (December 1877), 377.

December issue he mused that "trying to force belief" is "labor lost. We repeat what we have often said, the home circle is the best place to investigate the subject, or with a few intimate friends. There the conditions necessary for communion with loved ones are more easily obtained, and the results far more satisfactory than with promiscuous circles." Watson's home medium and the spirit of his first wife had apparently managed to persuade the exhausted evangelist to get back to basics. Soon after, "our spirit friends agreed to suspend the *Spiritual Magazine* in order that the *Voice of Truth,* a weekly, might be a success" but they assigned another task to Watson. He was to prepare and publish a book, *The Religion of Spiritualism.*[691]

As Watson turned to this new project, he and Ellen added a son to their family and named him Eugene Crowell. Yellow fever ravaged Memphis in 1878, so "distinctive in its severity" that "any reader of the newspapers from New Orleans and Memphis could see that something very unusual was happening." Besides following the watercourses as it always had, "The disease traveled doggedly up railroad lines, marching progressively outward from the urban centers[.]"[692] Many citizens left the city when yellow fever appeared; one source claiming "twenty-five of the city's forty thousand residents fled to places as distant as New York City. Businesses were abandoned; dinners left uneaten. . . . 'The ordinary courtesies of life were ignored,' wrote Colonel Keating, editor of the *Memphis Appeal.* 'There was one emotion: an inexpressible terror.'" Another source said twenty thousand remained in Memphis, nearly eighteen thousand of whom had the fever,

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[691] *American Spiritual Magazine* (December 1877), 377, 384; Samuel Watson, *The Religion of Spiritualism: Its Phenomena and Philosophy* (Boston: Colby & Rich, Publishers, 1889 c. 1880), 25.

[692] Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South,* 60–61.

and five thousand one hundred fifty—one of every four people in the city—died. It was almost as severe in New Orleans and Vicksburg, and on the Gulf coast. General Smith and his wife lost their son. Samuel Watson's brother Kendall was a physician who worked tirelessly treating the sick. When he was missed, it was assumed he was going wherever he was needed. Checking on a report of a dead body, a policeman kicked in the door of an abandoned building and found "the corpse of Dr. Watson, on an old mattress on the floor[.]"[693]

Yellow fever also administered the *coup de grâce* to the already struggling *Voice of Truth.* Mrs. Schindler, having exhausted herself doing most of the editorial work while Mrs. Hawks traveled and lectured, went home to Texas to recuperate. Mrs. Hawks assumed the duties of editor and soon found herself too ill to work, so publication was suspended until fall. By then the city was in the grip of yellow fever, and every member of the Hawks family came down with the disease; her mother died. The women were exhausted. Their funds were too, "and thus *The Voice of Truth* passed out of existence."[694]

Ironically, while the citizens had not yet connected mosquitoes with the transmission of yellow fever, the cisterns that were necessary to life in Shreveport and

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[693] Barbara Bisantz Raymond, *The Baby Thief: The Untold Story of Georgia Tann, the Baby Seller Who Corrupted Adoption* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 2007), 25; J. M. Goss, "Yellow Fever," Transactions of the National Eclectic Medical Association, of the *United States of America, for the Years 1885–86: Including the Proceedings of the Fiftieth Annual Meeting, Held at the City of Altoona, Pennsylvania, June, 1885, together with the Reports, Papers and Essays, Furnished, Submitted and Read Before the Several Sections of that Body,* vol. XII, ed. Alexander Wilder (Orange, N.J.: 1886), 233; John McLeod Keating, *The History of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878 in Memphis, Tennessee: Embracing a Complete List of the Dead, the Names of All who Contributed Money Or Means, and the Names and History of the Howards, Together with Other Data, and Lists of the Dead Elsewhere* (Memphis: Printed for the Howard Association of Memphis, c1879), 151–152.

[694] Sam H. Dixon, *The Poets and Poetry of Texas: Biographical Sketches of the Poets of Texas, with Selections from Their Writings* (Austin, Tex.: Printed for the author, 1885), 293–294.

other southern cities were also ideal breeding sites for the mosquitoes that spread the pestilence. People understood that disease as somehow linked to the foul miasma that pervaded the air in cities without proper systems to deliver clean water and sewers to carry off waste. In the wake of the 1878 epidemic, Memphis began to make improvements to the sidewalks and pavement, and to replace the city's "wells and cisterns with a modern waterworks. But yellow fever returned in 1879. Half the population fled. Five hundred eighty-three people died, as did any remaining faith in Memphis." Many moved away permanently. Property values had declined and "A generation of poor fiscal management ended in bankruptcy and the loss of the city's charter in 1879."[695]

Samuel Watson had traveled to the Northeast during the summer of 1879, probably as a speaker for the Spiritualist Camp Meeting established in 1874 at Lake Pleasant, Massachusetts. Spiritualist camps were descendants of the revival at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801 and the camp meetings that developed afterwards. Evangelists had adopted the camp meeting as a model for conversion because it was effective. As the country grew more settled, so did camp meetings. They evolved into annual encampments, and in some places people built cottages. The Spiritualists began to hold camp meetings after the Civil War, and their two most successful sites were Onset Bay

[695] Terry S. Reynolds, "Cisterns and Fires: Shreveport, Louisiana as a Case Study of the Emergence of Public Water Supply Systems in the South," *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 22:4 (Autumn 1981), 340; *The Baby Thief,* 28; *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture,* s. v. "Memphis," http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=M069 (accessed April 29, 2005).

and Lake Pleasant, Massachusetts.[696] We know Watson was invited to speak at Lake Pleasant in 1880 because he talked a bit about it in the book he was writing.

The Religion of Spiritualism, written at the behest of Watson's spirit advisers, was to be the definitive statement of the faith he had worked to found. National organization had failed, but he clung to the beliefs and early revelations that had impelled him to assume the mantle of leadership, formulate a Christian Spiritualism and take that message to his people. Ellen Watson's influence is apparent in the book, which Watson "Affectionately dedicated to my spirit band, my two wives, Mollie and Ellen. With the former nearly a quarter of a century of happy wedded life was spent. With the latter about half that time, in the most perfectly harmonious relations. Both have an abiding interest in this volume, as well as the band who originated and supervised its compilation." Ellen, acting as his home medium, was—consciously or not—a gatekeeper through whom spirit messages must pass to reach him.

The volume opens with a biographical sketch of Watson by his old friend Hudson Tuttle that had originally appeared in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal.* "He is at present lecturing on Spiritualism, taking still more advanced grounds than that occupied by his publications," Tuttle had written.[697]

Watson began with the basic question. "If a man die, shall he live again?" To a materialist, the body quickly decomposes and "oblivion triumphs," but "As seen from its opposite, the clairvoyant beholds the loved ones around, waiting to welcome a new-born soul to the spirit-world, the real substantial mode of existence." He revisited an

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[696] *Religion of Spiritualism,* 370; William D. Moore, "'To Hold Communion with Nature and the Spirit-World,: New England's Spiritualist Camp Meetings, 1865–1910," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 7 (1997), 231–233.

[697] Hudson Tuttle, "Biographical Sketch of Rev. Samuel Watson," *Religion of Spiritualism,* 9.

antebellum sermon by Bishop Holland McTyiere of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, who had written, "No vain or irreverent curiosity inquires here. A state so near, so certain, concerns us all. The soul would explore before entering 'the land of darkness' as darkness itself. We look, We cannot help looking, in that direction." Curiosity about the afterlife was justifiable, and "the written word" had not shed enough light on the subject to meet "the longing demands of a large class of mankind." Watson's project was to "supplement this deficiency by testimony regarding the life to come," which was pretty much what his first three books and his magazine had done. "Can any one," he asked, "conscientiously affirm that the Bible satisfies all our wants in this respect? We think not." Watson's disappointment with "the sad and comfortless teachings we often hear from the pulpit at funerals," might strike a responsive chord in the twenty-first-century reader. Spirit communion was for him the key that "adds intensely to the interest" of perusing the Scriptures by "spreading an entirely new light upon many Bible narratives that must have always appeared mysterious and inexplicable" to those who have not experienced such communication. The "resurrection of Jesus," he stressed, "is the rock on which the whole Christian superstructure is built." Like modern Spiritualism, Christianity's foundation was "recognition of those who were once denizens of earth." Invoking John Wesley's opinion that giving up these things is in effect giving up the Bible, Watson, "in harmony with the founder of the largest Protestant Church in the world," proceeded to give his own opinions, "controlled, as we believe, mainly by those who passed over, and know for themselves the truth of what they have realized in the spirit-world." It is difficult to see how any of this supports Tuttle's contention that Watson was taking more advanced positions. On the contrary, he had reaffirmed his

earliest positions on spirit communication as a sacred gift and an enhancement of faith, and Christian Spiritualism alone as supplying "the necessities which the intelligence of this age demands."[698]

There is in fact little in this volume that seems new. Much is reprinted almost verbatim from the *Clock* books and the magazine. Watson retells the story of his experiences with spirits and their early insistence that he travel to the North and sit with mediums. One surprising tidbit that emerges is that in 1856, while in New York, he had visited Emma Hardinge. "Quite a number of Memphians went together to see her," he disclosed. "She took us one at a time, and gave each one some very satisfactory tests, as to our spirit friends who were with us." Another comment reveals that Ellen Watson was with her husband when he witnessed full-form materialization for the first time. It was in Memphis in 1872, through the professional mediumship of Mrs. Hollis, and a dozen or more spirits materialized. Ellen, having seen a picture of Mollie, recognized her immediately. The only other spirit they could identify was Ellen's father. "Both looked about as natural as they did in earth-life."[699]

Watson remained committed to home circles and professed to have "greatly lost interest in public séances," only attending them to "aid others in their investigations." There were many families like his own who found home circles the most satisfying and convincing way to communicate with loved ones. "To them the gates are not only ajar, but the veil separating the two worlds is almost removed." Watson claimed he had "long

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[698] *Religion of Spiritualism,* 21–26. The sermon was "The Intermediate State: Or, State of the Soul Between Death and Resurrection," in *The Methodist Pulpit, South,* compiled by William T. Smithson (Washington, D.C.: William T. Smithson, 1859), 373–388; *Religion of Spiritualism,* 39.

[699] *Religion of Spiritualism, 43,* 69–70.

since ceased to feel any interest in physical manifestations. . . . but the home altar increases in interest. It is here that we can meet loved ones, and have communion sweet with those who have 'lived and loved together.'"[700]

In February 1880, as he worked on the manuscript, his daughter Ella died. Watson would live another fifteen years, but the chapter on home circles evokes nothing so much as the spirits swirling around Toulouse-Lautrec's bed in the final scene of the original *Moulin Rouge* (1952). Watson's spirits did not come to say goodbye, though, but to offer encouragement. He was making plans to attend the Spiritualist camp meeting in Lake Pleasant. They condoled with him in his discouragement, and encouraged his efforts as a lecturer. Spirit Mollie told him to "buckle on the armor, and go as Jesus said among wolves." One of his spirit children knew that "Lonely and melancholy were your feeling and reflections this afternoon while wandering o'er the ground where once our young and happy feet bounded so joyously."[701] He had more family, and many more children, in the spirit world than in the land of the living.

While he was preparing to go to Lake Pleasant in 1880, the spirit of an old Methodist friend requested at their home circle that Watson "ask John Wesley, Bishop Otey, R. D. Owen and others" to write to him through Mansfield. The reply from John Wesley identified some of the other spirits in Watson's band of advisers: Dr. Thomas Bond, with whom Watson had sparred over the letter about the clock striking one before family members died; Robert Dale Owen; Judge John Worth Edmonds; Bishop Otey; ministers "Fisk, Parsons and Sehon" and Jesse Babcock Ferguson. After conferring with

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[700] *Religion of Spiritualism,* 353.

[701] 360.

them, the spirit Wesley wrote they had decided that Watson's presence was required for him to receive the communications he desired. Watson "decided by our impressions to go to Saratoga to see what our friends had to say through Dr. Mansfield." He also participated in the Spiritualist camp meeting. The Eddy family was there doing materializing séances, and at the one he attended Watson recognized the form of noted trance lecturer E. V. Wilson, and heard him speak clearly. The fellowship at the meeting was probably disheartening for Watson. Other Lake Pleasant speakers had made pronouncements such as, "The best way the Bible could illumine, or shed any light upon the world, would be to make a bonfire of them all, and burn them."[702]

In two extended sittings with Mansfield, Watson received messages from fellow Spiritualist luminaries who had passed over, including Methodist healer Samuel Gilbert, *Religio-Philosophical Journal* editor S. S. Jones, Robert Dale Owen, Judge John W. Edmunds, and of course Bishop Otey and John Wesley. Methodist minister Willber Fisk and Bishop Joshua Soule voiced support for the new book, as did after-death Methodist converts to Spiritualism such as St. Louis editor T. E. Bond, attorney W. K. Poston, Rev. C. B. Parsons and Rev. Phineas T. Scruggs. The most interesting message, from the spirit of Jesse B. Ferguson, described "my early lectures at dear old Memphis, when you and Bro. Gilbert, Dr. Rose, Eleanora L. Winchester, and a few others, were all that dared to speak of Spiritualism."[703] If true, this is may be the only evidence placing Ferguson and Watson at the same place and time in pursuit of spirit communication—or suggesting that they ever met.

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[702] *Religion of Spiritualism,* 389; "Spiritual Matters in America," *Light* [London] (February 5, 1881), 34.

[703] *Religion of Spiritualism,* 389–399, 397.

Watson never could resist sharing positive reviews of his work, and later editions of *The Religion of Spiritualism* have comments from the press. They are reminiscent of what had been said about his other books and the magazine. The *Banner of Light* described it as "an excellent missionary book for thinking people in the Churches, as well as valuable for us." Emma Hardinge Britten commended Watson's "well-written rational, and always pure-minded" writing. Aging Spiritualist Herman Snow thought it was "wonderfully adapted to do a good work within the limits and upon the borders of the Christian Churches." The *Religio-Philosophical Journal* observed that "as would be expected, he leans to the religious side of Spiritualism rather than the scientific, feeling that his great life's work is to develop that aspect of this great subject." Eugene Crowell probably understood Watson's deepest hopes better than any of the others: "It is admirably calculated to favorably impress the minds, especially of the Methodist clergy and their flocks, and to convince them that there is nothing in Spiritualism that is antagonistic to rational religion, but on the contrary, that all its higher teachings are elevating and harmonious with the true devotional spirit."[704]

Watson celebrated his sixty-seventh birthday on August 10, 1880. He wrote no more books, and information about his activities is scant. He continued to lecture and participate in Spiritualist activities, but organizational efforts had apparently collapsed. In early 1881, a letter from James Peebles appeared in a London Spiritualist paper under the heading, "Spiritualist Matters in America." Speaking of the Philadelphia convention of 1876, he wrote that "Once we had a National Convention of Spiritualists. It died years ago. We had several State Associations of Spiritualists. They are all dead or in a comatose states." The cause, though was not dead. The fact that "many of our so-called

[704] Ibid. 406, 413–414 , 416, 417.

Spiritualists in America" hate Christ and the Bible," Peebles observed, "has driven multitudes of our most refined and cultured Spiritualists into the liberal Christian Churches." Christian Spiritualism, Peebles was suggesting, if not organized as such, was alive and well. "Several of our writers—speakers, trance-speakers too—have joined Christian denominations, working there either as laymen or preachers. Several of these are in frequent correspondence with me. They believe in the ministry of Spirits as firmly as ever." Perhaps, but Peebles quoted at length not from Watson but from Eugene Crowell on the subject of Christian Spiritualism, then mentioning Dr. Samuel Watson as one of a handful of "our ablest writers" who are "in perfect accord with Dr. Crowell on Christian Spiritualism."[705] Watson may have remained the leading Christian Spiritualist in the South, but apparently in Peebles's estimation Crowell was the movement's preeminent American spokesman .

National organization had eluded him, but Watson still had hopes for the South. The October 1883 meeting of Spiritualists at Lookout Mountain was probably masterminded by Chattanooga businessman Paul R. Albert. "Preliminary steps," reported the Atlanta *Constitution,* "were taken looking to the organization of an encampment for the Spiritualists of the South with a capital stock of fifty thousand dollars. Over eight thousand dollars were subscribed," with the firm of Seeman & Albert (Paul Albert and his brother-in-law Jacob Seeman) taking five hundred dollars of the stock. Samuel Watson was elected president of the newly constituted Southern Association of Spiritualists, which apparently had concluded it would be happier focusing its efforts regionally rather than nationally. The following March, the Memphis Spiritualists moved

[705] "Spiritual Matters in America," *Light* [London] (February 5, 1881), 34.

to a new hall, "equipped with a fine organ, cushioned seats and gas lights." Dr. Samuel Watson was moderator at the Sunday afternoon sessions.[706]

The Southern Association of Spiritualists purchased the Lookout Mountain property and its hotel in 1884, with P. R. Albert taking the position of president of the Camp Meeting Association. The relationship between the two groups is not clear, but Albert and Seeman were active in both. The Southern Association of Spiritualists met at Lookout Mountain in July, with about fifty delegates representing "Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, New York and Massachusetts." Watson, who would be remembered for his catholicity, delivered an address explaining the mission and needs of the young association, and a committee was selected to draft by-laws. P. R. Albert was one of the three members.[707] One of the first orders of business was approving six circuits for missionary work, and these had a decidedly southern focus: Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia; Virginia, North and South Carolina; Alabama and Mississippi; Louisiana and Texas; Arkansas, Kansas and Missouri; and Florida. This must have pleased Watson immensely. He was elected president again, and chosen to be one of the delegates to the American Association. *Light for Thinkers,* an Atlanta Spiritualist publication, was made the Southern Association's official organ.

Three men and four women applied for certificates of "ordination as ministers of the Gospel under the State authority given the Association." Elijah Grout Raiford of

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[706] "The Spiritualists," Atlanta *Constitution* (October 23, 1883); Memphis *Commercial Appeal,* www.commercialappeal.com/news/2009/mar/26/mid-south-memories-powerful-gift/ (accessed May 1, 2009).

[707] "Lookout Camp Meeting. Convention of the Southern Spiritualists," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (August 2, 1884), http://www.spirithistory.com/84south.html (accessed c. 2007).

Chattahoochee County, Georgia was a Mason and a trustee of the Methodist Church, a man after Watson's own heart. Alonzo Chase Ladd of Atlanta had begun publishing *Light for Thinkers* after his quarry and lime works were declared insolvent. He was a master Mason but we do not know his religious background. George Whitfield Kates and his wife were theatrical performers on the 1880 census. There would soon be a very public and unpleasant divorce, and Kates would marry an Atlanta medium; 1910 would find them in Washington, D. C., both Spiritualist ministers. Anna Cooper was a materializing medium from Kentucky, but is historically elusive. Sue B. Fales claimed the power to translate mystical characters, but little more is known about her. Mrs. S. A. H. Talbot had been working as a medium in Texas. Mrs. Ione Kneeland was the wife of Henry W. Kneeland of Shreveport; he had been nominated a trustee of the Association. They might not have been exactly the Christian Spiritualists Watson had imagined, but they wanted to be ministers of whatever Gospel it was the Association supported. Unfortunately, there seems to be no record of the Association's by-laws and other foundational documents.[708]

The Spiritualist assemblages on Lookout Mountain soon became an annual curiosity that drew locals to the mountaintop. Coverage of the 1886 meeting in the Atlanta *Constitution* described a materializing séance during which Milton Ochs of the Chattanooga *Times* sang, "I Have a Father in the Spirit Land" though it is not clear if Ochs was a believer or one of the local skeptics who came to be entertained.[709]

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[708] *Facts* 2:1 (March 1883), 36–38; "Lookout Camp Meeting. Convention of the Southern Spiritualists."

[709] "Spirits on Lookout. Kaleidoscopic Views in the Undiscovered Country," Atlanta *Constitution* (August 25, 1886), 5.

The Lookout Mountain Spiritualist Camp Meeting continued for several years. Samuel Watson was listed as one of the lecturers in 1887 and 1888.[710] After that he seems to slip quietly from the public record, though more research in local and Spiritualist newspapers is needed to confirm that.

Samuel Watson's faith was both immediate and mystical in ways we cannot fully recapture from a twenty-first-century vantage point. Building on beliefs and experiences reported through all of history, bolstered by the Bible and the interpretations of revered theologians such as John Wesley, and reminded that those who first stand firm in the true faith are often martyred, men like Watson and Jesse Ferguson were willing to risk almost everything for the privilege of leading people to the light. Their message of Christian Spiritualism, though each of them cast it differently, resonated for what in light of previous historical scholarship was an astonishing number of people, especially in the South. To them, with support from Scripture, giving their testimonies—sharing their personal stories of spirit communication—was a way of affirming and authenticating their faith that God loved them enough to give them *proof* of life after death. Spiritualists, guided and supervised by the spirits of just men made more perfect and continually progressing, were enabled to lead earthly lives of greater nobility and purity.

It was a beautiful and uplifting belief, but relied on the central sacrament of communication with spirits. Watson generated tremendous excitement and support, especially in the South, when he endorsed spirit communion as a modern step in the progress of Christian faith, as of God and not demoniacal. Readers were invited to

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[710] "Southern Spiritualists. Something About the Approaching Season of Their Lookout Mountain Camp Meeting," Atlanta *Constitution* (June 21, 1887), 1; "Lookout Mountain Camp Meeting of Spiritualists," *The Carrier Dove* [San Francisco], Volume 5 (1888), 381.

participate vicariously in his experiences with mediums—the wisdom and guidance of venerated spirits; the encouragement of family and colleagues in the spirit world; the after-death conversions to Christian Spiritualism by former opponents; and the visual, aural and tactile proofs of materializations. In the end, too few people were able to achieve satisfactory results or to sustain them in home circles, or to agree on exactly what Spiritualism was, to make it the basis of a vibrant and self-sustaining institution. Too many scientists and fraudulent mediums made it easy to mock Spiritualism. In Watson's own South, too few Christians were willing to turn their backs on the comfort of their communities of faith to create the institutionalized Christian Spiritualist movement he envisioned, and Watson himself proved too willing to attempt national organization without Christianity as its touchstone. The truly devout, people of the South such as Rev. Bingham in Georgia who shared the news of his spirit wife's comforting visits with his congregation or Robert Cubley of Corsicana who came to Jesus when the stars fell, would never follow Watson into an association that embraced Spiritualists who spurned Christ and the Bible. When southern Spiritualists regrouped in the early 1880s to form a regional association and establish an annual camp meeting at Lookout Mountain, Watson's energy and financial clout were not the moving forces. He was initially selected to head the new organization, but without a publication of his own he was unable to sustain his early role as the voice of Christian Spiritualism in the South and not enough members of the group shared his commitment to a Scriptural interpretation of the phenomena. The Southern Association of Spiritualists put in place a structure for ordination and missionary work, but only one of the first group of ministers came from a ministerial background akin to Watson's. The Association quickly spun out of Watson's

control and the camp meetings devolved into annual carnivals of spirit performance. The Spiritualists sold the property in 1890,[711] and two years later Watson crept back into the Methodist Church.

Samuel Watson would never have imagined that Christian Spiritualism would finally be established as an enduring and recognizable Christian (if also highly syncretic) movement under the leadership of black women in Chicago in the early twentieth century. Ultimately, Watson must have thought his mission to share the light of Christian Spiritualism had failed. In 1892 he was readmitted to the Methodist Church and the Methodist annual conference. He must have been in decline for the last years of his life. He had been unconscious for days, but his obituary described a good death on January 20, 1895. Samuel Watson was remembered as kind, generous, a vigorous churchman and equally sincere and Bible-based in his pursuit of Christian Spiritualism. "The end came peacefully, as his life had been lived. Surrounded by his loved ones, he gave a little smile of recognition and closed his eyes in eternal sleep."[712] Whatever Watson believed lay in store at the end of his life, it was certainly not eternal sleep.

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[711] William F. Hull, *Lookout Mountain* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 34.

[712] *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology,* Ed. Gayraud S. Wilmore (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989), 85; "End of a Peaceful Life: Rev. Samuel Watson, D. D., Passes Quietly Away," Memphis *Commercial Appeal* (January 31, 1895).

CONCLUSION

New Sources, Spiritualism and the South's Religious Constituencies

Sarah Morgan's published Civil War journals are the most widely read and easily accessible source for a southerner's thoughts on spirit communion in that time period, and it was her musings and dreams about death and the afterlife that launched this project. Reading manuscript collections with fresh purpose casts previously studied elite southerners in new perspective. Scholars had noted but barely studied the engagement of elite white southerners with Spiritualism and other occult beliefs, or how their stories connnected to others throughout the South.

Two sources added considerably to the breadth of this project, which would otherwise have had recourse to little but the statements of the usual archival suspects. Names gleaned from Spiritualist publications offered a fresh set of nineteenth-century southerners with a serious interest in Spiritualism. The 1854 petition asking Congress to investigate Spiritualism allowed the inclusion of a significant representative sample of middling and even less privileged people, hundreds of previously lost lives and voices. Thorough demographic research on both sets of names—using census records, city directories, local and family histories as well as traditional histories—has yielded a much richer picture of who in the South found Spiritualism compelling, where they were located and how their webs of connection facilitated the sharing and spread of ideas and beliefs.

Many of those who wrote to newspapers from the South were of the middling sort, and their words were particularly useful in providing insights into the ways they experienced, imagined and explained spiritual phenomena. John B. Wolff chronicled his spiritual journey from Methodism to Spiritualism to Andrew Jackson's harmonialism and mesmerism in the *Spiritual Telegraph.* A list of receipts for *The Christian Spiritualist* led to the Goodrich/Angell/Scott clan of Mississippi and Louisiana. Methodists, they lived and worked among numbers of Swedenborgians who shared their interest in a world of spirits hovering nearby. On the same list was the wife of Methodist minister William H. Watkins of Natchez, who had entered the ministry years earlier with Robert Angell. They are a reminder that Methodists appear to have been disproportionately receptive to the message of Christian Spiritualism. Samuel D. Pace, another Methodist, was one of the few identified as both a correspondent of Spiritualist newspapers and a signer. Through Pace, it was possible to trace a local network of Spiritualists as well as ties of family and Spiritualist belief moving from Tennessee to Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. A letter to Samuel Watson's *Americal Spiritual Magazine* from "Allena" in Shreveport in time led to reconstructing the Watsons' network of kinship connnections, invaluable in understanding the significance of Henry Gerard Hall's journals to this project.

Analysis of the names on the 1854 petition revealed that those who were interested in spiritual phenomena came from all walks of life and all parts of the South, and that the *Spiritual Telegraph, Banner of Light* and other Spiritualist publications made deep inroads into the region. Mapping the signatories showed that they were usually people living along the commeercial watercourses of the South. The signers were mostly white, mostly farmers and tradesmen and businessmen. But there were planters,

transients, the occasional free person of color and even at least one slave. People did not believe petitions to Congress were only to be signed by those entitled to the franchise, and many signers were females and teenagers. Some who signed were illiterate according to the census. Those who can be traced were mostly Protestants except in New Orleans, where Catholicism was the traditional faith of those with French surnames. In Kentucky, twenty-five members of the South Union Shaker community signed together. They are the largest identifiable group of co-religionist signers; next is Methodist at sixteen, with a dozen scattered through other Protestant denominations. The signers from Westminster, Maryland and Jasper County, Texas revealed webs of family and social connection within communities. Among ordinary Americans, sharing ideas was very much a word-of-mouth matter and Spiritualist phenomena might have been part of everyday conversations that—as in some of the letters and journals we have seen—touched on a number of other subjects as well.

This project would be much less interesting without extensive use of online resources. Robert M. Cubley was a gem uncovered by searching through what is a comparatively new set of souces, the postings of Internet genealogists. Much of what they share is speculative, but there are some very good amateur historians sorting out their own family histories and sharing old photographs, letters and memoirs. Online sources other than scholarly databases are a factor serious historians are just beginning to understand. They are, when approached with caution and discernment, invaluable. Piecing together the extended networks of kinship for families such as the Killgores, Killebrews, Paces, Kyles, Watsons, Halls and Fullers would have been all but impossible without the work of family historians who share their work on genealogy sites. A useful

and expanding site, Find-a-Grave, yielded information years of other searches had failed to, most notably the birth and death dates of Samuel Watson's many children as this project was in its last stages.

Moseley Baker's involvement with what later was labeled Spiritualism was briefly noted in an old history of Methodism in Texas, which also mentioned Abijah Alley's influence on Baker. These matters were discovered the old-fashioned way, in a book in the library. Without Internet searches, however, it would have been impossile to assemble much more of Alley's story. An 1897 *New York Times* article about a colorful Virginia backwoods prophet provided more, if some of it probably apocryphal, information about Alley. An Oregon WPA interview with one of Alley's sons was helpful. It was an amateur historian in Ohio who shared convincing information that the Abijah Alley who was a Shaker schismatic was the same individual, and a family history that gave a bit more information about his "little band" in Virginia. The reference to Alley visiting Baker in Houston came from another old Methodist history, which was by then available through Google Books. Alley's beehive patent information was also in an online source. Columbus Patton was the result of yet another Google search, and the information about his life and misadventures is available on the website of his former home, now the Varner-Hogg State Historical Site. The Pattons purchased the property from the Varners; it was eventually owned by Texas Governor James S. Hogg and donated to the state by his daughter Ima. Some of them, like the Paces and Kilgores and their kin, demonstrate the dissemination of Spiritualist beliefs and information through families. Until recently, Spiritualism was not a widely used term in cataloguing

collections. Henry Gerard Hall's journals, housed in a university archive, were found not through scholarly searches but transcribed on a genealogy website.

Another invaluable online resource was John B. Buescher's spirithistory.com, may it rest in peace. Spending lunch hours transcribing old Spiritualist documents is not everyone's cup of tea, but researchers living far from the National Archives and the Library of Congress followed his postings with avid gratitude. Spirithistory.com was a labor of love. Bandwidth is not free, so Buescher eventually shut it down after observing that most people were led to his site using three search terms: "bunco," "bloomers" and "aren't I a woman." Marc Demarest, who studies and blogs about Emma Hardinge Britten and is working on book-length manuscripts, has begun a project to put complete runs of Spiritualist newspapers online, opening the study of Spiritualism's primary sources to many more scholars and allowing those of us already working in this area to access them and study them more thoroughly.

Spiritualism and the Folk and Religious Inheritances of Southern Christians

Those who were receptive to the message of communication from the spirit world were not looking for a new faith, but opening themselves to the possibility that God allowed something more than ministers, parsons or priests said He did, and that it could *enhance* their faith. Many people knew it was so from their own experience, and personal encounters with the supernatural had a privileged history among many Protestants. Devout men and women such as Mary Maverick recorded mystical experiences that acknowledged a vibrant world of spirits and dreams and portents before the Foxes started rapping. Without ever calling herself a Spiritualist, and framing her understanding of

good and evil spirits as God's will, Amelia Barr described the 1867 yellow fever outbreak in Galveston as a time when "The invisible world drew strangely near to the visible; every one talked with bated breath of things supernatural."

The work of Catherine Albanese, John L. Brook, Jon Butler, Christine Heyrman and Ann Taves thoughtfully refocused attention on the elements of folk and metaphysical belief in the lives of American Christians, and studying Spiritualism helps sharpen that focus. It demonstrates the ways those elements remained very real factors in the thought and belief of southerners and the surprising extent to which even the elite and educated drew their worldview—despite vehement denials—from the same reservoir of explanations for the mysterious tapped by whites of lesser status and by the African Americans who lived among them.

White southerners and their black human property also drew on each other's traditions as they built a shared culture, however much whites might have resisted admitting it. Some white evangelicals believed that blacks were more spiritual in nature, more susceptible to the influence of the Holy Spirit, than they. Cross-cultural "spiritual intimacies" inevitably developed between white children and the African American slaves who helped to raise them. Whites may have been aware that some blacks retained vestiges of their forebears' African spiritist traditions. The slave Lennice had no doubt that Miss Sarah went to the graveyard every day to call up the spirits of her father and brother. Many slaves apparently took advantage of such perceptions of whites about them to serve as mediums for their masters and in the process some were able to deliver messages from the spirit world suggesting better treatment or even emancipation. Samuel Watson was introduced to the world of spirits by a slave; John C. McRae of North

Carolina and Chancellor George Dargan of South Carolina relied on slave mediums. Columbus Patton was so totally under the sway of his mulatto mate Rachel that his family cited her influence and his turn to Spiritualism to have him declared insane. Henry Force and his family probably would never have considered sitting down to a meal with their slaves, but they sat around the table to call the spirits with their slave Goff and his wife; it was Goff, not his master, who decided when it was time to call it a night. The interplay of blacks, whites and the spirit world merits greater study.

Southern Clergymen and Spiritualism

Since Spiritualism was for many an enhancement to religious belief, some ministers were willing to move beyond "orthodoxy" to open themselves to new interpretations and revelations. Preachers Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker, before there was a Spiritualist movement, had like Andrew Jackson Davis moved beyond conventional formulations of religion to welcome a more profound experience of the divine. For Alley and Baker, this heightened faith could include personal revelation of the divine after the first blessing of conversion. Jesse Babcock Ferguson certainly believed that he was merely following the tenets of Campbellism to a higher plane of understanding despite Alexander Campbell's strenuous objection. And Tennessee's Episcopal Bishop James Hervey Otey, thought that the mystery of spirit communication was real enough to lead him beyond strictly orthodox conventions. Otey never sought to have his name publicly linked to Spiritualism, but when it happened in 1852 he was willing to go on record as believing "it was too serious a matter to be laughed at" and it was his Christian duty to investigate the phenomena. He visited the Fox sisters when they

were in Cincinnati and later presided over a circle in Memphis that included several physicians and clergymen, including Samuel Watson. Otey's conviction that spirit communion was a reality seems to have been confirmed during those investigations, and all the members of the circle wrote to a Memphis newspaper to attest to their belief. A religious leader of Otey's stature and reputation brought gravitas to the investigation of Christian Spiritualism, and cast it in a more respectable light. Jesse Ferguson's experience in Nashville is probably the reason Otey and Watson curtailed their public statements at the time. Methodist minister John Wolff of Virginia wrote frequently and at length of his engagement with Spiritualism and how he integrated it into his faith and then followed Andrew Jackson Davis's interpretation away from Christ and towards mesmerism, and he was not the only Wesleyan preacher whose religious traditions made spirit communion a reasonable possibility. Samuel Watson of Memphis led many of his co-religionists in the quest for a Christian Spiritualism.

As it became apparent in the course of this project how many of those attracted to Spiritualism were Methodists, fundamental questions demanded answers. What was inherent in Methodism that led so many of them to be receptive to Spiritualism? When a truly southern, truly Christian Spiritualism emerged in the early 1870s, why was it led by a lifelong Methodist minister? Watson himself believed he could find the answer in John Wesley's writings. Samuel Watson described himself as a reluctant convert to Spiritualism, convinced by a slave medium the raps in his house were the spirits of the dead Watson children she had cared for. He approached the subject cautiously and reverently. After he initially announced his belief in the 1850s, like Methodist Robert Bigham, his congregation and the church hierarchy did not react. One explanation may be

that Methodists were traditionally less focused on doctrine than guided by the nonconfrontational spirit of John Wesley's statement: " . . . I will not quarrel with you about any opinion. Only see that your heart be right toward God, that you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ; that you love your neighbour, and walk as your Master walked; and I desire no more. . . . Let my soul be with these Christians, wheresoever they are, and whatsoever opinion they are of." Methodism valued ministers who could bring large crowds into Christian fellowship in their churches. A good preacher could warm the hearts of his parishioners, and in a season of revival elicit the religious exercises that were proof of the power, presence and working of the Holy Spirit.

Methodists since the days of Wesley had revered religious exercises, trances, dreams and quiet piety. In the realm of devotional attitude, they relied on the intersection of the self and the spiritual. It was understood that the witness of the Spirit was a deeply personal experience, beyond Scripture, theology or the teachings of church fathers, verified by *knowing* oneself to be a child of God. As Reverend Thomas L. Boswell of the Memphis Conference explained, "the human mind is susceptible of direct communications by the Holy Ghost." Believers receive "the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The Christian receives "the direct witness of the Spirit." Reverend Joseph Cross of the South Carolina Conference observed that "Heaven and earth have claims upon us," and "the eyes of witnessing angels range over our solemn assemblies, and departed friends from paradise stoop to listen to our vows." It would be but a small step for those steeped in an ethos of seeking an experience of the Holy Spirit subject only to personal verification, and admonished to be aware of the spirits of those they had

known on earth observing them, to seek a bit farther outside traditional boundaries and try the spirits.

Christian Spiritualists as Church Members

Church membership did not necessarily mean that people did not allow themselves to think about religion in ways their ministers might not have approved. They adapted religious ideas to their own needs, and communicating with spirits was a possibility some embraced. Christian Spiritualism was in many ways more about a broader understanding of religion than about Christianity itself. Religious in nature without every truly becoming a separate religion, it was a way for believers to improve and perfect their old understanding of faith. It was a useful mechanism for connecting with the sort of reverential awe that conversion had elicited. Worship in churches offered Christians predictable, affirming ritual and social involvement, but in séances they could experience the supernatural in a way singing hymns and hearing sermons could not provide. Spiritualism's potential for immediate gratification was a large element of its attraction. Fundamentalists and premillennialists promised answers to life's mysteries at the end of time; Spiritualists insisted the world of spirits was close by, and sometimes broke through the veil into daily life in this world. Spiritualism allowed Robert Cubley to recapture the sense of awe he experienced at conversion, and sought to recall each time he pulled his talismanic meteorite out of his pocket.

To be sure, Jesse Babcock Ferguson's experience with the Campbellites was a cautionary tale, and people who were comfortable church members henceforth were much more cautious about sharing their interest in the subject with anyone besides trusted

family and friends, but they did not think of themselves necessarily as quitting their faith even if censorious doubters did. The mediumship of Sallie Whittle in Portsmouth, seeking solace after yellow fever devastated the community in 1855, was validated by messages from her minister the late rector of her family's Episcopal congreation. Like Sarah Morgan and most people who were drawn to Spiritualism, it was the yearning for proof their loved ones lived on in the world of spirits and awaited them there that was spirit communion's great attraction. By the 1870s, there were even scattered examples of people known to be Spiritualists—including Samuel Watson's wife and people associated with Texas's Soule University—remaining comfortable in their Methodist congregations. Methodists expressed great confidence in those most open to the Spirit, which is perhaps why Robert Cubley sought conversion in the slave quarters when the stars fell and Samuel Watson came to rely on a slave medium. Methodists also knew Wesley's family stories about the ghostly Jeremy, and that his mother, who held iconic status among Methodists, was "rather inclined to think there would be frequent intercourse between good spirits and us, did not our deep lapse into sensuality prevent it. . . ."

The Meaning of Spiritualism in the Nineteenth-century South

The significant presence of Spiritualists in the South suggests studies of denominational growth and theology alone cannot give us an adequate understanding of what American religion was, particularly what it meant to many nineteenth-century southerners. Spiritualism may never have been a numerically significant religious movement in the South, or even truly a "religion" at all, but between 1850 and 1880 people in both the urban and rural South took it seriously. It gives insight into the ways

middle class southerners felt free to experiment with religion, often while remaining part of an organized denomination that officially denounced ideas such as trying the spirits that most people in churches were willing to eschew.

A fortunate few who lived in the South could to afford to visit mediums in the North. Others, both black and white, developed as home mediums. Spiritualist newspapers helped forge a virtual community for sharing information, and networks of family, community and commerce allowed believers to share their thoughts and experiences. In cities with enough adherents such as Baltimore, St. Louis, Memphis and New Orleans, Spiritualists organized to hire a hall and pay lecturers. New Orleans was a nexus of southern commerce, and the most "southern" of those cities. Possibly the most promient antebellum New Orleans Spiritualist was Glendy Burke, a Swedenborgian who indulged in spirit communication. John M. Chilton was an associate; Mrs. Chilton's friends and sisters were among the few who left records of interest in Spiritualism during the Civil War. New Orleans also affords the richest record of the interaction with Spiritualism by persons of color. Some of the interest in Spiritualism in New Orleans centered on the Customhouse and its employees, not surprising since that was the gateway for commerce and publications entering the city. Godfrey Barnsley shared his interest with associates in the cotton trade. Many within the network of men who spearheaded internal improvements were Spiritualists, including Marcus Winchester, Moseley Baker, Columbus Patton, Ebenezer Allen, Paul Bremond, John Winfield Scott Dancy, Simeon Wiess, Alexander and John C. McRae, Glendy Burke, Thomas Butler King and Richard Rodgers Peebles. Besides these men and others who of wealth and influence, there were also men, women and children, black and white and Indian, all over

he South who believed it was possible to communicate with those beyond the veil. This study has only begun to reconstruct their beliefs and networks of connection, the interplay of race and class, and the subtleties of religious meaning for individuals in the nineteenth-century South.

There were both public and private mediums, and most were women. Professional mediumship did offer a career as a public speaker to women, but very few female trance speakers were native to the South and these did not appear until the 1870s. In the North many Spiritualists, especially women, did combine their public Spiritualism with a radical reform agenda that focused on female suffrage and equality. More typical of the southern activists who were also Spiritualists are Mrs. Samuel Watson, who was a home medium and led a number of female reform organizations in post-Reconstruction Tennessee, or suffragist Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, both of whom had impeccible Confederate credentials.

"And do I believe that the future can be foretold?—Do I believe the Bible? There we have the most authentic record of prophecies, visions, & dreams, together with their fulfillment," reflected the widowed Sarah Morgan Dawson in 1891. "We find there also the statement that there are 'familiar spirits' that know & reveal things; & the commandment to have nothing to do with them."

For many Christians, the question of communicating with spirits came down to interpreting that biblical commandment to have nothing to do with them. Those who feared Spiritualism was a snare set for unwary souls by Satan and his imps avoided it, and their ministers railed from the pulpit against summoning familiar spirits. Nonetheless, not a few people either blythely ignored the proscription or found other

evidence in the Bible that they could interpret as countermanding it. Too, while Holy Writ may have been the supreme arbiter of belief for most southern Christians, it was not the only source of their understanding of the afterlife. They had the legitimacy and authenteciation of their own experience of the supernatural.

Generalizations about Spiritualists are elusive, but it is fair to say that those who approached it from a religious perspective in the early years were part of a widespread disaffection with the squabbles of sectarianism. They read widely beyond the Bible and shared a willingness to step outside orthodoxy, to move beyond conventional religion, and saw themselves as simply being open to innovative spiritual influences. Their stories show the reach of unconventional religious thought, forcing us to rethink categorizations such as orthodox, evangelical, liberal, scriptural and even Christian to allow for a greater complexity. Just as southerners could pick and choose from among available reforms and innovations, some of which trickled down from the North—accepting those that were a good fit and rejecting others—so it was in matters of faith. Many could accept the supernatural through the testimony of people they had known their whole lives, and "proof" through tests of shared memories kept alive by those in the spirit world. Death was all around, and faith did not soothe its sting. Messages of comfort and love from the dead did. They offered a positive resolution to the crises of faith—the estrangement from God—that so often accompanied bereavement for Christians.

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