

# The History of Spiritualism In Indiana

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All through the ages man has groped for an answer to the question: "If a man die, shall he live again?" While the human race as a whole never quite believed death to be the termination of human existence, faith always had to be exerted. Spiritualism has now come, offering to fortify faith with knowledge.

In this age of scientific investigation and enlightenment, it is imperative that we learn what Spiritualism is, what it means, and what its mission. We cannot afford to neglect a subject that is of such vital importance. Nor can we profit in our undertakings if we allow the doors of prejudice to close the avenue of knowledge.

The phenomena of Spiritualism were known to the ancient world. The literature of India, Egypt and China is permeated with spiritual truths. Mediaeval Spiritualism made its mark through Jesus, the healer. This chain of spirit influence has continued unbroken; the rise and fall of nations have not obliterated the phenomena from human existence.

Spiritualism is defined as the belief in the continuity of life after death, and its continual progress, and the application of this belief to the right conduct of living. Modern Spiritualism stands for the supremacy of law in the realm of spirit, as in the physical. The departed are near and communicate with their earth friends, not by permission but by law.

That modern Spiritualism is not a movement of mortals alone has been frequently declared by spirit workers. That the so-called dead are an organized body systematically working for mortals is no secret to the mediums doing their work. Maintaining the purpose of life to be for the growth and progress of the soul and its ultimate perfection, spirit teachers strive to impress this fact upon man while he is yet in the body. Through the phenomena of spirit return they hope to call attention to the need of individual soul culture, and to instruct man through the philosophy of Spiritualism as presented through their trained speakers.

The key which unlocked the door of modern Spiritualism was discovered in 1848 by the Fox sisters of Hydesville, New York. Through the raps which came unheralded and unsought, to the Fox household, the girls, Margaret and Kate, established a code of communication which proved that those called "dead" could see and hear, and were seeking to prove their identity. That the communicating intelligence had purpose, and determination to carry it out, was discovered when the communication was rapped upon walls and furniture by the spirit Charles Rosna, who claimed he was robbed of his peddler's pack, murdered, and his body buried in the cellar of the house. These discoveries and their later verification naturally attracted widespread attention. Soon the searchlight of intelligent investigation was turned upon the matter, revealing the truth that man survives death, and that the fact is demonstrated through conditions operating under natural laws. These revelations distinguish modern Spiritualism and place it on the list of scientific discoveries.

The spread of Spiritualism dates from 1850. At this early date the facts upon which Spiritualism is based were known to be as follows: That man in the body is spirit as much as he ever will be; that laws of the universe govern spirit; that through these laws communication between man in the body and man out of the body is possible.

The sons of Robert Owen, spiritualist, and head of the colony known as New Harmony, in Indiana, were among the first to arouse an interest in Spiritualism in the state. Many other unorganized but zealous workers, remaining true to their convictions in the face of persecution, aided the movement. Among these were Julius A. Wayland, editor of the *Coming Nation*, of Greensburg, Indiana, and later of the *Appeal to Reason*, of Kansas; Dr. Henry Stockinger, one of the first graduates of Indiana University, later a student under Joseph Rodes Buchanan, professor of the Cincinnati Eclectic Medical College, father of psychometry, author and spiritualist; Dr. H. V. Sweringen, head of the Medical Association of Ft. Wayne, lecturer and writer; Hon. A. B. Richmond, of Switzerland county, M. D. and lecturer, later United States court attorney, author of books on legal questions; Mrs.

Henrietta Elliott, propagandist, North Vernon; Mrs. L. L. Lawrence, noted as first to establish free dress cutting and making schools in Indianapolis and other cities. With voice and pen Mrs. Lawrence announced the discoveries made by her mother, "Grandma Davis" who became a remarkable medium at the age of eighty.

The first state organization of Indiana Spiritualists was formed in 1862; Dr. Samuel Maxwell, of Richmond, was its president. Twenty delegates represented the Indiana societies at the National Spiritualist convention held at Chicago in 1873.

There are two state Spiritualist organizations in Indiana today—one dating from 1888, known as the Indiana Association of Spiritualists, the other from 1904, known as the Indiana State Association of Spiritualists. The latter is an auxiliary of the National Spiritualist Association which directs the welfare of the 34 state organizations and has for its purpose the promotion of religion and morality, the erection of suitable places of worship where spiritualism may be taught and the education and license of proper persons as authorized lecturers or teachers of Spiritualism.

The Indiana Association of Spiritualists held its first Convention at Anderson, in 1888. Its by-laws and laws of incorporation were drawn by Dr. G. W. Hilligoss, Anderson; James Millspaugh and Carl Bronenberg, Chesterfield; and filed by A. J. Davis, recorder, of Madison county. The presiding speakers and mediums at the early meetings were Mrs. Colby Luther, Charles Barnes, Dr. Horn, Dr. and Mrs. Hilligoss.

The following committee was appointed to select a suitable site for a camp ground for Indiana Spiritualists: D. A. Ralston, G. W. Bunting, J. G. Cook, John Shoemaker, all of Indianapolis; J. H. Bond, Greensboro; Warren Smith, Frankfort; H. Manahan, Crown Point; Isaac King, Williamsburg; Dr. Westerfield, Anderson; Wallace Hibbits, Muncie; A. B. Goodykuntz, Jonesboro; James Best, Winchester; L. O. Edson, Hartford City. Upon their report, a 34-acre tract on the banks of White river at Chesterfield, Indiana, was purchased of Carl Bronenberg.

Of those who helped to prepare the camp ground for the first meeting in 1892, and who served officially, were Carl and Henry Bronenberg, of Chesterfield; Thomas Bronenberg, Anderson; and John Bronenberg, Versailles, Indiana.

There is now a Spiritualist camp in nearly every state in the union. Camp Chesterfield ranks as the second largest, the one at Lily Dale, New York, being largest. The charming location and modern equipment make the Indiana camp an ideal retreat for thousands coming from every state in the union to investigate the phenomena of Spiritualism in open light through certificated mediums, and to hear its philosophy explained by the highest talent in the ranks.

Camp Chesterfield holds its six-weeks' session annually, beginning in July, with an average attendance of twenty thousand. Its officers for 1924 are Myron H. Post, Pres.; Mable Riffle, Sec.; Susie Brown, Treas., all of Anderson, and L. R. Bute, vice-pres., Pendleton, Indiana.

The Indiana State Association of Spiritualists holds its annual conventions in June, in Indianapolis where there are nine Spiritualist churches. It has a yearly increase of delegates from its fifty or more churches and their Lyceums. The state officers are William Woodworth, Pres., Crawfordsville; Luther Huber, Vice-pres., Hammond; Mrs. Mattie Bolser, Sec., Richmond, and Mrs. Velma Hool, Treas., South Bend.

The rapid growth of Spiritualism is unprecedented in the annals of any religious movement. Coming into an epoch of practical activity and working toward universal education and brotherhood, churches began to spring up in the early fifties. The first was built in Fountain county, near Veedersburg, and meetings are still held there. The builders of this church suffered for their convictions by the boycott of local merchants and grain dealers, being forced to take their produce to the Lafayette markets, fifty miles distant.

In 1858, a church was built at Salem, by "The Friends of Progress." Its first president was Jonathan Swain. Dr. Samuel Maxwell of Richmond, the first known public lecturer and message bearer, alternating with J. J. Gardner, served the Salem church regularly. These workers established a Spiritualist library and lyceum in 1865.

The movement still grows. Today, Indiana with her fifty or more churches affiliated with the National Spiritualist Organization, is one of over forty states so organized. The Indiana Association of Spiritualists also has many churches and societies working under an independent state charter. The average general attendance of all these churches and societies is now estimated at half a million.

The origin and development of the First Spiritualist church of Versailles, is typical. Thirty years ago, Mr. B. F. Spencer, John B. Austin, and Dr. Jno. M. Sweezey engaged Mrs. R. S. Lilly, a medium of national reputation, to deliver Spiritualist lectures in Versailles. After Mrs. Lilly, the national missionaries, Rev. and Mrs. E. W. Sprague, presented the philosophy and phenomena to Versailles audiences. At Rev. Sprague's suggestion a society was organized and chartered by the National Spiritualist Association under the name of "The Psychical Research Society." Its membership was composed of prominent people, among whom were B. F. Spencer and family, Dr. Olmsted and family, Dr. John M. Sweezey and wife, and Attorney Adam Stockinger and family. A course of reading for spiritual education and development was followed, private home circles were formed and a medium for public message work developed. The accumulated experiences of this medium were later edited by Prof. James H. Hyslop in the *Journal of the American Psychical Research society* of 1916. In 1921 the Versailles society reorganized under charter of the Indiana State Association of Spiritualists and the First Spiritualist church in southern Indiana was established, with Mrs. Eva M. Hunter, president.

The Rev. and Mrs. E. W. Sprague, working throughout Indiana thirty years ago, reported having organized thirty-nine societies in the space of six months. These, like the Versailles society, later became churches. Also they learned that many circles for the development and education of mediums were being held in private homes. That this home circle work still prevails in Indiana is evidenced by the book of Mrs. May Wright Sewell which contains a wonderful example of healing in the privacy of her home.

In past ages the mediaries between the spirit world and man were the seers, priests and prophets. "Medium" is the word now used to designate such workers. The home circle is the school where spirit teachers train mediums. While every one possesses some degree of mediumship, the spirit teachers choose those certain to submit to years of training. If skeptical they become all the better workers after being convinced of spirit return. In the circle, their spiritual faculties are systematically quickened and exercised that they may serve as efficient tools for the receiving and sending of information from the spirit world to man. In time they become message bearers and speakers. They are then required by the state organizations to pass examination and become certificated before engaging in public work. Those ordained as ministers are entitled to the rights and privileges held by the clergy of other religions under the laws of Indiana.

Many of these authorized workers were writers as well as mediums. They wrote many books which contributed largely to the understanding of the subject. However, they are most popularly known and loved for the messages they have delivered from the public platform. Through the public test message from spirit loved ones, they brought consolation to the bereaved and proof of immortality to the thousands who had disbelieved or whose faith had waned. Space permits mention of but few: Mrs. Colby Luther, Crown Point; Dr. and Mrs. Hilligoss, Anderson; Moses and Mattie Hull; Hudson and Emma Rood Tuttle; Rev. and Mrs. E. W. Sprague, Dr. J. F. Ireland, Dr. George E. Warne, president of the National Spiritualist Association; also graduates of the Morris Pratt Institute,—the first institution of learning established under the auspices of Spiritualism,—were prominent workers in Indiana. The public workers of the present day are numerous.

In expounding the philosophy of Spiritualism, these speakers teach the significance of life, emphasizing individual responsibility and encouraging spiritual education and development.

The following Declaration of Principles is published to the world, not as a creed binding on the conscience of the indi-

vidual, but as the consensus of a very large majority of American Spiritualists on the fundamental teachings of Spiritualism:

1. We believe in Infinite Intelligence.
2. We believe that the phenomena of nature, both physical and spiritual, are the expression of Infinite Intelligence.
3. We affirm that a correct understanding of such expression, and living in accordance therewith, constitute true religion.
4. We affirm that the existence and personal identity of the individual continue after the change called death.
5. We affirm that communication with the so-called dead is a fact scientifically proven by the phenomena of Spiritualism.
6. We believe that the highest morality is contained in the Golden Rule: "Whatsoever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye also unto them."
7. We affirm the moral responsibility of the individual, and that he makes his own happiness or unhappiness as he obeys or disobeys Nature's physical and spiritual laws.
8. We affirm that the doorway to reformation is never closed against any human soul, here or hereafter.

The literature of Spiritualism is abundant and has received wide attention. The books of Andrew Jackson Davis circulated in Indiana in 1850. The volume, *Nature's Divine Revelations* was noteworthy in that it contained the prophecy that Spiritualism would soon become an established fact, which prophecy was fulfilled by the Fox sisters two years later. Other books followed in quick succession. Most notable of these were from the pen of Robert Dale Owen, member of congress and minister to Naples. Mr. Owen investigated spirit return through the Fox sisters in New York, and abroad with eminent men. In 1859, he made known the fact that the Spiritual phenomena which had been observed for centuries were not to be dismissed by the easy term "supernaturalism", but that they were occurrences under laws. The best authenticated of the phenomena he published in *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*. This and another book entitled

*The Debatable Land Between this World and the Next*, still find readers in Indiana.

The books written in the early fifties by John W. Edmonds, judge of the supreme court of New York, had even a deeper appeal than the scholarly Owen productions, because the Judge's own mediumship made the subject clearer. The same is true of Rev. E. W. Sprague whose books based on years of missionary experience throughout the nation convey with peculiar clearness an understanding of the subject.

A recent addition to the Spiritualist library is the book *Neither Dead nor Sleeping*, by Mrs. May Wright Sewell, with introduction by Booth Tarkington. Mrs. Sewell, who had attained national fame in educational lines, was ranked by Indianapolis as one of her three most eminent citizens. She demonstrated the benefit of the home circle, especially in the work of spirit healing. Her book is a complete record of the work of healing by spirit physicians through mortal co-operation.

The periodicals from the Spiritualist press have also a wide circulation. *The Progressive Thinker* and *The National Spiritualist*, both Chicago publications, are the most popular of the many Spiritualist papers circulating in Indiana.

To all its adherents, Spiritualism has meant intellectual emancipation. Its workers, inspired with the idea that unrestricted mental progress should be for every individual, devote themselves to the task of carrying the message of spirit return to the world. Through the philosophy of Spiritualism, which teaches of life here and hereafter, they touch on every subject that makes for improved material conditions. The organized Spiritualists of Indiana are influential in all that is for the good of mankind.