

## The Birth of Modern Spiritualism

Ghosts and spirits have long been a concept among humanity. From the early Celts who worshiped their ancestors on Samhain (now neatly coinciding with Halloween—who can say that the rise of Christianity was not without political savvy) to Greeks occasionally crossing the River Styx and onward into Shakespeare’s time, when Hamlet became obsessed with life, death, and revenge through the urging of his murdered father’s spectral appearance. From our earliest times, we have questioned death, and sought the truth that lies beyond the one veil none of us now living has ever crossed.

While the concept of ghosts, gods, demons, and various other entities can be found as far back as cave drawings, the credit in the rise of the modern spiritual movement began with the Fox sisters, Leah, Maggie and Katie, in 1848. Born in Ontario, they had come to the states in 1847. They believed that a spirit lived with them in their home in Hydesville, New York. According to the spirit who first communicated with them, he was a man who had been killed and buried in their cellar.

At first, the man “talked” to them through strange noises, tapping and footsteps, that occurred when no one could possibly be making the sounds. Mr. And Mrs. Fox, parents of the girls, were deeply distressed. They determined they were being disturbed by a ghost with something to say.

The children began to tap back, asking the ghost to tap so many times for a yes answer to a question, and so many times for a no answer. Through all this tapping and knocking, the sisters found out that the man had been thirty-one years old when he had been murdered in the house.

The Civil War had yet to come, and Victoria was sitting on the throne in England. People were religious—and people also wanted desperately then, as they do now, to believe that we are unique, that the spirit is a real thing, and that we go on. As always, people loved a great story. When

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the news of all that was happening at the Fox household went out to the world, it was embraced. The Fox sisters progressed from tapping; they said that the spirit—and other spirits with whom they learned to communicate—could move objects and make things fly around the room.

A true showman of the era, P.T. Barnum, heard about the girls, and they became part of his world.

Modern spiritualism had found roots in western society of the day.

More and more people became “mediums,” communicating with the dead.

Later in life, one of the sisters, Maggie, recanted, and told people that she had invented it all as a prank. She had come to be very religious, a practicing Catholic, at that time, and the Church looked upon spiritualism as evil. Those who had been skeptics were greatly elated by her confession, but it didn't stop what was going on. Maggie recanted her recant later on, but it was too late. The girls were suspect, and they died in poverty.

They had, however, created a movement that has been alive since, sometimes far more popular than others.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believed in spiritualism, and admitted it openly, even knowing that it would place him in the path of ridicule. Just before he died, Sir Arthur wrote these words, “The reader will judge that I have had many adventures. The greatest and most glorious of all awaits me now.” His career had taken a beating and he had been abased in print many times for his beliefs, but he had never denied his words or recanted his opinions.

Harry Houdini was another famous believer in spiritualism. A man who had adored his mother, he spent a great deal of his time after her death desperately trying to reach her.

Although Abraham Lincoln was never a proclaimed spiritualist, he was known to tell friends and associates that he could feel those who had been in his shoes in the past, still there is some

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essence in the White House. Lincoln was also famous for his dreams, including one in which he saw himself lying in state in the White House rotunda.

Some argue that belief in what is to come, brought perhaps of spirits of those who have come before, is like creating fate because of what's in the mind.

But many of Lincoln's famous instances of foresight have been documented.

Today, mediums can be found in almost every community, and "readings" of different kinds can be found in many places, often, those with an artistic or historical edge to them, such as New Orleans or Salem, Mass, just to name a few. And "spiritualism" has taken on a 21<sup>st</sup> century life all of its own.

Many mediums, or true spiritualists, believe they need no articles to communicate with spirits or spirit guides. But there are some, also considering themselves to be spiritualists rather than wizards, magicians, or readers, deal with spirits through the use of such items as the Ouija board—the original concept dating back to Pythagoras in 540BC, a more refined construction invented in 1853 by M. Planchette, a Frenchman, and all rights now belonging to Parker Bros. Games, having been purchased by the company in 1966—Tarot cards, or crystal balls. There is always a scholarly argument about the exact origin of Tarot cards, but they do date back to at least the early 1400s. Some say they originated in China or the Mideast, while others fervently believe they were first drawn in Italy, the assumption taken from the artistry on the earliest cards. The crystal ball has long been associated with divine interpretation—it can be traced back 2000 years to the Druids. A medium, psychic, or clairvoyant *gazes* into the ball rather than stars; it is placed on black to better balance the characteristics of crystal. The images that appear in the crystal can reflect the past or present, show the future, or even the image of a spirit guide.

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Cassadaga, Florida, is a town settled by mediums. George P. Colby, a medium who hailed from Pike, New York, who had attended spiritualist workshops in Lily Dale, New York (by Cassadaga County,) had a dream. He came to the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association, and, voila. Cassadaga is now known, in Cassadaga, at least, as the spiritualist center of the world. mediums are now everyday people, with a sound and real belief in spiritualism. You can visit them online at [cassadaga.com](http://cassadaga.com).

The story of all that's paranormal/believed to be paranormal/esp/gremlins/ghosts/pookas and more is endless, and fascinating. Concepts span the globe and all nationalities have old beliefs and current beliefs. Many are strangely similar, considering their rise when the world was not so small and easily traveled. And many of them are wonderfully unique to certain cultures and people.

My mother was born in Ireland. While she was more of a realistic frame of mind, I grew up with a Gran who managed to threaten my sister and I into good behavior by threatening us that the banshees attacked bad children in the outhouse. She was so talented with her tales that we were young teens before mentioning to one another that it was an idle threat—we never had an outhouse. She believed quite seriously that the “little people,” or leprechauns existed, and that all the fantastic tales of the ancient Tuath de Danaan were true. What she really thought? I don't know. But she filled my young years with great tales. What do I believe now? I don't know. I have my days when faith is strong, and if there is a God, a supreme being, then there is no reason that souls don't go on. Then there are those times when Darwinism and that simple fact that we are animals tugs at the logic in my mind. I have seen things that I question; I have heard scientific explanations for near death experiences that seem remarkably similar from all over the globe.

This is true; I cannot *prove* ghosts exist; neither can I *disprove* it. Greater minds than mine—

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such as those belonging to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Houdini, and more—could not prove or disprove the matter. Maybe, like faith, it is a matter of belief. Some spiritualists say that skeptics will never hear; it is as if they refuse to answer a phone call. They suggest that we all have it within us to commune with those who have gone before us.

In October of 2007, Mira books hosted a seance for The Seance at the House of the Seven Gables in Salem, Massachusetts, with a local medium. She was dressed as ordinarily as any tourist, and used no form of gadget for her readings. To be honest, we all had a few “spirits” of another kind before sitting down for our seance. The House of the Seven Gables is remarkably old and historic. There were news cameras about, and perhaps twelve of us seated around her. She told us that she’d been approached by several entities, and described them, letting each person tell her if she had contacted one of their relatives or friends. Some of her details were amazingly good, according to members of the group, but if my relatives were there, they were quiet.

It is known that we use a remarkably small percentage of our mental capacity. Perhaps we will evolve into a higher state where communication through airwaves, time, and space with one another—or even those long gone, perhaps existing in some form on another plain—will be as matter-of-fact and ordinary as cell phones, computers, and Ipods are to us now.

Most of us have felt a sense of awe and wonder at some point in life, such as when entering a place that is old and hallowed, an ancient cemetery or cathedral. Does a sense of history linger behind, do the essences of men, tragedy and triumph linger? Or is it simply the scent of moss and lime, candles burned long ago? Currently, TV shows regarding ghosts or the supernatural are at an all time high, so apparently, interest in the occult is also at an all time high.

Writing ghost stories and being on the road a lot, I have heard many stories. I’ve heard them

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from friends and relatives. There is a scene in *The Death Dealer* involving a car accident that I took from an event that occurred to a friend, a Metro-Dade Policeman, in South Florida.

I've never known him to lie, or exaggerate.

And that makes me wonder about the power of the human soul, or spirit.

For more on what I've written, here are a few sites you can visit:

[www.siracd.com](http://www.siracd.com)

[www.pararesearchers.org](http://www.pararesearchers.org)

[www.victorianweb.org](http://www.victorianweb.org)

[www.cassadaga.org](http://www.cassadaga.org)

[www.lilydaleassembly.com](http://www.lilydaleassembly.com)

[crystallinks.com](http://crystallinks.com)

key word seance, paranormal, gods, goddesses, demons, occult, celts, fox sisters, ghosts, pookas, poltergeists, etc.

(Perhaps one of the best books on the concept of spirituality, fiction, is Caleb Carr's *The Alienist*)