

# **The Archives of Parapsychology: Why Even Bother?**

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# Origins of Parapsychology

- parapsychology examines little-understood human faculties and experiences
- genuine phenomena that science cannot explain
- origins in psychical research as response to investigation of Spiritualistic phenomena
  - modern Spiritualist movement dates from 1848
  - Hydesville, New York, with Fox sisters
  - spread to Europe by early 1850s

# Broader Field of Parapsychology

- does not attribute phenomena to surviving spirits
- encompasses a larger range of human experiences, including telepathy between living minds, precognition, and psychokinesis (mind over matter)
- term “parapsychology” popularized through J.B. Rhine’s book *New Frontiers of the Mind* (1937)
- term coined by Max Dessoir more than 40 years earlier

# Society for Psychical Research

- London-based Society for Psychical Research founded in 1882
- arguably the predecessor of current organizations
- original purpose:
  - "to examine without prejudice or prepossession and in a scientific spirit those faculties of man, real or supposed, which appear to be inexplicable on any generally recognized hypothesis"
- SPR founders interested in psychical research as a means of investigating life after death, possibility of spirit communication through Spiritualist mediumship, apparitions of the living and dead, etc.

# What do you believe in?

- What do you believe in:
  - Some form of telepathic communication between two people?
  - The possibility of mind over matter -- or movement of objects at a distance?
- Support of the field is complicated by fact that
  - many professional parapsychologists are afraid of the phenomena
  - others are afraid of stating what they believe
  - some turn against the field when they fail personally to obtain positive results (e.g., Susan Blackmore)
- What convinced me?





Contact table levitation – ca. 1940-1945

Photograph by Sven Turck (1897-1954), Copenhagen, Denmark





**Mary Marshall – medium**  
**Dr. T. Glen Hamilton experiments, Winnipeg, 1928**

# Prejudice against Parapsychology Persists

- prejudice against practical vs. philosophical investigation
- study of life after death & other existential questions is accepted when abstract (e.g., within theology)
- obstructive individuals have control of many Wikipedia entries about psychical researchers (e.g., T. Glen Hamilton)
- campaign of misinformation being waged
- includes attempts to discredit current researchers in the field (e.g., Erlendur Haraldsson)
- is this problem unique to the English Wikipedia? what about the Dutch & German versions?



# Wikipedia: T. Glen Hamilton

- [entry about Winnipeg physician Dr. T. Glen Hamilton](#)
- claims that psychical research experiments were a hoax
- absolutely no evidence of collusion (my research)
- link used to justify that claim was the website created by Walter David Falk who is 100% convinced that the phenomena photographed were genuine
- attempts to correct the entry
  - will be changed back to other misinformation
  - user account of editor likely to be blocked

# Prejudice in Digitization Firm

- prejudice against inexplicable phenomena is widespread
- can extend into commercial sector
- counter to the pursuit of profit
- current initiative to scan back issues of *Psychic News* from 1932-2010
- Max Communications (UK firm) decided NOT to quote
- its staff were “struggling with the subject area”
- letter of protest sent: they include Amnesty International among their clients
- reported in *Psychic News* (issue 4116 (June 2014), p. 10)

# So why bother?

- prejudice against an obscure and problematic field of human inquiry
- archives are so underfunded even when dealing with archives of government, major corporations, and prominent individuals
- why complicate our lives with the archives of parapsychology?
- because parapsychology:
  - is a field of “unsettled science”
  - deals with fundamental questions about the nature of our very existence and nature of subtle interactions
  - parapsychology will progress only if the archives of past generations are available to future generations of researchers

# Context: Popular Belief

- Reginald Bibby, sociologist, University of Lethbridge, Alberta
- studying beliefs about an afterlife for decades
- Angus Reid Global opinion polling surveys at Easter 2014
- Bibby reports consistency among Canadian, American and British beliefs
- about 50% of Canadian adults believe in life after death
- virtually unchanged since 1975 despite “substantive decline in religious beliefs and behaviour”
- interestingly, about 40% believe that they “have been in touch with someone who has died”
- reported in *Globe and Mail* (online), 21 April 2014

# Conclusion: Potential for Advancement of Knowledge

- widespread belief in something more than can be explained by science -- questions that have preoccupied humans for millennia
- since 1850s many organizations formed to expound a philosophy to make sense of so-called “Spiritualistic phenomena”
- European context (Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucian)
- archives of these institutions and researchers must be preserved
- many “fanciful teachings” in whole field, but also truths about which we need better understanding
- Reginald Bibby suggests “vast market” that is “dramatically underserved” and about which “there is an incredible lack of credible entries”





**Thank you for your  
attention!**

# Archives of Spiritualism and Psychical Research in Canada

- Identification
- Location
- Acquisition
- Deposit
- Access

# Archivists of Parapsychology

- How does this happen?
- Several participants pursue similar goals, in a voluntary capacity:
  - HJBF (Wim Kramer)
  - IAPSOP initiative (Marc Demarest & Brandon Hodge)
  - PsyPioneer (Leslie Price & Paul Gaunt)
  - WISE (John Reed)
- In other archival fields, archivists would be paid

# Personal Path to Archives

- Spiritualist church services, 1975
- historical research, 1983
- “The Canadian Spiritualist Movement and Sources for its Study,” *Archivaria* (vol. 30 (Summer 1990), pp. 71-84)
- article called for preservation of records relating to the Canadian Spiritualist movement
- early interest morphed into academic study
- formation of Survival Research Institute of Canada (SRIC) in 1991
- one of its goals = preservation of related library and archival material



# Survival Research Institute of Canada (SRIC) library

- donation of books focussed on life after death from 1980s
- growth accelerated after 2000 when SRIC federally incorporated and recognized as Canadian registered charity for advancement of survival research education
- charitable status meant that SRIC could issue income tax receipts for fair market value of books donated
- library has grown to over 2,500 unique monograph and pamphlet titles, and some journals
- majority donated by individuals and Spiritualist organizations
- library catalogue completed as MS Access database

# Library Collections

- libraries do not typically not accept libraries without reserving right to discard items already held
- sound like good policy? as space on library shelving becomes a problem, books that have not circulated in years are often discarded
- that issue has resulted in creation of initiatives to digitize related books and journals
- for instance, IAPSOP initiative (International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals)
- to ensure that SRIC's unique library survives, arrangements made with University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections to accession it as archival collection when SRIC no longer able to maintain it
- work is underway to transfer SRIC's archival collections

# Psychical Research Archives Endowment Fund (PRAEF)

- University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada
- Psychical Research Archives Endowment Fund (PRAEF) to support acquisition, preservation and use of archival materials relating to psychical research
- initial donation and promise of ongoing fundraising assistance
- University administers fund, paying 4% interest per annum
- will be used to hire archival studies students to arrange and describe new collections in the field
- review and discussion of terms of reference took a year

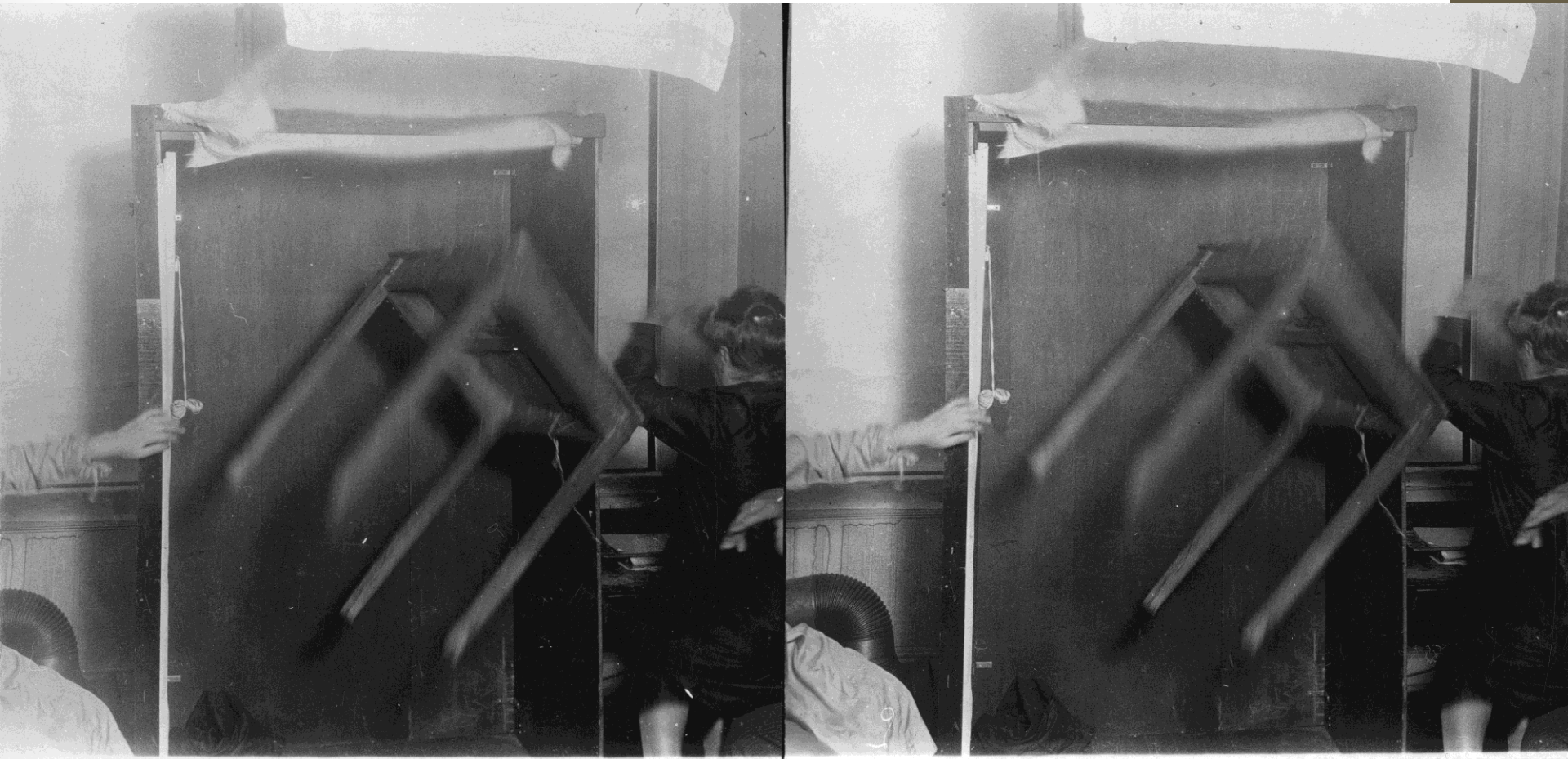
# Pursuit of Archives & Artifacts

- May 2014 visit to Ontario
- records and libraries dating from 1910-1930
- séance table of two of Dr. T.G. Hamilton's colleagues Dr. William Creighton and his wife Florence who participated in Winnipeg experiments during the 1920s
- its accidental discovery highlights Brandon Hodge's concerns about artifacts becoming separated from the archives to which they relate
- H.P.B. Lending Library created by Alice Leighton Cleather (1846-1938) as a "back-to-Blavatsky" initiative
- of interest to the Friends of Theosophical Archives (FOTA)





Mrs. Elizabeth Poole (1870-1935) – Non-contact table  
levitations, 1926-1927 – Photograph by  
Dr. T. Glen Hamilton, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1926-1927



Stereoscopic View – Psychic Force causes “Curtain” to Billow Upward













# William Lyon Mackenzie King

- Canadian national significance
- National Archives of Canada holds papers of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (1874-1950)
- during his years in office consulted prominent Spiritualist mediums over several decades, as did his contemporaries in Britain and the United States
- portion of his records relating to Spiritualism destroyed
- fortunately King's literary executors retained a portion as explained to me by former Dominion Archivist William Kaye Lamb (1904-1999)



# Demonstration of WISE Wiki

- Following upon John Reed's introduction of WISE wiki, Walter will demonstrate how that tool could be used by archivists and librarians to document the location of collections that are preserved in archival repositories, as well as those known to be at risk or lost. Examples will include the archives of the Dutch Spiritualist Society "Harmonia," as well as related entries for that organization and prominent Dutch Spiritualists associated with it. Entries for archival collections held by the University of Manitoba will also be referenced, together with other illustrative examples.