

# Newspaper delves into spiritualist's world at seance

*"A prominent physician and his wife of this city have been corresponding with a very old, experienced and artful spiritualistic medium of Jeffersonville during the past few weeks, the result of which was the arrival Thursday morning in this city of the celebrated madam."*

Bloomington World, April 11, 1896.

Perhaps it was the scientific, inquiring mind of the "Bloomington physician" that prompted him to dabble in the spiritual world. There is another possibility — that it was then considered sophisticated and fashionable to test the expertise of a spiritualist.

Whatever the reason, the *Bloomington World* editor made a decision to publish an article about the woman's visit, even though all of the participants were to be anonymous in print.

The object of the spiritualist's visit was to conduct seances. She began her series at the home of the physician's brother-in-law. Commented the *World*, "At these seances wonder-



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

ful things are said to have been accomplished — a prominent grocery merchant and the postmaster of the city being astounded at the wonderful things seen and heard and experienced."

That same day "The World received a polite and urgent invitation to attend a seance Thursday night at the residence of the before-mentioned merchant." When the reporter arrived, he found "a goodly number" at the house.

The medium had been set up in a bedroom on the north side of the house. Small groups of two or three or four persons were allowed to enter the room at one time.

A half hour was allotted to each group. The *World* reported what happened next.

"The trio returned at the end of their half hour ... altogether dissatisfied with the answers of 'I don't know,' returned to each of the questions written on their slates."

Actually, the questioners were Indiana University professors who had been trying to trick the medium by writing their questions in Latin, Greek and Swedish. The newspapers reported that all of the other questions were "adroitly" answered.

Some of the answers really excited the participants. There was, as the *World* put it, "An ex-county officer (who) was so wrought up by a supposed conversation with a beloved daughter who died some years since, that he became quite excited, and shed tears quite freely in relating the incident subsequently in the parlor."

For some reason, the hostess (the wife of the merchant) was suspicious of the whole thing. She took her son outside "on a little expedition of her own and through a window watched the medium drop the slates in her lap and saw her write each answer, herself, on

the slates as one by one they came to her."

The hostess returned to the house and took at least a dozen of the guests (in little groups) to the bedroom window to see for themselves how the hoax was being carried out.

Continued the *World*, "A professional gentleman, a disciple of Esculapeus, was puzzled by some of the answers to his interrogatories, the medium getting him badly mixed up with a newspaper man seated by his side at the table."

The secret of the medium's success was that she had sent an accomplice ahead of her arrival to wander through the cemetery, looking for facts and dates. How she used the information in regard to one person was described by the newspaper.

"At one time she (the medium) said to the ex-county official ... 'I see the form of a lovely maiden about fourteen years old. She is coming up behind you, sir. She looks surprisingly happy. She is going to lay her hand on your shoulder.'"

H-T 9/9/96