

Across the Dead Line

Lincoln and the Spirits during the War and Reconstruction Era Washington

John B. Buescher

The Chicago Historical Society has organized a team of investigators to try to solve several problems of provenance among its collection of Abraham Lincoln relics. It has set up a website exhibition—*Wet with Blood*—and has invited information from readers of the site that will help curators positively identify a few of its more enigmatic items.¹ The Society wishes to maintain the physical integrity of the pieces, rather than risk destroying them by collecting DNA material and other kinds of forensic evidence.



The Chicago Historical Society's Lock of Hair

Among its other Lincoln relics, the Society has on display a lock of hair. An old note accompanying it reads—“Taken from President Lincoln’s head after he was shot, cut from the spot where the ball passed through. Washington, D.C., April 26th 1866.” The note is signed Mrs. M. Laurie and Belle C. Youngs. The curators read Belle’s middle initial as an “A,” but a dark crease line in the notepaper crosses through it—it is most likely a “C.”

The Society notes, “There is no record of how the relic entered the collection, and the identities of Mrs. Laurie and Belle Youngs are unknown.”

¹ http://chicagohistory.org/wetwithblood/bloody/bullet_hair/index.htm

Their identities are not difficult to guess, however. The women who signed the note were almost certainly Mrs. Margaret Ann Laurie and her daughter Belle, intimates of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln. They were spiritualist mediums at whose home the Lincolns attended séances, and who were invited to the White House to conduct private sessions. They began their acquaintance with the Lincolns in 1862.



The Lauries' Georgetown House

The Lauries' home at 21 First Street (now 3226 N Street, N.W.) in Georgetown was a hive of spiritualist activity, where many people, including highly placed government officials, went to inquire into spiritualism. One of the Lauries' frequent houseguests was Nettie Colburn, a young woman who had come to Washington to find employment at the beginning of the War. Nettie was also a spirit medium. She later wrote of her many visits to the Laurie household that she "had met many prominent people ... who, though not professing to be spiritualists, made no secret of their desire to investigate the subject."²

Mrs. Margaret Laurie had been born in Washington, as Margaret Ann McCutcheon, in 1818. In 1832, at age fourteen, she married another Washington native, Cranstoun (or Cranston) H. Laurie, the son of the Reverend James Laurie, the founder and first rector of the F Street Presbyterian Church,

² Nettie Colburn Maynard, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?* (Philadelphia: R. C. Hartranft, 1891), 54.

which was later called the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, a couple of blocks from the White House. During Andrew Jackson's presidency, Cranstoun Laurie was appointed to a position in the Post Office Department, as Chief Statistician. He remained in that job throughout his career.

The Lauries had three children. Mary Isabella C. Laurie, called "Bell" or "Belle," was their oldest child. Although Cranstoun's father was Rector of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church until the early 1850s, the records of the Church do not show Cranstoun or his wife or his children as having been members. They may have attended, however—Abraham Lincoln sometimes went to services at that church, after he moved to Washington to be President. Lincoln rented a pew there, but never became a member, although his wife Mary did.

In the 1850s, the Cranstoun Laurie family had become devoted spiritualists. Cranstoun and Margaret and their daughter Belle began to exhibit various "mediumistic" abilities. He had been in the Post Office when Congress had directed it to construct Samuel F. B. Morse's experimental telegraphic line between Baltimore and Washington. Cranstoun, it appears, decided to open a depot in his own home for a "spiritual telegraph" between heaven and earth.

Lincoln, while in New York campaigning for the presidency, had anonymously visited the séance exhibitions in the rooms of spirit medium John B. Conklin several times, presumably as something of a lark, although he asked a few test questions of the entranced medium about deceased friends and took notes on the answers he was given. An account of these visits, published in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* soon after the election, was denied by some of the President Elect's handlers, but pointedly not by

Lincoln himself.³ After his inauguration, the President delved more deeply into the subject—at least as recounted years later by a friend of the Lauries:

Some senators were telling their experiences one day when the President expressed a curiosity to attend one of the Laurie séances; not that he had the least faith in spirit communion with mortals, but would like to investigate the jugglery practiced. A séance was arranged and he received such wonderful tests that his materialistic ideas were greatly shaken, and after a few more sittings he became a confirmed Spiritualist.⁴

The Lincolns were introduced to the spiritualist circle that often gathered at the Laurie house through their friend, the Reverend John Pierpont, an aged Unitarian minister and abolitionist from Boston, who had become a devoted spiritualist. At the beginning of the War he had accepted a commission as the chaplain of a Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, which had proved too physically taxing for the old gentleman, so Salmon Chase had given him a sinecure in Washington as a clerk in the Treasury Department. He had become a close acquaintance of the Laurie Family through their shared spiritualist convictions.

In an article on “Spiritualism in Washington, D. C.,” in *The Year-Book of Spiritualism for 1871*, the pseudonymously-entitled “Verax” wrote:

³ *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 1, 1860.

⁴ Prof. W. H. Chaney, “Was He a Spiritualist? Reminiscences of President Lincoln,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (Chicago), January 16, 1886.

There are a great many Spiritualists among the senators and members of Congress. ... These, for the most part, are free to acknowledge themselves Spiritualists *among Spiritualists*, but *nowhere else*; they are so much afraid of losing caste by so doing. If they would be honest to themselves and the world by declaring their convictions, and boldly placing themselves by our side, it is morally certain that the Spiritualists would have the largest society in the city. Besides the above, we have *high* government officials, and officials of all grades, judges, auditors, commissioners, generals, &c., none of whom would at present thank *you* for publishing their names, or *any person* for reporting them.⁵

Some in Lincoln's new administration were open about their deep interest in spiritualism, including Isaac Newton, the gentleman farmer Lincoln placed at the head of the Department of Agriculture when he created it. Among Union Generals, there were Daniel Sickles and Nathaniel Banks. Others included men and women who were serving in the Executive departments as clerks or advisors. Washington spiritualists thought that as many as a third of the Congress during the War were privately sympathetic to spiritualism, even though only a few—such as Representative Daniel Somes from Maine—were open about their beliefs. Traveling spiritualist lecturers and advocates also visited the Capitol, to fortify believers and to make converts, and a host of professional mediums and clairvoyants plied their trade there.

As "Verax" complained, however, those who were drawn to spiritualist séances were often not eager to admit their interests. For some, this was because they recognized

⁵ *The Year-Book of Spiritualism for 1871* (Boston: William White and Company, 1871).

spiritualism as unorthodox: Christian tradition has never felt comfortable with the practice of necromancy, and so they wished to remain (or to remain known as) Christian. For others, it was because they wished to avoid being publicly associated with spirit mediums of allegedly low morals or who possibly used fraudulent methods. For others, it was because they did not wish to be thought of as fools who listened to the babblings of hysterical women or who delighted in twilight levitations of the furniture in the parlor. Politicians and officials who became known to the public as spiritualists faced ridicule or sometimes even removal from office at the hands of their constituents—as happened to New York Supreme Court Judge John Edmonds. And some did not wish to be identified as spiritualists simply because they did not see themselves that way, but rather as seeking to be entertained.

Some described themselves, precisely, not as spiritualists, but as “investigators,” to use the word in common currency then, as if they were amateur scientists. Spiritualism’s adherents tended to see it not as superstition, but as a rational belief because spiritualistic phenomena, they often said, were susceptible to empirical investigation, to proof and disproof. To them, spiritualism was redolent of science and progress. It was nonconformist, anti-authoritarian, and individualistic. People could obtain their own revelations about the afterlife, drawing them out of their own trances or those of innocent girls, rather than from the priests and preachers of traditional religion who authorized doctrine from the pulpit. Spiritualism also had the attractive air of novelty—it had been sparked into a fire of nationwide interest as recently as 1848, when the young Fox Sisters in upstate New York began producing spirit rappings.

Spiritualism, at least on the surface, also presented itself as supremely optimistic. To those who were recently bereaved, it offered continuing contact with departed loved ones and an assurance that the afterlife was an endless path of evolutionary betterment. It had great appeal during a War that carried away hundreds of thousands of men in the peak of their strength and left their families bereft.

It appealed especially to people of liberal temperament, those who had a loose or nonexistent affiliation to denominational religion and who tended toward Freethought, although still perhaps reading the Bible for personal inspiration. Many of the reformers at the avant garde of the inter-related progressive causes of abolition, women's rights, health reform, and social regeneration, who intended to emancipate the human race from the shackles of the past, did not easily dismiss spiritualism. In short, opening an inspirational concourse with "advanced" spirits often appealed to the kind of man who Lincoln was, and to the political and social radicals who surrounded him in the Republican Party.

People present at a séance often held a mixture of attitudes towards what was being unfolded before them—trance speaking, disembodied sounds, floating lights, levitating chairs, mind reading, materialized writings from spirits and other uncanny phenomena. Their attitudes ranged from the heartiest skepticism to unhesitating belief, and their emotions ranged from extreme agitation or excitement, even ecstasy or terror, to utter calm or boredom. Many people appeared to be somewhere in a volatile middle range along a graduated spectrum of suspended disbelief.

Nevertheless, some of those who repeatedly attended séances took what they saw and heard very seriously. They earnestly believed that the spirits of deceased loved ones

or of past political, religious, and military leaders were being evoked from the afterlife and were offering to them, through an entranced medium, otherwise unobtainable comfort or facts about the state of past, present, and future affairs. But even when they did not think it was absolutely trustworthy, they might regard the séance as an additional source of consolation and advice.

The Lincolns, searching for solace in their grief after the death of their son Willie in February 1862, brought spirit mediums to the White House for private consultations. How often or for how long is impossible to say. During these consultations, the mediums purported, not only to deliver messages from Willie but also to speak in the voices of dead leaders, politicians, clergymen, and generals, who offered Mr. Lincoln advice on how to govern and command his armies. He received encouragement from them for what they regarded as the holy crusade of the War, its point being, according to them, not so much to save the Union as to emancipate the slaves.⁶ He was sent by Providence, they said over and over again, to accomplish this great task. What was happening on Earth, they said, was merely a reflection of what the spirits were doing in the land beyond. The spirits were the ones who were controlling events.

Alonzo Newton, former editor of *The New England Spiritualist*, who came to Washington, D.C., at the beginning of the War and worked in the Quartermaster General's Office as a clerk, had attended a public speech in Boston after Lincoln had been elected, given by abolitionist Wendell Phillips. At Newton's side had been his wife Sarah, who was a spirit medium. Newton wrote:

⁶ See, for example, Thomas Richmond, *God Dealing with Slavery: God's Instrumentalities in Emancipating the African Slave in America* (Chicago: Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, 1870).

As the orator stepped upon the platform, and began his address, my companion whispered to me that she saw, as it were above and in his rear, another platform, or a vast amphitheatre, on which were assembled a noble array of dignified and shining beings, with countenances all aglow with interest in the occasion. Among those in the foreground she soon distinguished the unmistakable lineaments of a large number of the patriots, statesmen, and worthies of American history, prominent among whom was the majestic form of Washington, who appeared to be an object of deferential regard by all the assembled host, and spokesman or master of ceremonies for the occasion. Intently regarding this unexpected scene, she soon perceived that the chief personages revealed to her vision were in some way unitedly engaged in giving expression to thoughts, accompanied by symbolic representations, of wonderful artistic beauty and force of significance, and evidently appropriate to the object of the meeting there convened. At my request, she repeated to me, in a low whisper, as fully as possible, the ideas she received, and described the imagery which was made to pass before her surprised vision. Listening to her words, and at the same time to the eloquent language of the visible orator, I soon perceived that the latter was but following in the same track, and repeating the substantial ideas—sometimes the very words—which had a moment before been whispered in my ear. When he indulged, as was his wont, in a figure of speech, he but dimly indicated what had just been presented as a vivid picture before my companion's vision!⁷

⁷ Alonzo Newton, "The Transmission of Thought," *Brittan's Journal: Spiritual Science, Literature, Art and Inspiration* (New York) (January 1874): 33.

Lincoln may or may not have accepted the spirit voices at séances as truly those of such people as George Washington, Andrew Jackson, or Boston abolitionist Theodore Parker—as they represented themselves to be—but he could well have found in them some congenial encouragement for his plans and policies. Whether he looked to the spirits for literal direction is less likely. Lincoln's written and spoken thought about religion and his independent temperament make it unlikely that he would become an unthinking acolyte of the spirits, or even to identify himself as a spiritualist. Mary Todd Lincoln was much closer to that than her husband. Acquaintances and favor seekers imposed themselves upon her fairly easily. Historians have sometimes explained her husband's presence at the séances she attended or spirit consultations she had in the White House by his having wished to insure that spirit mediums did not gain an ascendancy over her.

The immensity of the burden that Lincoln carried during the War, as well as the beliefs of those whose company he was keeping and whose advice he sought, and his private reading of the Bible, gradually strengthened in him a conviction that the political and military events that assailed the country were beyond the anticipation or control of mere individuals, including him, and that a higher force was guiding the fortunes of the nation. He did come to feel that he was the instrument of Providence, not just in conducting the War, but also in purging the land from the evil of slavery. This is similar to what spiritualists were telling him. As Alonzo Newton put it, when describing the invisible spirit world behind the oratory of Wendell Phillips:

Whether or not the eminent orator referred to was at that time, or is ever, conscious of any extraneous influence exerted upon him; or, if so, whether he is aware of the true nature and source of “that flowing river which out of regions he sees not, pours for a season its streams into him,” I know not. Consciousness of such influence appears to depend upon some peculiarity of organism or temperament. But instances are not wanting of public men and authors of high repute, who have been both sensible of such inspirational aid, and aware of its source—as they have acknowledged in private to confidential friends—but who have refrained from avowing the fact to the world, through motives of prudence or policy. Whether this has been wise or otherwise on their part, I presume not to judge.⁸

In saying that some acted and spoke nobly without knowing that the spirits were behind it, Newton was certainly referring here to Wendell Phillips, who was not a spiritualist. But Newton’s further critical remark about those who did not acknowledge the spirits at work behind the scenes suggested something more. Newton’s fellow abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison had become a spiritualist, but he did not take up the pages of his antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, to advocate it. Newton was not necessarily thinking of Garrison, but he was also certainly questioning whether the veil of secrecy that public figures drew around their spiritualist interests and beliefs crossed the line from prudence to prevarication.

⁸ Alonzo Newton, “The Transmission of Thought,” 34.

Lincoln's private secretary, John Nicolay, who charged himself with protecting Lincoln's privacy and even his public image, years after the War, gave this ambiguous statement about the President:

Of course, I have no doubt that Mr. Lincoln, like a great many other men, might have had some curiosity as to spiritualism, and he might have attended some of these séances solely out of curiosity. But he was the last man in the world to yield to any other judgment than that arrived at by his own mature deliberation. He was not superstitious, nor did he have any spiritualistic tendencies. I have attended spiritualistic séances, not because I believed in them, but because I was curious to see the proceedings. They were such manifest humbugs that I usually came away disgusted. If President Lincoln ever attended séances, as alleged, it was with this same feeling of curiosity. But I do not remember that even curiosity ever impelled him to attend a séance. He had more important business on hand during those days. In any event I can say without the slightest qualification that a séance never occurred at the White House.⁹

Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence that mediums were invited to the White House more than once, if not for the elaborate performances or exhibitions that Nicolay seems to envision here as necessary to qualify as a séance, then for after-hours private consultations with Mary Todd Lincoln and sometimes her husband. Even Lincoln's

⁹ "Mr. Lincoln Not a Spiritualist," *Weekly Republican* (Decatur, Illinois), October 29, 1891.

spiritualist friends and acquaintances who affirmed that he was more than sympathetic to spiritualism, said that this sympathy never took the form of a public endorsement. John C. Bundy was the editor of the spiritualist newspaper, *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*, one of two nationally read spiritualist newspapers in the years after the War. He wrote:

There can be no question but that Mr. Lincoln sat in séances and repeatedly had mediums at the White House. I know positively that through his investigations he became convinced of the continuity of life and of communication between the two worlds. He was an unusually cautious, discreet man; and while it is quite probable that he received advice from the spirit world, it is also certain that he never blindly followed it. It would have to conform to his own better judgment before being adopted.¹⁰

What were the Lauries' "mediumistic" powers that interested the Lincolns? Cranstoun Laurie's power, practically speaking, was not all that impressive. It was a kind of inspired doodling. His specialty was automatic (or "trance") drawing. Spiritualist historian Emma Hardinge, also a trance medium, wrote that, "the drawings of Mr. Laurie can not possibly be the suggestion of any merely human ideality." The statistician's drawings were phantasmagorical, as if his careful penmanship exploded on its own initiative into an exuberant and heaving foliage of lines and images.

¹⁰ As quoted in "He Was a Spiritualist," *Daily Statesman* (Boise City, Idaho), October 24, 1891.

They consist of groups of figures, large, small, perfect, and broken, made up from the vegetable, animal, and human kingdoms, fragments or entire forms of which are massed together in the most singular and heterogeneous variety and abundance. ... a huge formless mass, whose irregular outline and indefinite proportion seem to belong to no known element or object, and yet might represent a fantastic picture daguerreotyped upon the atmosphere. ... It is a noticeable fact, that, whilst the beautifully-imaginative way in which he designs letters and figures for this purpose present only the appearance of highly-elaborate



MRS. NETTIE COLBURN MAYNARD.
Photographed from miniature, 1863.

penmanship, a close scrutiny will reveal the fact, that every curve and line is full of the same marvelous and often grotesque little images as the drawings described above. A visiting-card, a direction, whatever is inscribed by the hand of this ever-fertile medium, contains the same evidences of unceasing control of a similar character.¹¹

Cranstoun's spiritualistic penmanship was supposed to reveal the occult nature of all things—that every atom was a kind of eternal recording machine, constantly capturing and storing images of everything around it. It was a nice curiosity, but hardly the sort of thing to arouse the excitement of the Lincolns, or almost anyone else.

¹¹ Emma Hardinge, "Spirit Art," *The Year-Book of Spiritualism for 1871* (Boston: William White and Company, 1871).

Margaret and daughter Isabella were by far the more impressive mediums in the Laurie family. In 1856, at age fifteen, Belle married Lincoln's acquaintance and supporter, forty-eight-year-old James J. Miller, another spiritualist. There was little love between husband and wife, and by 1862, Belle Miller was back in Washington living with her parents and her two small children, and the husband she had just divorced was living in New York City.

Margaret Laurie's specialties included contacting spirits of the deceased for messages, and using "magnetic" or spiritual powers for healing. She appears to have become an intimate and confidante of Mary Todd Lincoln—and, according to Margaret—of Mr. Lincoln as well, arranging séances for the Lincolns and some of their friends. Lincoln's aides, Margaret said, cautioned her about the need to protect the President's public image, and strongly urged her to secrecy about the meetings, as a matter of State security.

Nettie Colburn often visited the Lauries' house during her first year in Washington at the beginning of the War, and acted as a medium there and at the White House—especially, she said, as a medium for spirits of freedom who urged the President to emancipate the slaves. She wrote later of occasions at the White House when she would awaken from a trance and find that the spirits, working through her, had been able to divine the location of Confederate forces on maps spread before her. She also wrote that, as with Margaret Laurie, Lincoln's advisors and supporters cautioned her against talking about the President's interest, and not until twenty years later did she write up her reminiscences and publish them under the title, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?*—to

which question, she answered yes. Skeptics (then and ever afterwards) tended to regard her reminiscences as febrile embroideries on a flimsy tissue of fact.¹²

Around the time Nettie published her book, an acquaintance of the Lauries, William Henry Chaney, wrote to *The Religio-Philosophical Journal* giving corroborative details of the Lincolns' relationship with the Lauries, an emotionally erratic lawyer who eventually became known for his studies of astrology (and for fathering writer Jack London out of wedlock). He had helped Belle with her divorce from James Miller and had spent time with the Lauries. Chaney depicted the Lincolns' involvement with the Lauries not as a casual and single attendance at a gathering at the Lauries' house, as some had said, but as an extended, intimate relationship:

During my stay Mrs. Laurie told me many things connected with President Lincoln. Hundreds of times he had consulted Bell, and she preserved scores of his notes, in his own handwriting signed "A. Lincoln," inviting Bell to come and give him a private séance. It will be remembered that for a long time matters connected with the war went wrong, but when Washington, La Fayette, Jackson, etc., began to be listened to by Lincoln, things went better. Mr. Lincoln consulted these grand old patriots in matters of state as well as war. Sometimes his cabinet would be unanimous in their opposition to some of the President's measures, but when the spirits assured him he was right he would hold out against the whole world. But all these things were profound State secrets, and even at the time Mrs.

¹² A note from Lincoln's former law partner, Joshua F. Speed, introducing Nettie Colburn and her friend Anna Cosby to Lincoln, October 26, 1863 (Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress), describing them as spirit mediums and desirous of an interview, corroborates Maynard, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?* 114-23.

Laurie made the revelations to me and showed me the notes in Mr. Lincoln's well-known chirography, it was under the seal of secrecy, and I have faithfully observed it for more than twenty years; but now that so much has been said about it, and there is no longer any reason for silence, I do not feel that I am violating confidence by making this publication.¹³

This was just what Lincoln's enemies (and many of his friends) had feared was happening during the War, amid whispered rumors about the President's resorting to spirit mediums. As one of his Copperhead opponents had put it:

Mr. Lincoln, with his aiders and abettors, has assumed great responsibilities in thus revolutionizing the government; but unlike our old fashioned presidents who were compelled to consult the Constitution, he has, in a secret hole of the White House, a rapping table, which discourses sweeter music than ever issued from Hamlet's pipe. It is law, constitution and gospel; and the great magical power which gathers armies presages events, equalizes whites and negroes, and converts paper into gold. Washington, Jefferson and Jackson, Caesar, Hannibal, Napoleon, Wellington, and all the other great men of history, wake from their slumbers and protrude their counsels through it; direct the plans of battles, the windings of anacondas, the policy of proclamations, and the movements of armies; so that a new dispensation looms up around the present power, while laws and constitutions flee before the mystical light, as ragged relics

¹³ Chaney, "Was He a Spiritualist? Reminiscences of President Lincoln," *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, January 16, 1886.

of the vulgar past. Delphos had her oracles, Olympus her enchantments; but all now sink into insignificance before the superior powers of this wonderful table.¹⁴

Chaney recounted one striking episode that revealed the depth of intimacy that existed between the Lincolns and the Lauries:

I will relate an incident illustrative of the character of good old Abe, and also showing the esteem in which he held the Laurie family. Mrs. Laurie told it to me with tears in her voice as well as eyes. It was in 1864. Desertions had become so common among the soldiers that it was found necessary to enforce the death penalty most rigorously. A soldier from Maine went home on a furlough. The illness and death of a sister caused him to stay until the thirty days had expired. Then he started, and on landing from the cars in Boston a policeman touched him and asked to see his furlough. Innocently he showed it and was promptly arrested as a deserter. The policeman would get a reward of thirty dollars, and although the soldier assured him he was going back himself, the policeman put him in irons and took him to his regiment near Washington.

There was a court martial; the policeman swore the poor fellow's life away and he was sentenced to be shot at sunrise. A friend to whom the soldier had told everything, mounted a horse after dark, and started for Washington to get a reprieve for thirty days that the soldier might obtain proofs of his statement. It was past midnight when the friend presented himself at the White House. Mr.

¹⁴ David Quinn, *Interior Causes of the War: The Nation Demonised, and Its President a Spirit-Rapper* (New York: Doolady, 1863): 94-95.

Lincoln had just retired, leaving strict orders with the sergeant on duty not to allow any one to disturb him, as he had been broken of his rest for several nights. The friend told the sergeant the circumstances, but still he could not admit him. But the sergeant softened enough to tell him that he had orders to admit Mrs. Laurie at any hour, day or night. Then the friend rushed for Mrs. Laurie and told her the strait he was in. Scarcely stopping to dress, she hurried to the White House, reprieve in hand, and was instantly admitted to the room where the President and his wife were asleep. Mr. Lincoln aroused himself with great difficulty. In a few words she explained her mission, which he seemed to understand intuitively more than by his consciousness. Without speaking he motioned her to hand him a pen from the table, and as he put his name to the reprieve, with a moistened eye and trembling lip, he said: "Thank you, Mrs. Laurie; never fear to arouse me on an errand of mercy like this." The reprieve arrived just in time to prevent a murder. The story of the soldier was corroborated and his life spared.¹⁵

In fact, Lincoln's collected papers contain a letter to Lincoln from Margaret Laurie, dated December 19, 1864, asking him to release a Private Elbert F. Turner.¹⁶ And military records show that Turner, aged 21, who had enlisted as a Private on June 7, 1864 in Washington, DC, in Company U, 3rd U. S. Infantry, was discharged on December 22, 1864, three days after Mrs. Laurie wrote her letter. This is plain evidence of her

¹⁵ Chaney, "Was He a Spiritualist?" *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, January 16, 1886.

¹⁶ Mrs. M. A. Laurie to Abraham Lincoln, Monday, December 19, 1864. Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

influence with Lincoln independent of her own testimony or that of her spiritualist friends.

Margaret Laurie specialized in conducting private, intimate séances, but her daughter Belle Laurie Miller used her gifts to produce physical “phenomena” as well, most strikingly, the levitation of the grand piano in the Lauries’ parlor. Nettie Colburn described Belle’s ability as a “physical medium”: “While she played the piano it would rise with apparent ease, and keep perfect time, rising and falling with the music. By placing her hand on the top of the piano it would rise clear from the floor, though I have seen as many as five men seated on it at the time.”¹⁷

Nettie described a visit that the Lincolns had made to the Lauries’ house one night in February 1862:

Mr. and Mrs. Laurie, with their daughter, Mrs. Miller, at his [Lincoln’s] request, sang several fine old Scotch airs—among them, one that he declared a favorite, called “Bonnie Doon.” I can see him now, as he sat in the old high-backed rocking-chair; one leg thrown over the arm; leaning back in utter weariness, with his eyes closed, listening to the low, strong, and clear yet plaintive notes, rendered as only the Scotch can sing their native melodies. ... Mrs. Miller played upon the piano (a three-corner grand), and under her influence it “rose and fell,” keeping time to her touch in a perfectly regular manner. Mr. Laurie suggested that, as an added “test” of the invisible power that moved the piano, Mrs. Miller (his daughter) should place her hand on the instrument,

¹⁷ Maynard, *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?* 55.

standing at arm's length from it, to show that she was in no wise connected with its movement other than as agent. Mr. Lincoln then placed his hand underneath the piano, at the end nearest Mrs. Miller, who placed her left hand upon his to demonstrate that neither strength nor pressure was used. In this position the piano rose and fell a number of times at her bidding. At Mr. Laurie's desire the President changed his position to another side, meeting with the same result. The President, with a quaint smile, said, "I think we can hold down that instrument." Whereupon he climbed upon it, sitting with his legs dangling over the side, as also did Mr. [Daniel E.] Somes, S[imon] P. Kase, and a soldier in the uniform of a major ... from the Army of the Potomac. The piano, notwithstanding this enormous added weight, continued to rise and fall until the sitters were glad "to vacate the premises." We were convinced that there were no mechanical contrivances to produce the strange result, and Mr. Lincoln expressed himself perfectly satisfied that the motion was caused by some "invisible power."¹⁸

Nettie also wrote that she accompanied the Lauries on a visit to the White House in December 1862, for the purpose of conducting a séance for Mrs. Lincoln in the Crimson Room (now the Red Room). She described the scene as the President came down the stairs:

While all were conversing pleasantly on general subjects, Mrs. Miller (Mr. Laurie's daughter) seated herself, under control, at the double grand piano at one

¹⁸ Ibid., 82-91.

side of the room, seemingly awaiting some one. Mrs. Lincoln was talking with us in a pleasant strain when suddenly Mrs. Miller's hands fell upon the keys with a force that betokened a master hand, and the strains of a grand march filled the room. As the measured notes rose and fell we became silent. The heavy end of the piano began rising and falling in perfect time to the music. All at once it ceased, and Mr. Lincoln stood upon the threshold of the room. (He afterwards informed us that the first notes of the music fell upon his ears as he reached the head of the grand staircase to descend, and that he kept step to the music until he reached the doorway).¹⁹

In 1885, as earlier pledges to keep quiet about Lincoln's dabbling in séances began to lapse, and descriptions of the Lincolns' involvement with spiritualism were beginning to be published, the Lauries' son Jack, who was a fourteen-year-old boy at the beginning of the Civil War, wrote a letter to *The Religio-Philosophical Journal* affirming the Lincolns' visits to his family's home.

About the commencement of the year 1862, my father became personally acquainted with late President Abraham Lincoln, and my belief is that through my father's influence, the President became interested in Spiritualism. I have very often seen Mr. Lincoln at my father's house engaged in attending circles for spiritual phenomena, and generally Mrs. Lincoln was with him. The practice of attending circles by Mr. Lincoln at my father's house continued from early in

¹⁹ Ibid., 70-71.

1862, to late in 1863, and during portions of the time such visits were very frequent. This was especially the case after the President's son Willie died. I remember well one evening when Nettie Colburn, a medium, was present, Mr. Lincoln seemed very deeply interested in the proceedings and asked a great many questions of the spirits.

I have on several occasions seen Mr. Lincoln at a circle at my father's house, so much influenced, apparently by spiritual forces, that he became partially entranced, and I have heard him make remarks while in that condition, in which he spoke of his deceased son Willie, and said that he saw him. I have on several occasions seen Mr. Lincoln take notes of what was said by mediums. At one circle, I remember that a heavy table was being raised and caused to dance about the room by what purported to be spirits. Mr. Lincoln laughed heartily and said to my father, "Never mind, Cranston, if they break the table, I will give you a new one." On one occasion, I remember well of hearing my father ask Mr. Lincoln, if he believed the phenomena he had witnessed was caused by spirits, and Mr. Lincoln replied, that he did so believe.²⁰

In reaction to this letter, Lincoln's former law partner from Springfield, William Herndon, wrote to *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*:

I know nothing of Lincoln's belief or disbelief in Spiritualism. I had thought, and now think, that Mr. Lincoln's original nature was materialistic as

²⁰ Cyrus Oliver Poole, "The Religious Convictions of Abraham Lincoln. A Study," *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, November 28, 1885.

opposed to the spiritualistic; was realistic as opposed to idealistic. I cannot say that he believed in Spiritualism, nor can I say that he did not believe in it. ...

Mr. Lincoln was a kind of fatalist in some aspects of his philosophy, and skeptical in his religion. He was a sad man, a terribly gloomy one—a man of sorrow, if not of agony. This, his state, may have arisen from a defective physical organization, or it may have arisen from some fatalistic idea, that he was to die a sudden and a terrible death. Some unknown power seemed to buzz about his consciousness, his being, his mind, that whispered in his ear. ...

When you are in some imminent danger or suppose you are, when you are suffering terribly, do you not call on some power to come to your assistance and give you relief? I do, and all men do. Mr. Lincoln was in great danger, or thought he was, and did as you and I have done: he sincerely invoked and fiercely interrogated all intelligences to give him a true solution of his states—the mysteries and his destiny. He had great—too great confidence in the common judgment of an uneducated people. He believed that the common people had truths that philosophers never dreamed of; and often appealed to that common judgment of the common people over the shoulders of scientists. I am not saying that he did right. I am only stating what I know to be facts, to be truths.

Mr. Lincoln was in some phases of his nature very, very superstitious; and it may be—it is quite probable that he in his gloom, sadness, fear and despair, invoked the spirits of the dead to reveal to him the cause of his states of gloom,

sadness, fear and despair. He craved light from all intelligences to flash his way to the unknown future of his life.²¹

According to Belle, she served as a battlefield and hospital nurse during the last part of the Civil War, sustaining several bullet wounds. Again on her account, President Lincoln gave her a gold medal “for devotion to sick and wounded soldiers during the



Belle C. Laurie Miller Youngs

war.” While visiting the sick in prison, she met a soldier imprisoned for desertion. It was Theophilus Youngs, a mechanic and grifter from New York City who said he had lost his discharge papers. Belle married him in 1866, and Theophilus was given an appointment as a clerk in the Quartermaster General’s Department through the influence of his father-in-law Cranstoun. By that time, when the note accompanying the lock of hair that eventually came into the collection of the Chicago Historical Society was signed in 1866, she was

Belle C. Youngs.

Presenting oneself as capable of levitating grand pianos can do little to convince a dispassionate observer of one’s honesty. In addition, Belle’s selection of the small time con artist, Theophilus Youngs, as her partner in marriage must also diminish confidence

²¹ William H. Herndon, “Letter from Lincoln’s Old Partner,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, December 12, 1885.

in her character. Youngs himself eventually wilted in the light of his “prepossessing” bride, and disappeared. When Belle then discovered that she could not take possession of his money unless she could prove that he was dead, she paid an indigent drifter to testify that a body that had been found washed ashore one day was that of Theophilus, who was therewith pronounced deceased. When she then went to court to claim the inheritance of her husband, the veritable Theophilus suddenly came back from his self-imposed exile in oblivion and presented himself before the judge in order to block the transfer. Belle responded by denying that this man in the courtroom was in fact Theophilus Youngs her husband, and created several months’ worth of lurid copy for newspaper reporters.²² So much for Belle’s truthfulness.

No matter what one may think of Margaret and Belle Laurie, at least Mrs. Lincoln appears to have thought highly of them. When her husband was assassinated in the spring of 1865, almost no one was in a better position to obtain a lock of Lincoln’s hair than Margaret Laurie and her daughter Belle. Nor was anyone else better able to make a claim—at least to Mary Todd Lincoln—for the need to have physical possession of a lock of her husband’s hair. With it, the Lauries would have told Mrs. Lincoln, they would be able to maintain for her a psychic connection with her husband. If the hair were cut from the spot next to where the bullet passed through the President’s head, that was better for making spirit contact, because the lock of hair would carry the mental energy from where his life’s blood had departed his body. The use of locks of hair for “psychometric” examination, diagnosis, and healing, and for making psychic contact with the owner of

²² Reporting on these courtroom shenanigans commenced with “Mr. Youngs or Not Mr. Youngs: His Brother Says It Is Mr. Youngs, His Wife Says It Is Not,” *New York Times*, 22 October 1880, and finally petered out with “Theophilus Youngs’s Bald Spot,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1880.

the hair, was a well-established practice among mediums of the time. The power attributed to the lock of hair, when used by mediums, was far more than that attributed to locks of hair in Victorian funerary practice—where they were saved and treasured, and woven and braided into *memento mori*. The medium would place the lock of hair on her forehead and a series of images and suggestions would appear to her, showing her its history and its provenance, and allowing her to establish a connection in spirit with the person from whom it had come. The principle was supposed to be the same one that allowed Cranstoun Laurie to express, in his drawings, the accumulated histories of inanimate objects.

During the autopsy of the President, Mary Todd Lincoln sent word in to the surgeons, requesting a lock of hair be cut and sent to her. This was done. A few other locks of hair were then cut as well for the attending physicians. What happened to the lock given to Mrs. Lincoln? It seems more than merely plausible that she gave it—or a portion of it—to her confidantes, the Lauries, who she believed could keep her in contact with the spirit of her husband, or might even help conjure information, through a psychometric reading of the hair, that would establish the identity of his assassin. One of the Lincolns' bodyguards who had taken up his responsibilities not long before the assassination, later wrote:

The days during which the President lay in state before they took him away for his long progress over the country he had saved were even more distressing than grief would have made them. Mrs. Lincoln was almost frantic with suffering.

Women spiritualists in some way gained access to her. They poured into her ears

pretended messages from her dead husband. Mrs. Lincoln was so weakened that she had not force enough to resist the cruel cheat. These women nearly crazed her. Mr. Robert Lincoln, who had to take his place now at the head of the family, finally ordered them out of the house.²³

The Lincolns' son Robert, not long afterwards, used his mother's recourse to spirit mediums as one of his reasons for testifying that she should be committed to a mental institution. And years later, when the publication of Nettie Colburn's book opened the subject of the President's belief in spiritualism to public discussion, Robert maintained that his father had no such belief and no involvement with spirit mediums.²⁴



Cora Scott about 1856

Lincoln repeatedly returned to the land of the living, however, beginning almost immediately after his death, through spirit mediums who, as they said, allowed him to speak through them. The most well known of these mediums was Cora L. V. Scott.

Cora was born in 1840 in upstate New York to dreamy and peripatetic parents who were enamored of Freethought. At puberty, she began to “impersonate” the departed spirits of famous people,

²³ William Henry Crook, *Through Five Administrations; Reminiscences of Colonel William H. Crook, Body-Guard to President Lincoln* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1910), 69-70.

²⁴ See, for example, *Freeborn County Standard* (Albert Lea, Minnesota), September 20, 1893.

who would be drawn into her psyche through the intercession of a little Indian spirit guide, who Cora said was named “Shenandoah” or “Shannie.”²⁵

Cora was a beautiful girl, with thin, delicate features, long, blond ringlets, and immense blue eyes. She was visited by spirits who took over her consciousness and her voice in order to deliver orations and messages or to answer test questions to confirm their identities or to provide oracles about the nature of the cosmos or the hidden meaning of political events. She would stand straight up on a platform in front of an audience and turn her blue orbs heavenward, where she would fix her stare for as long as the spirits chose to speak through her. Women often found her performances inspiring—by taking on the authority of revered sages, statesmen, politicians, scientists, philosophers, and social reformers, she was able to project herself into the public sphere and capture a respectful attention on a platform that women generally did not occupy. Men often found her performances inspiring, too, but sometimes for a different reason—here was a beautiful young woman, indiscriminately uncovering her vulnerabilities, as it were, in front of large groups of people. The spectacle called forth from them both a chivalrous desire to protect her and a lascivious desire to see more.

²⁵ Cora’s hagiography by her fellow spiritualist, Harrison Delavan Barrett, *The Life Work of Cora L. V. Richmond* (Chicago: National Spiritualists Association, 1896), was highly reticent about the facts of her life, as was the brief biographical introduction to *Discourses through the Mediumship of Mrs. Cora L. V. Tappan* (London: J. Burns, 1875). See Ann Braude, “Cora L. V. Richmond,” *American National Biography*, volume 18, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 461-462; also, Benjamin F. Hatch, *Spiritualists’ Iniquities Unmasked, and the Hatch Divorce Case* (New York: The Author, 1859); “The Cora Hatch-McKinley Affair,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 28, 1864; “The Cora Hatch Divorce Case,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 20, 1864; and “Cora Hatch and Her Troubles,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 10, 1864.

By her middle teens, she was a popular figure on the lecture circuit. In trance, she was almost endlessly voluble on any subject that the audience asked her to speak on. Some in her audiences were well pleased and praised her wonderful, high-minded lucubrations. Walt Whitman, for one, after hearing her, attempted to enlarge his own imaginative powers by developing his own “mediumship.”²⁶ Others, however, found her “divine afflatus” to be less than compelling. Henry James, for example, saw her perform and left in disgust before she finished. She probably inspired the character of Verena Tarrant in his novel *The Bostonians*.²⁷ Her logorrhea, to critics, was a giveaway of her disingenuousness: She would “iterate and reiterate” abstract phrases, running up to her subject, then veering off before saying anything quite specific about it, always merely orbiting, and allowing herself to say something portentous but substantially empty, and simultaneously giving herself time, during the varying phrasings, to anticipate where her discourse would proceed next.

Like other successful mediums, she was adept at playing to her audience, whether it consisted of a thousand people or a single individual. In her entranced state, Cora functioned as a kind of lightning rod, collecting bits and pieces of information and news of the day, along with the hopes, fears, expectations, and dreams of her audiences, and then weaving them into an unconscious tapestry that she offered in the “person” of such famous people as Andrew Jackson. Listening to her was like taking a dip in the antebellum zeitgeist.

²⁶ “New York Conference. Session of July 21,” *Spiritual Age* (New York), August 1, 1857, and Joseph Barthelet, “Conférences,” *Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (October 1858): 257-61.

²⁷ Letter of Henry James to Thomas Sargeant Perry, 1 November 1863, quoted in John McClymer’s website, “Making Sense of Cora Hatch,” at <http://www.assumption.edu/whw/Hatch/Approaches.html>

In 1856, when Cora was barely sixteen, she married Benjamin Hatch, a homeopathic physician and mesmerist. Hatch took control of her as her agent. Within a year, Cora was in court petitioning for divorce, accusing her husband of abusing her and of unsavory sexual antics with other women. To her fans, Cora was always an image of womanhood's purity, but Hatch responded to her application for divorce with denials of her accusations and, later, with counter-accusations of her own sexual infidelities, which he said were perfectly typical of the "free love" convictions of almost all the spiritualists he had encountered. Counter petitions for divorce would continue into 1864. After splitting from her husband, Cora arranged her own lectures, which, as the War drew closer, were often delivered in the "person" of Theodore Parker, a radical abolitionist, Transcendentalist, and Unitarian minister from Boston, who had died while on a European visit in 1860.

Not all of Parker's friends and acquaintances were happy about Parker's coming back to life through Cora's public lectures. Parker's own leanings had been just as radical—politically and socially—as any "progressive" spiritualist, and his own independent congregation in Boston had many spiritualists within it. Parker had little use for traditional Christianity and, through his critiques, had led many away from it. But he was diffident about spiritualism. He admired spiritualists' enthusiasm, and even described spiritualism positively as being the only religion that had enkindled "a new fire in the hearth" of the spirit, but he could not take it at face value, as a real revelation of the spirits of the deceased from the realm of the afterlife.

When Cora lectured in Lyceum Hall in Boston in 1863, "personating" Parker, one of his old friends protested mightily in a letter to William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper,

The Liberator, about Cora's unhallowed "confiscation" and "misuse" of Parker's identity, and about her trying to put words in his mouth that he would not have agreed with:

He is not here in person, to speak in his own vindication; nor can I think of an act of injustice more dark and disgraceful than that perpetrated by the fanaticism which makes Theodore Parker the author of this language. To make a false quotation from Mr. Parker's writings, and thus to attribute words to him which he never used, and ideas which he never taught, would be a very serious crime; as it would be, also, to quote his ideas in language he never used, and then announce that language as Mr. Parker's own identical words. But, the *fraud* now complained of is a greater crime than this; for the young woman in his case does not pretend to quote Mr. Parker, she does not appear as his interpreter, nor does she tell us that she, in common with others, is more or less influenced by Mr. Parker's writings. Nothing like this! The young woman, Cora L. V. Hatch, stands up before a "crowded audience," most of whom were hallucinated with the IDEA of "spirits," like herself, and she says:—

"I am Theodore Parker, who died in Florence, May 10, 1860. And I wish to be known, that no one else may be responsible for my ideas, or what I may express; therefore I wish you expressly to understand who I am, and what is my name. My name was Theodore Parker."²⁸

²⁸ "Theodore Parker," *Liberator*, July 10, 1863.

The “controlling influence”—the “spirit” of Theodore Parker—was, in the words of the letter writer, “verily, a nose of wax, which takes any shape which the imagination or fancy chances to give it; a phantasmagoria, a mental kaleidoscope; and hence we find this same Mrs. Hatch, dreamy, somnambulist, hallucinated, as she has been from a child, by this same ‘controlling influence,’ announcing herself, now as ‘Theodore Parker,’ then as ‘Daniel Webster,’ and next as ‘John C. Calhoun,’ or Tom, Dick and Harry, as the ‘controlling influence’ can best succeed in putting money in her pocket.”

Through Parker’s spirit, Cora urged the country to a holy crusade to eliminate slavery and to redeem the land from its bondage and its sin through an expiation of blood on the battlefield. It was a message that rang true to radical Republicans and it became more and more pronounced in Abraham Lincoln’s own thinking about the War, framing it in his speeches as a national blood atonement.

Nevertheless, radical Republicans in Congress were troubled that, as the War drew to a close, Lincoln appeared inclined to count the atonement as having been paid, and to bring back the Southern States into the Union without their having endured the penance and reparation that the Radicals believed their sin of slavery required of them. Indeed, for these Republicans, grief at Lincoln’s assassination was not entirely unmixed with a sense of relief that his death would stiffen the resolve of the North to lay the South prostrate and would allow them to paint the Confederate leaders—most especially, Jefferson Davis—as the worst of villains, justifying a decades-long purgatory of Northern rule over the South. But the man who stepped into Lincoln’s place—Andrew Johnson—was perhaps even more inclined than Lincoln had been to bring the Southern States back into the Union as soon as possible and without many preconditions. The fiery, crusading

language with which Theodore Parker and others had scorched the political discourse in the North before and during the War was in danger, the radicals believed, of being quenched in a lukewarm bath of national forgiveness.²⁹

During the War, Cora had continued her city-to-city lecture tours, speaking before large crowds, and often prophesying, through the spirit of Theodore Parker and others, about the “coming events” that “cast their shadows before them.” On one of these tours, while in Washington, D.C., she met Nathan W. Daniels, a Union colonel of strong abolitionist convictions who had commanded a regiment of black soldiers in Louisiana during the War. Daniels had been relieved of duty by General Nathaniel Banks, on charges ranging from personal immorality to misappropriation of supplies. Daniels was convinced, however, that the charges were trumped up to punish him for having arrested all his subordinate officers in his regiment for saying that they would not follow the orders of black officers. Daniels somehow struck a deal with the Army to ignore his dishonorable discharge and proceeded to Washington to lobby abolitionist members of Congress and the Executive Branch for new employment.

Daniels had become a devoted spiritualist in New Orleans during the War, often visiting clairvoyants and spirit mediums, and attending the public exhibitions and appearances of visiting trance lecturers. He was a dashing young man—although an avid skirt chaser and quite full of himself. In March 1865, soon after he arrived in Washington, he attended a séance in the Green Room at the White House presided over

²⁹ Roy Z. Chamlee, Jr., *Lincoln's Assassins: A Complete Account of Their Capture, Trial, and Punishment* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1989), 203-11, 493-516; Robert F. Horowitz, *The Great Impeacher: A Political Biography of James M. Ashley* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), 129-43.

by one of Cora's professional friends, New York medium and "spirit artist" Wella P. Anderson.³⁰

Nathan and Cora met and fell in love. They were married in Washington on December 8, 1865.³¹ While they waited in Washington for Nathan to secure a position, they mingled with the city's other spiritualists, especially those who were well placed in the Administration or Congress. Cora added Abraham Lincoln to her stable of spirit "influences," and took to presiding over small séances attended by a select few. She was especially in demand, during this time when tensions between President Johnson and Congress were rising, as a sort of trance advisor to a group of radical Republican members of Congress who were thoroughly inclined—at least in private—to treat her revelations from the higher spheres, and especially from the spirits of Lincoln and Parker as important information about matters of fact and about the hidden motives of those enmeshed in the political intrigues in the Capitol.

Her most devoted Congressional acolytes were Michigan Senator Jacob M. Howard and Ohio Representative George W. Julian. They were both leaders in efforts to institute a harsh regime of retribution upon the South, at odds with that envisioned by Andrew Johnson. Howard chaired one of the subcommittees of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction. Julian was one of the members of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War and was one of the members of the House of Representatives who eventually prepared the formal impeachment of Johnson. Howard, Julian, and many other

³⁰ 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, 1998), 172.

³¹ Cora and Nathan were issued a marriage license in the District of Columbia--she was listed as Cora Scott--There seems to have been some real question about whether her divorce from Benjamin Hatch had been finalized even as late as 1864.

Congressmen attended soirees in the rooms of the city's spiritualists during which Cora Daniels, impersonating the spirit of Lincoln or Parker, rhapsodized about the blood that was still to be shed in a second—or continued—war between slavery and anti-slavery forces.

In the character of Lincoln or Parker or Indian guide “Shenandoah,” Cora would extemporize upon the advantages or disadvantages of various policy measures then being considered by Congress or the Administration. She would also descend into particulars, answering factual questions posed to her by those in attendance. Washington spiritualist leader George Bacon, a clerk in the Quartermaster General's Office, with whom the Daniels often socialized, wrote, “It is no secret that certain efforts were made to incorporate into national law some of the hints and suggestions received from spiritual séances; as usual, however, short-sighted policy was in the ascendant then as it is today.”³²

Harrison Delivan Barrett, a spiritualist who would later become the President of the National Spiritualists Association, wrote about Cora's influence:

The committee on reconstruction from both Houses of Congress, of which Senator Howard was chairman, sometimes called upon our subject as often as twice each week for advice from the spirit side of life upon the reconstruction of the Southern States. It was particularly to Senator Howard that this advice was given and he ever listened attentively and reverently, urging upon his colleagues the recommendations given from the Spirit guides. The guides always gave to

³² George A. Bacon in Harrison Delivan Barrett, *The Life Work of Cora L. V. Richmond*. (Chicago: National Spiritualists Association, 1896), 226.

these public men sound advice and some of the suggestions advanced by them were adopted by these gentlemen in their reports to Congress; but, as Brother Bacon says, short-sighted policy too often governed the majority and the recommendations of the guides were not followed in their entirety. ... It is impossible for us to measure the full effect that the words of these guides had upon the teachers in the Congress of the Nation who sought communion with the statesmen in the higher life. It is safe to say, however, that many of the measures, outside of reconstruction, were tinged with the ideas conveyed to our lawmakers through spiritual agency.³³

During 1866-67, Cora and Nathan kept a private journal. Nathan's entries in it detailed the trance sessions over which Cora presided.³⁴ The entries make evident how chaotic and threatening the political situation was in Washington during these two years, filled with frenzied visions of anarchy, conspiracies, military coups, and political dissolution. It was not yet clear whether the violence of the Civil War had definitively ended. The holy crusade to abolish slavery had not yet been definitively won—slavery would need to be abolished by Constitutional amendment, and blacks would need to be given the power to protect themselves through the instrument of suffrage.

³³ Barrett, *The Life Work of Cora L. V. Richmond*, 244-45.

³⁴ Nathan W. Daniels, *Diary*, volume 3, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. C. P. Weaver, the descendent of Cora Scott's next husband, Samuel Forster Tappan, discovered the diary in the attic of her ancestral home. Weaver transcribed it and used the first two volumes of the diary—which Daniels kept before moving to Washington and meeting Cora—as the basis of her book, *Thank God My Regiment an African One*. The last volume, which details Cora's séances, has not been published. For more on Daniels' character and performance as an officer, see David C. Rankin, *Diary of a Christian Soldier: Rufus Kinsley and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 48-52.

The Daniels's journal provides an unsettling view of Congressional leaders who, during the day, were overseeing hearings on the Lincoln assassination, reconstruction, foreign policy, and impeachment, and who, in the evening, were resorting to private séance rooms, filling in gaps in information they had been able to glean from their committee hearings, and learning what they could of the dark and hidden web of conspiracies that they believed were woven all about them. The journal portrays Cora in a setting in which her normal, vague mode of speaking about factual events was replaced, or at least supplemented, by quite specific answers to questions posed to the spirit of Lincoln or Parker or even British reformer William Wilberforce. The rumor mill in Washington and in the national newspapers was operating at full steam. Cora had plenty of raw material with which to spin her fantasies to her Congressional devotees, as described in this journal entry:

Tuesday, February 20th 1866

Shannie [Cora's Indian spirit guide] came this morning & said that the war had begun. – That the President had arrayed himself upon the side of The Conservatives & that he would carry out the same plan until war again breathed its terrible spirit over the country. ... --That President Johnson had determined not to veto The Freedmen's Bill up to Sunday. That [Secretary of State William] Seward had opposed the veto up to that time & had written the document that accompanied the veto asking amendments to the Bill—but that on Sunday, Seward had learned that they could not retain their southern influence if the Bill became a law—changed & went to the support of The President's original intentions--& then the decision was made to veto the same, [Secretary of the

Interior James] *Harlan* & [Secretary of War Edwin] *Stanton* being the only ones who stood out against it. *Shannie* ... also said that the villain who was dogging Senator *Howard* would be in the Senate chamber again to day & that if we went to the same place that he was in before we would find him.

A little group of spiritualists attended another séance—the group included Giles B. Stebbins, an abolitionist lecturer and apologist for spiritualism who was from Michigan but had come to the city, along with his wife Catherine, to work in the Freedman’s Bureau. It also included “the angel of the battlefield,” Clara Barton, whose belief in spiritualism would continue throughout the rest of her life, her close friend, abolitionist and woman’s rights activist and nurse Frances (“Fannie”) Dana Gage, as well as Senator Howard and Eber B. Ward, a fabulously wealthy Detroit industrialist who was a devoted spiritualist and who was in Washington because his name was being passed around as a possible candidate for Treasury Secretary. Parker and Lincoln both spoke to them:

Wednesday, February 21st 1866

This evening Mr & Mrs Stebbins, Mrs Frances D Gage, Miss Clara Barton, Senator Howard, & Mr Ward of Detroit, came up & spent the evening with us. —They are all notables in their way, and it was a very interesting occasion. — After an interesting conversation, my darling was entranced and Parker came and gave us an hour of his wonderful prophecy and predictions. — He said —

The struggle is surely coming & you may prepare for the worst. There will be difficulty between The President & Congress & 'ere long war will exist. Sen H—Will The President veto the Freedmen's Bureau Bill? Ans—He wishes at heart to do so but is not sustained by all his Cabinet—we do not think he will dare to go before the country against the measure—still if he thinks he can do so with impunity, he will. But he can effectually nullify it in the appointments & at present he desires to act discreetly. —Sen H—Is Mr Lincoln here? & can he tell anything about a conversation he had with Mr [John Brown] Baldwin of Va, Apr 3rd '61? — Senator Howard then related the testimony of Baldwin & others upon that subject. — Ans—Yes he is here standing by your side & his hand is on your shoulder. He remembers the conversation well & says “Senator, I never offered a bribe to Treason. I did say to Mr Baldwin that if he would go to Richmond & cause the convention there assembled to go home, I would not send supplies & ammunition or provisions of any kind to Fort Sumter until it was absolutely necessary, even to the point of starvation. I would do this to avoid any irritation to the people of the South—but I never could withdraw the garrisons either from Fort Sumter or Pickens.” Sen H—This is the answer of Mr Lincoln? Ans—Yes, and 'tis the truth. He assures you that you may rely on its correctness. —

Pre-War Virginia politicians John Lewis, John Baldwin, and John Botts had just given mutually contradictory testimony to Sen. Howard's Subcommittee. Lewis and Botts claimed that, at the beginning of April 1861, Lincoln had offered to the Virginia Constitutional Convention in Richmond a pledge that, if it would adjourn without voting for secession, he would evacuate the Federal forces from Forts Sumter and Pickens.

Lewis and Botts claimed that Lincoln made this offer to Baldwin with the intention that he should relay it to the Convention, but that Baldwin, on his own initiative, decided not to do it. The implication of the testimony was that such an offer would have been gladly accepted by the Convention and that Virginia would not have seceded from the Union. Also implied was the notion that Baldwin had kept silent about the offer in order to bring the impending crisis to a head, with the commencement of hostilities. After the fall of Fort Sumter, Baldwin had quickly joined the Confederate army and had also served in the Virginia legislature. Before Howard's Congressional subcommittee, Baldwin denied that Lincoln had made this offer during their conversation.

In the hearing, Botts said that Lincoln's offer elevated the President's reputation as a statesman who was genuinely seeking peace and the preservation of the Union. The Radical Republicans' concern over Lincoln's offer, however—if we judge by the sentiment assumed by the spirit of Lincoln in this séance—was that, if Lincoln had made such an offer, it would suggest that he had been willing to sacrifice a principle, that is, to “offer a bribe to Treason.”

(The conversation then turned on Foreign affairs) Sen H—Is there any danger of a war with France? Ans—not the least. – The Secretary of State is too wily for that. He approves of the existing state of affairs. – Sen H—Is the Influence informed whether Mr Seward ever gave any special pledges or sent any private messengers to Europe in the beginning of our war & pending the occupation of Mexico? – Ans—We are aware that he did make such pledges of neutrality as would justify the occupation of Mexico by The French and we think he sent two messengers whose names we will ascertain & reveal. –

The country has been betrayed by this subtle & unprincipled Demagogue & the testimony will yet be revealed to prove it—we will ascertain the facts & then make them know to you. After some further conversation of a personal character referring to the danger of the Senator because of his inquiries concerning Jefferson Davis [and his alleged link to Lincoln's assassination], & a statement that he was wise in changing his rooms & warning him that under the President plans [sic], his life & that of other senators who were Radical members are threatened -- & the influence left.

Howard was focusing here on French support for Emperor Maximilian in Mexico because the U.S. had begun aiding the rebel republican Benito Juarez. Howard had repeatedly asked the witnesses before his Subcommittee whether they thought it likely that the defeated Confederate States would again take up arms against the U.S. if French or monarchist armies in Mexico encouraged them.

Anti-Catholic sentiments were at a high tide at the moment among radical Republicans for a number of reasons. The fundamentally Protestant, nonconformist nature of the most “advanced” radicals, gave them a “natural” anti-Roman stance, especially in their assertion of individual sovereignty against church and state, and in their centuries-long claim that Roman Catholicism was superstitious, corrupt, and working to keep humanity in bondage. American progressives and radicals felt a kinship with the European radicals, such as Viktor Emmanuel, who were waging a war against the Papal States; they believed that the Holy See had tilted its support toward the Confederacy during the War. They believed further that the Pope had blessed the establishment of Maximilian on the Mexican throne as a timely counterpoint to Northern

efforts to extend republicanism in the Civil War. They feared that the assassination of Lincoln had been a Catholic conspiracy (many of the conspirators had been Catholic) aimed against the Republic, that it had been a conspiracy driven ultimately by a “Jesuitical mainspring.” They were convinced that the Democratic Party opposition in the North during the War—especially manifest in the 1863 Draft Riots in New York City—was heavily influenced by immigrant Catholics, especially Irish. And, finally, they were prepared to believe that the Irish “Fenian” movement (although denounced by American Catholic bishops and priests) was attempting to destabilize the United States by drawing it into a war with England by sending a series of raiding parties across the northern border into Canada, beginning in April 1866.

Radicals in the North feared that the Civil War conflict was not yet over, but that it was about to turn into an international conflict between republicanism and the Catholic Church. They regarded Pius IX’s encyclical, *Quanta Cura*, promulgated in the United States at the beginning of 1865, containing the “Syllabus of Errors,” as “a covert declaration of war against the American Republic,” for it declared to be anathema the idea that humans were capable of establishing a just society without the guidance offered by religion through the teachings of the Church.

Saturday evening—Shannie said in the presence of Senator Howard ... that it had been ascertained that one of the messengers whom Mr Seward specially deputed to carry out negotiations of neutrality was “the man with a big cross,” meaning Arch Bishop [of New York John Joseph] Hughes. That he had ample instructions to treat with the Emperor of the French [Louis Bonaparte] & The Pope—that the other names would

be revealed on Thursday evening Feb 22nd. The influence repeated the substance of Mr Lincoln's conversation with Mr Baldwin, & when asked if he remembered having any conversation with Mr [John Minor] Botts of Virginia a few days after the said April 3rd 1861, he replied yes, & that he told Mr Botts in substance what he had said to Mr Baldwin. —

Sen H—How long after the interview with Baldwin did you see Botts? Ans—about two days—no, it must have been longer—it was a week nearly, for the vessels had already sailed, which were to provision Fort Sumter & I could not then make Botts the same offer that I did Mr Baldwin, though I told him what I had said to the latter. — Sen H—Did Mr Lincoln keep any record of those conversations? Ans—Yes, he says, it is in my pocket memorandum—I wrote it myself.—It must be among my papers at home with my wife—write her for the memorandum of that date—I am sure it is there, write her.

The influence then proceeded to state that the private messengers whom Mr Seward sent to Europe as special Diplomats were Arch Bishop Hughes, Thurlow Weed, and later Gen'l George B. McClellan. That to these persons he gave private particular instructions ... & that the first conveyed the message to the Emperor of The French & Pope of Rome—"If you will remain neutral we will not oppose any schemes you may have concerning Mexico." —

Sen H—Did any of these parties carry written dispatches to the French minister or others in power or authority? Ans—Arch Bishop Hughes had written & verbal Instructions but they are inaccessible and as safe in the archives of The Roman Church as tho' they were buried beneath the Pyramids of Egypt. — He is the only one whom Mr Seward dared to entrust with written dispatches—nor were these to the minister, but to

The Emperor & Pope in person. – To the others he gave a Carte Blanche saying simply, I will be responsible for the fulfillment of the promises and negotiations made by these gentlemen. He promised neutrality and gave instructions that this government would not object to the establishment of a Roman Catholic Monarch in Mexico. Of course these private negotiations would never be revealed except in case of war.—But woe unto the man who has thus betrayed the trust of this nation. Sen H—Does Gen'l McClellan hold correspondence with The Pope at the present time? Ans—He has lately been in Rome & is now in active communication with the Papal Power. – The stronghold which that power has gained in Mexico leads them to hope for an increase of influence in these states, and Mr Seward's love of Intrigue would prompt him to favor the establishment of such a government here.

Archbishop Hughes and Thurlow Weed had gone on a diplomatic mission to Europe—including to Rome—early in the War, although its objects would seem to have been much more benign than what was hinted at here.³⁵ After the War, McClellan took his family on a trip to Europe, which also excited the suspicions of some back in America.

The influence then proceeded to warn the senator that the President contemplated & would attempt high-handed measures against the loyal majorities in Congress if they persisted in refusing seats to southern members—that to secure the admission of these southern states, especially Tennessee, was his pet idea & he would not hesitate to adopt

³⁵ Rena Mazyck Andrews, *Archbishop Hughes and the Civil War* (Chicago: 1935), 4-10.

any measures to its fulfillment. – Hoping to be sustained by the Democrats of the north & southern sympathizers all over the land—that his policy was to veto every measure intended for the amelioration of the Freeman’s condition & not accept any action of Congress covering the states in Rebellion. – That he would as Commander in Chief of the army declare Congress or its Radical members in Insurrection & attempt by force of arms to drive them from the councils of the nation. That war, bitter & relentless, was coming in which the free north & its Congress & the free colored people of the south will be on one side & the government of Andrew Johnson—the southern traitors, northern Democrats, Fenians & the Catholic church on the other, but Freedom shall at last prevail.

Around this time, the relationship between the President and Congress had become so strained on the question of whether representatives from the Southern States should be seated, that both the Executive and the Congress were convinced that when the next Congress was due to convene, both the President and the Congress would have to rely on the support of the Army to displace and arrest their recalcitrant foes in the Administration or in Congress. Lincoln’s “influence” continued:

Ques. By Mr Bacon—Is Gen’l Grant true to the north? Ans—He is, of this we are sure, notwithstanding his Democratic antecedents. His heart is right and furthermore a division is coming between him & The Executive, which will throw him into the arms of the north and he will espouse its cause. –Sen H—What of Sherman? Ans—He will be on the side of the south and will be one of the leaders of the Gov’t against the Freedmen.

Ques by Col D[aniels]—Are you sure Grant will be all right? Ans—Yes, we are sure—already there is some difficulty between him & The President, he cannot remain longer. Bear in mind all we have said & be prepared for the worst as these are no imagination dreams but stern realities. Ques by Col. D—Is the Influence still certain that The President will attempt to control Congress by force of crisis? Ans—We are certain that is his purpose, unless Congress checkmates him by an Impeachment which we fear they cannot do, as the Senate is not strong enough. If the Radicals persist (which they will) in keeping out the southern members, The President acting under the advice of southern Rebels & northern Democrats, will attempt what we have predicted & we think it will occur within three months. Such is his present design—But we must close for tonight commending what we have said to your wisdom & judgment.³⁶

The journal is most interesting not so much for the tendentious, sensationalistic revelations that it purports to disclose from the spirits of Lincoln and Parker and others, but rather for its off-handed documentation of how trustingly eager to be given these revelations were some of the most influential and active political and government figures of the times.

Thursday, February 22nd 1866

Senator Howard came this evening and after a pleasant visit my darling was controlled by Parker.

³⁶ Col. Daniels wrote a letter, as “Viator,” to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (March 17, 1866), elaborating many of these points.

Monday, February 26th 1866

This morning Shannie came & wrote a long time reproducing the conversation between Parker & Sen Howard, also giving the “Singing words” in which the Senator rec’d his Spiritual name. It was “Rock of Truth” which we think most appropriate.

Went up to the Senate Chamber and saw Senator Howard, gave him the minutes of Parker’s communication and Shannie’s Poem. Then went up into the Gentlemen’s gallery where I found a man—a one armed specimen ... answering the description of the one that was represented by Parker as dogging Senator Howard. – I immediately notified Howard & we put a detective on his track. I then went over to the House where I saw [Rep. Fernando] Beaman and gave him ticket for the lecture for the members. – Met Gen’l Banks & in conversation with him he said that in case it came to a conflict of arms, the army would not be with Wendell Phillips. I replied it had better be with him than the President. He answered that he thought it would be with neither—that all military history went to show that the army was always for the army and that such would be the case in the coming conflict. Learned from Mr [Silas] Merchant [clerk, Quartermaster General Dept] that he had put Senator [Henry] Wilson’s brother, who is a special detective, on the track of the miscreant who have been pointed out to us as the would be assassin of Senator Howard, so that we shall now see what will become of it.

Wednesday, February 28th 1866

Last night Parker, through my darling, again predicted that we were on the eve of a most terrible war and that but a few days would elapse ‘ere the President proclaimed the southern states in the Union and forced at the point of the bayonet the southern

Representatives into Congress. – Then would come bloody war and finally he closed with a grand thrilling and magnificent description of what was soon coming and closed with a glorious peroration calling forth from the audience repeated demonstrations of applause. ... I noticed among the audience Senator Howard, Gen'l Banks & many other noted personages. – The Lecture was indeed a success and carried the audience completely with the speaker.

Sunday, March 4th 1866

Found a large company assembled to meet us composed of the following members of Congress—[George] Julian, [William] Lawrence of Ohio, [George] Lawrence of Penn, [Glenni] Scofield, [Charles] Upson, [Fernando] Beaman, [Rowland] Trowbridge and five others whose names I have forgotten. – Mr & Mrs Giles Stebbins, Mrs Merchant, Mrs Beaman, Mrs [Josephine] Griffing [anti-slavery activist working at the Freedman's Bureau], Miss Clara Barton & others. – After a brief conversation my darling was influenced by Theodore Parker & for two hours a conversation was kept up upon the condition & prospects of the country, The President & Congress, Spirit Communion & other subjects, the substance of which I abstract as follows—

He said that President Johnson would not hesitate to carry out his policy even if he is compelled to disperse the Radical part of Congress with the bayonet—and much more bearing upon the same point that has been given us & written down here before. – That Seward was at the bottom of the whole matter & was now intriguing with the Pope at Rome & the Emperor Napoleon through his special Private Ambassador Gen'l McClellan, reiterated what he had before said to Senator Howard relative to Seward's

sending Arch Bishop Hughes & Thurlow Weed to France & Rome, & also the arrangements that he had made & carried out relative to their neutrality and the Mexican scheme.

Here “Parker” took up another vision of conspiracy that had been floating in the air. To quell general suspicion that the investigation and trial of the conspirators in the Lincoln assassination had left important evidence aside, Congress had formed a joint committee to hear testimony on the assassination. Some now believed that Andrew Johnson had been complicit in the assassination because he had had so much to gain—that is, the Presidency and the readmission of the South into the Union without hindrance. The radical Republicans in Congress who were now locked in a struggle with him over the conduct of reconstruction tended to see his character, more and more, as purely demonic. At least one of them, Rep. James Ashley from Ohio, became so fixated on removing Johnson from office that he cooked up a scheme with Charles Dunham alias Sanford Conover alias James Wallace, a shady ex-Confederate lawyer and newspaper correspondent who was then in prison, to produce a raft of witnesses who would deliver secret testimony to members of Congress and who would be paid large sums of money for their accounts. Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt, under Secretary of War Stanton, paid out this money and collected the accounts, through the work of Lafayette Baker to collect the information. The scheme came unraveled however. During the first effort to impeach Johnson, the Congressional committee investigating charges eventually realized how all these witnesses were false and how Ashley and Holt—at least indirectly—had suborned their testimony. Johnson came to understand the scheme and, after it fell apart,

took the opportunity to fire Stanton. Congress had just passed a law over his veto denying the President the power to fire appointed officials—a law they would repeal several years later—so this would become the offense that formed the basis for the second (and successful) attempt to impeach him the following year. The spirit of Parker continued:

Said that Johnson was in complicity with the Assassination of Mr Lincoln, that the visit of Booth the morning of the day the deed was done was significant, as most certainly if anything the way of harm had been intended Johnson, it would not have occurred at that time as his death then or an attempt at his assassination would have prevented their designs upon Mr Lincoln from being carried out, therefore that it was not to assassinate but to hold a conference with him that Booth's visit was made -- & that other evidence would yet come to light which would prove the truth of the assertion. – That the admission of Tennessee would only delay the conflict and not prevent it—that if Congress did not admit that state, the fight would commence in one month, if they did, it would within two months, as Mr Johnson would insist upon the admission of all the states & unless Congress consented he would then force them to his demands. – That the loan bill sought to be carried through Congress by the secretary of the Treasury was but a part of the programme but that it would fail. –That the President wanted all the money & control of all that he could obtain to carry out these purposes, but that Congress would discover his animus and prevent it. – That Congress would not hold another session in Washington, that within the next six months war would be in existence all over the land, in which The Government, the southern people, northern Copperheads & sympathizers &

The Fenians & the Catholic church would be on one side and the Freedmen, radicals & The true Government upon the other. – That it would begin in the streets of Washington with the arrest of the Radical wing of Congress for treason—that it would then spread like the New York riots all over the country. – That a Provisional Government would be established somewhere in Ohio or some of the Western states—that at first the Conservatives would gain the ascendancy, but finally it would have to succumb to the true principles of Humanity & Freedom. – That it would last at least four years & perhaps longer. – That in its settlement all of the Religious, Political & social questions that now agitate the country would be settled and Peace and true Harmony would finally prevail.

Much else was said that I have not room to write and deep interest was manifested by the parties present. – The President & Mr Seward rec'd a terrible scorching—the members of Congress questioned the speaker closely & upon every answer were satisfied of its truth. – Indeed many things seeming to corroborate what they already knew, but which the remainder of the company were entirely ignorant of. – The séance lasted until a late hour & all went away satisfied of the truth of the revelations & predictions. – The Interview had a marked effect & will I believe serve to influence the votes of the members present upon the Tennessee question which comes up tomorrow.

In such an uncertain time, with rumors and counter-rumors furiously flying and no one sure of his friends' hidden agendas, even Congressmen sought out mediums and oracles, not only to gather bits of possibly true information, but also simply to hear what was floating about in the air and—assuming that Cora was privy to the whispered rumors

of all kinds of people in the Administration and the Congress—to monitor what revelations came forth through her in order to make sure that none of it was damaging to their own interests.

During the summer of 1866, the Daniels took a long trip back to Cora's family's home in upstate New York. While they were there, a great National Fair was held in Washington, for the benefit of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Orphans' Home. Among the Fair's displays was a collection of relics memorializing the War dead, including some collected by Cora's friend and spiritualist believer Clara Barton.

Barton had been in Washington, working in the Patent Office, near the end of the War, after having spent considerable time at and around battlefields during the fighting.



Clara Barton in Washington, 1866
Photo by Matthew Brady

Just before the War ended, with Lincoln's blessing, Barton began working with returning soldiers to identify the War dead. She had been approached late in 1865 by a former prisoner at the Andersonville prisoner of war camp, Dorence Atwater, who, during his internment, had made as thorough a list as he could of the names of the thirteen thousand Union soldiers who had died at the camp and where their bodies had been placed in a mass grave. Barton approached Secretary of War Stanton with a request to

send a military detachment to Andersonville to inspect the abandoned site. He approved

her request and allowed her and Atwater to accompany the detachment. Barton spent several weeks there, in July and August 1865, while they inspected the site, including the mass graves. She and Atwater collected “relics” from the abandoned prison as well—“rude utensils of the occupants—drinking cups made of sections of horns, platters and



spoons wrought from parts of old canteens, kettles and pans made, without solder, from stray pieces of tin or sheet iron,” and a piece of the already notorious wooden lathe “dead-line” across which prisoners, under pain of being instantly shot, were not allowed to cross. “I brought away a considerable number of these articles,” she wrote, “which may one day be of interest to the curious.”³⁷

On their return to Washington,

Barton wrote an emotional account of the visit, which was published in the *New York*

Tribune on February 14, 1866. The widespread national attention to Barton’s article in the *Tribune* caused Senator Jacob Howard to have her testify before his subcommittee on

³⁷ See also Fannie Gage, “Dorance Atwater, the Hero of Andersonville,” *Independent* (New York), February 28, 1866. A copy of Brady’s photo of the display of relics, made into a carte de visite souvenir of the Fair, is in the Clara Barton Papers, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. See also, “National Burial-Ground at Andersonville,” *Harper’s Weekly*, October 7, 1865.

reconstruction barely a week later.³⁸

Barton and Atwater's "relics" were made into a display, photographed by Matthew Brady, for a National Fair for the benefit of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Orphan Home in Washington. The fair opened on June 6th and concluded in the middle of July.³⁹ The displays at the fair invoked the memory and spirit of the dead martyrs of the War and included patriotic tableaux of bunting and flowers, and portraits of warriors and statesmen, as well as tables of items for purchase, such as scarves and stationery. As at other nineteenth-century exhibitions and fairs, the tables also included displays of curios—one of these was of Barton's relics of the Andersonville dead. Given the date of the Lauries' inscription accompanying the Lincoln lock of hair—April 26, 1866, just when "extensive preparations" for the fair were being undertaken and contributions were being solicited in the national papers—it seems likely that this, too, was part of a display, donated by Barton's "sisters in spirit," the Lauries, for the fair.⁴⁰

Cora and Nathan Daniels returned to Washington in the spring of 1867, on renewed hope that Nathan would secure a political appointment. Their best friends in the Capitol were another spiritualist couple, Alfred and Annie Cridge. In March 1866, when the Daniels had first visited the Cridges at their Georgetown home at 214 Fayette Street

³⁸ Testimony of Clara Barton to the Joint Congressional Committee on Reconstruction, Subcommittee on Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, February 21, 1866, Chairman, Senator Jacob M. Howard, *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, at the First Session Thirty-Ninth Congress* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), Part 3, 107. See also *The Martyrs Who, for Our Country, Gave Up Their Lives in the Prison Pens in Andersonville, Ga.* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866).

³⁹ *Washington Star*, June 7, 1866.

⁴⁰ "Fair to be Held at Washington in Aid of Soldiers' and Sailors' Orphans," *New York Times*, April 22, 1866.

(now 35th Street, N.W., near the Visitation Convent), Cora had written:



Annie Denton Cridge

They live far up on the heights in an old fashioned cottage surrounded by grounds which once were beautiful and still retain traces of former loveliness.—Mrs C is a lovely woman, possessing a highly gifted & susceptible organism.—She is the sister of Prof Denton the eminent Geologist who has published that wonderful book entitled the “Soul of Things” which contains the psychometric readings of Mrs Cridge while in a Clairvoyant state.—both

herself & husband are highly intellectual, but her mind is the finer of the two.— They have two lovely children, a boy & a girl & two in the spirit world. Their little boy (five years old) is a most remarkable & gifted being, spontaneous and free as the sunshine, holding daily converse with his little spirit Brothers—he insists that they come and play with him.⁴¹

Alfred Cridge, born in England in 1824, had immigrated to Canada as a young man. While living in Nova Scotia he had become interested in spiritualism and had rapidly developed his visionary abilities, with which he, like other mediums of the day, attempted to trace the fate of the lost 1845 arctic expedition of Sir John Franklin, eventually receiving, he believed, messages from the spirits of the deceased Franklin and

⁴¹ Nathan W. Daniels, Diary, March 4, 1866.

his crew. Cridge published his vision accounts in 1854 in *The Epitome of Spirit-Intercourse*.⁴² His trance voyages to the arctic were in the style of Andrew Jackson Davis, the young psychic who, as early as 1845, had “traveled” in vision out into space among the comets and other planets and had found thriving cultures living there. Davis had discovered that Saturn’s inhabitants, for example, were more beautiful and intelligent than Earthlings, with high foreheads, and translucent skin. During life spans of a thousand years, free of illness or sin, they “worship[ped] God with willing hearts, all as one.”⁴³

By the time Cridge had published *Epitome of Spirit-Intercourse*, he had immigrated to the United States. He initiated a correspondence by letter with a young woman, Annie Denton, who was recommended to him by a mutual acquaintance as someone whose radical views were consonant with his, a soul mate for his visionary voyages. Annie, also born in England, had arrived in the States in 1849, having come over with her parents and her younger sister Elizabeth, to join her older brother William, who had preceded the family. Annie Denton, like her brother William, had bitterly repudiated the strict Methodism in which they had been desultorily raised. William had begun studying Geology and became convinced that Darwin and the geological record would overturn the Bible and revolutionize society. He became a fervent public speaker on Evolution, Geology, and Atheism.

⁴² Alfred Cridge, *Epitome of Spirit-Intercourse: A Condensed View of Spiritualism, in Its Scriptural, Historical, Actual and Scientific Aspects; Its Relations to Christianity, Insanity, Psychometry and Social Reform; Manifestations in Nova Scotia; Important Communications from the Spirits of Sir John Franklin and Rev. Wm. Wishart, St. John, N.B., with Evidences of Identity and Directions for Developing Mediums* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1854).

⁴³ Gibson Smith, ed., *Lectures on Clairmativess; or Human Magnetism* (New York: Searing & Prall, 1845), 32.

Annie Denton, according to her mother, had been the “crossest baby she ever saw.”⁴⁴ Annie would later blame the world—especially Christianity and men—for that and for making her life miserable, even as a child, when she was inhibited on Sundays, for example, from picking as many buttercups as she had wanted to. By the time Annie and her family had left England and landed in America, she was an uncompromising Freethinker and social revolutionary, dedicated, as her husband Alfred would put it, to overturning society’s most basic foundations, by “dissolving all false relations.” This included marriage relations, as they were traditionally understood. Alfred and Annie learned about each other as comrades in the cause of marriage reform and decided, through exchanging letters, that they would make appropriate mates for each other. They married in April 1854.

In 1857, Alfred, Annie, and her sister-in-law Elizabeth Denton—together with some of the country’s most notorious theorists and practitioners of “Free Love”—signed a “call” to gather for a convention at Berlin Heights, Ohio, inviting others from around the country to join in “maturing a practical and successful effort at Social reconstruction.”⁴⁵ The Cridges and the Dentons had moved to Dayton by then, where William Denton taught geology, delivered public lectures on evolution, and where he and Alfred and their wives wrote and published *The Vanguard*, a newspaper of spiritualism and social and political radicalism.

Around this time, William, a “highly imaginative” and “trusting” soul, perhaps thinking over his brother-in-law Alfred’s trance journeys to the arctic regions, discovered

⁴⁴ Alfred Cridge, “Annie Denton Cridge,” *The Carrier Dove* (San Francisco), vol. 3, no. 11 (November 1886): 260-64.

⁴⁵ “Convention at Berlin,” *The Liberator*, September 4, 1857.

that his sister Annie could—to his satisfaction, anyway—read unopened letters through their still-sealed envelopes. Not only that, but she could also receive from the letters a rapid sequence of mental images that supposedly conveyed the scenes present when the writers penned them, as well as images of the writers themselves. Annie also had success with “psychometrizing” locks of hair, visualizing characteristics of the people from whom they had come. Having convinced himself that his sister had this power, in part because of her feminine sensitivity, William wondered whether she might help him in his geological research, as he later recalled:

After testing this thoroughly by numerous experiments, being intensely interested in geology and paleontology, it occurred to me that perhaps something might be done by psychometry ... in these departments of science. If there could be impressed upon a letter the image of the writer and his surroundings during the brief space of time that the paper was subjected to their influence ... why could not rocks receive impressions of surrounding objects, some of which they have been in the immediate neighborhood of for years, and why could they not communicate this in a similar manner to sensitive persons; thus giving us the clue to the conditions of the earth and its inhabitants during the vast eras of the past?

I accordingly commenced ... a series of experiments with mineral and fossil specimens and archeological remains, and was delighted to find that without possessing any previous knowledge of the specimen, or even seeing it, the history of its time passed before the gaze of the seer like a grand panoramic view;

sometimes almost with the rapidity of lightning, and at other times so slowly and distinctly that it could be described as readily as an ordinary scene.⁴⁶

An example of an early “experiment” with Annie, for example, was one in which William gave her a “piece of limestone, full of small fossil shells, from Quindaro, Kansas, a small town on the Missouri River.” She placed it against her forehead and said: “It seems to me there is a deep hole here. Oh, what shells! small shells; so many. I see water; it looks like a river running along. What a high hill! Almost perpendicular; it seems as if the water had cut it in two; it is not so high on the other side. The hill is covered with sand and gravel.”⁴⁷ Annie got better with practice—with a piece of lava from Kilauea, she envisioned ships on the sea and something like an ocean of fire pouring over a precipice, terrifying her.

She read specimens of coal, of stalactites, and of fossil bones. She described gigantic animals from the far past. She held a piece of mosaic tile from Cicero’s villa to her forehead and gave a reading: “I see a dense forest. The trees are very high. Under them I see a mastodon, or something of that kind. I see its head more distinctly than I ever did before.” At this point, William instructed her to “come down to more modern times.” She then saw a scene of a grotto, a spring, and an old man wearing knee breeches and a swallow-tail coat with brass buttons.

⁴⁶ William Denton and Elizabeth M. F. Denton, *The Soul of Things; or, Psychometric Researches and Discoveries* (Boston: Walker, Wise and Company, 1863), 35-36.

⁴⁷ Denton, *The Soul of Things*, 37.

She also “read” the provenance of meteorite fragments. She described where in the Solar System they were from and what had occasioned their being blasted to Earth. William had Annie do hundreds of these readings.

Just before the War, the Cridges moved to Pennsylvania, to be near the new oilfields being discovered there, and using their psychometric powers—especially Annie’s—to locate hidden oil deposits underground. That venture, too, failed because, as Alfred wrote, “psychometry was but one factor in the case; not only capital and business talent, but science, experience and technical knowledge were also essential requisites to success.”⁴⁸

The Cridges’ first two children, two boys, sickened and died in childhood. It was a terrible grief to their parents, although, as mediums, they sought solace in communicating with the boys in the afterlife. Annie wrote that the spirits of her deceased parents continued to take care of them in the afterlife, but that she held her spirit boy in her arms every day. Annie and Alfred had two more children—a boy named Fred, that is, Alfred, and a girl named Jessie.

This was the Cridge family who moved to Washington, D. C. at the outbreak of the Civil War, who become leaders among the spiritualists in the city, and who became fast friends with Cora and Nathan Daniels. It was son Fred Cridge who Cora described as having communed with his dead brothers. During the War the Cridges lived at 517 17th Street, N.W., less than two blocks from the White House. Also living with the Cridges at the time was Annie’s younger sister Lizzie, who, in 1851, had married a

⁴⁸ Alfred Cridge, “Annie Denton Cridge,” 262.

newspaper correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, Thaddeus Sobieski (“T. S.”) Seybold, sometimes based on Washington.

It is unclear how Alfred Cridge managed to land a Government job—perhaps through the influence of War Department clerk and fellow spiritualist Thomas Gales Forster.⁴⁹ During the first part of the War, Cridge was a clerk—and an operative—for Allan Pinkerton in the detective’s Washington office, which operated under the War Department, as the Government’s Secret Service, working on counterespionage and reporting to General McClellan.⁵⁰ Cridge investigated cases of suspected espionage or disloyalty to the Union cause. He was in fact the agent who Pinkerton ordered out to

⁴⁹ Perusing the personnel list of the War Department—and especially of the Adjutant General’s Office—in the years immediately after the War, published in the Washington, D.C., city directory, yields a surprisingly large number of spiritualists (identifiable because of their involvement in spiritualist activities and organizations of the time). Other agencies that were hives of spiritualist employment were the Treasury Department and the Freedman’s Bureau.

⁵⁰ Letter of James S. Wadsworth to Ward H. Lamon, May 17, 1862, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. A possible tangled web of connection is suggested by the fact that Allan Pinkerton was virtually in the employ of Northern abolitionists who funded his Underground Railroad efforts, in which he used his operatives. When he was alerted by them that John Brown was about to be hanged, he made his way to Harper’s Ferry in disguise, along with some of his operatives and spent a week there unsuccessfully trying to figure out how to spring Brown from incarceration. This would have put Pinkerton in the town along with Henry Steele Olcott, who was also there undercover, on secret assignment from the *New York Herald*. Olcott, of course, later turned up as one of William Seward’s three commissioners appointed to investigate the Lincoln assassination. Another very prominent spiritualist who worked with Alfred Cridge in Washington during the War as one of Pinkerton’s chief operatives in the Secret Service was Chicago “spiritual banker” Seth Paine, who, like Pinkerton himself, was a fervent abolitionist and had been active as an operator on the Underground Railroad—“Seth Paine, Reminiscences of a Remarkable Career,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 7, 1872, p. 5. The association between the two men is highly ironic, in one way, because Pinkerton began his detective career by investigating and breaking up counterfeiting rings, and Paine encountered his most intense notoriety when he set up a “bank of the spirits” which issued what amounted to wildcat bank notes backed only by the “good offices” of the spirits.

bring in Confederate spy Belle Boyd.⁵¹ Cridge continued with Pinkerton until May 1863, after which he transferred into a similar position when the War Department gave control of Secret Service operations to Colonel Lafayette C. Baker.⁵² Baker's Washington office of agents took the lead in investigating the assassination of Lincoln immediately after it occurred and in tracking down the conspirators, including John Wilkes Booth. Lawyer, newspaper reporter, army officer, spiritualist—and, later, Theosophist—Henry Steel Olcott was one of Cridge's colleagues in Baker's secret service, and played an important part in the investigations of the assassination. Given the Cridges' close social ties with the Daniels in the years when rumors about the assassination conspirators were floating about and Cora was holding forth in trance, it is not a stretch to wonder whether Alfred was one of Cora's sources of scuttlebutt and rumor or even actual bits of real information about the assassination.

While living in Washington, Annie expanded her interplanetary psychic voyages, travelling, under her husband's suggestion, to Mars, Venus, and Jupiter. Like Andrew Jackson Davis, she was able to gaze down over the planets and catalog their various life forms. Alfred wrote about these sessions:

At last, the requisite conditions being secured with great difficulty and delay, she sat in a room in Washington and directed her attention to the planet Mars, giving what appeared to be a life-like delineation of its atmosphere, topography and

⁵¹ Orders and papers from Asst Secretary of War C. P. Wolcott, to Alfred Cridge, July 18, 1862. Case file 863, Levi Turner and Lafayette Baker Papers. Record Group 94, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

⁵² Alfred Cridge, letter to Col. Baker, June 29, 1863. Case file 1557, Levi Turner and Lafayette Baker Papers.

humanitary condition, including minute details of the latter, such as some of their words and a description of one of their musical instruments. All this however, required some twenty visits. I took down—almost verbatim, though in the dark—her remarks as they were made, and still preserve the record. ...

When first I pointed out to her the planet Venus, she admired it very much and expected to find there human beings advanced much beyond the people of this planet. But to her great disappointment, she found there only two races of wandering savages, the higher of which was not up to the average American Indian, while the lower were slaves to the former. ...

There she repeatedly visited the planet Jupiter, and saw that which surpassed her ideal of a true life, though from the immense area of the planet, she probably saw but a fraction of the people. That fraction, however, lived in unitary dwellings [that is, were all married each one to every other one], were very beautiful, intensely interested in scientific study, especially astronomy, and bore no trace of care or want.⁵³

Alfred recognized that Annie's visionary ability was superior to his. As one amused skeptic described the reason for this, "superior gifts depend on superior organization. Man, with his coarser grain, his harder fibre, his duller spirit, is unequal to the flights and ecstasies of the nobler sex."⁵⁴

⁵³ Alfred Cridge, "Annie Denton Cridge," 262.

⁵⁴ William Hepworth Dixon, "Female Seers," *New America* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1867), 323.

Cora Daniels' trance performances were really not so very different from Annie Cridge's interplanetary expeditions. Cora, too, psychically traveled out into the far reaches of previously unexplored regions of knowledge. What she brought back from there, in the form of her discourses, was meant to be evidence to skeptics, by the implied argument that her untutored mind would not have been able to create these wondrous things on its own. Cora later gave a trance discourse on the "science" of psychometry itself, as a superior method of empirical investigation:

Clairvoyants have asserted that the moon is inhabited, not, indeed, by a high order of beings, but by beings in an embryotic and transitory state, who will, however, eventually become developed. You are not able to determine whether other planets are peopled; but psychometry and Spiritualism say those planets are inhabited; and the more advanced spirits say that they have been able to communicate with the beings of other planets; that the inhabitants of some of those planets are far in advance of yourselves in relation to all science and to spiritual truths; that many live in an atmosphere which to you would seem to be like Paradise, so transcendent in its lightness and in the perception of the beauties of the spirit. Indeed, you would seem to some of those inhabitants as beings of a lower order of creation and life.⁵⁵

Annie's visionary travels to other worlds, while she sat in her Washington parlor, would eventually take a new shape as literary "dreams" of visiting an alternative Earth,

⁵⁵ Cora L. V. Tappan, *Discourses Through the Mediumship of Cora L. V. Tappan* (London: J. Burns, 1876), 43.

where things were ordered differently. Her brother William edited and then printed these in 1870, in serial form. More followed, and Victoria Woodhull reprinted them all in her spiritualist and radical newspaper, *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*.⁵⁶ They were then gathered together and printed under separate cover under the title, *Man's Rights; or, How Would You Like It?*⁵⁷ It was, as one might say now, a feminist proto-science fiction story, part serious and part satirical, about a society that is inverted from this world's: Women rule and have "real" jobs and men do the laundry and housework and nursery tasks. The men are all confused and oppressed by the fairer sex and are beginning to agitate for their rights.

After the War, Alfred and Annie remained in Washington, and Alfred found a civil service position as a clerk in the Office of the Quartermaster General, where George Bacon and several other spiritualists were employed. Comparing the Washington City Directories during and after the War shows a large increase in the number of clerks in that office in the years immediately after hostilities ceased. The enormous task had fallen to the Quartermaster General of identifying the individual remains of the Civil War dead, locating where others had been hurriedly buried around the battlefields, and exhuming and re-intering some of the dead in newly established military cemeteries.

Much of this work must have drawn on Cridge's mundane detective skills. But perhaps more than that: By day, it appears, Alfred the Civil Servant (along with George Bacon and perhaps others) was helping manage a national effort to locate and identify the remains of the dead. By night, Alfred the Psychometer returned home to his wife Annie

⁵⁶ *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly* (New York), September 3–November 19, 1870.

⁵⁷ *Man's Rights; or, How Would You Like It? Comprising Dreams* (Boston: William Denton, 1870).

the Psychometer, who had plenty of experience psychically identifying mute relics and locating underground deposits by the divining of maps. It seems unlikely that Alfred never brought his work home with him—it is not difficult to imagine the Cridges's parlor table covered with a clod of dirt, a lock of hair, a shard of bone, a spent bullet, a shred of blue woolen cloth, or a torn fragment of a field map.

Cora and Nathan Daniels returned to Washington at the beginning of 1867, with renewed hope that Nathan would land a good position through the influence of their friends. Back in the Capital, Cora continued her séances where she had left off, as Congress and the President joined again in opposition to each other. In séance after séance, Lincoln's spirit pursued Andrew Johnson, implicating him in his predecessor's assassination:

Friday, February 22nd 1867

Senator Howard & son present at our rooms. Cora was influenced and gave the following:

That Andrew Johnson had had interviews with Wilkes Booth, the assassination of Mr Lincoln when in Tennessee and before the Inauguration as vice President. That Booth went to see him at Nashville. That Johnson wrote a letter to Jeff Davis, taking sides with the Rebellion and that such document was in existence & its date early in the commencement of the war. That in fact Johnson had corresponded with nearly all of the leaders of the Rebel side & that they understood and knew him to be their friend & not enemy. — That on the day of the assassination of Mr. Lincoln, Booth and Atzerodt both had interviews with Johnson and that Booth's card was left merely as a blind. That

Johnson knew the deed was to be attempted that night together with the assassination of all the Radical leaders in Washington. – That Mrs. Surratt and her fellow conspirators had been unceremoniously and hastily put to death thru fear that they would reveal Johnson's complicity in the plot—and that already a sister of Surratt's had had an interview with him thru the assistance of Andrew Johnson and that she was authorized by Johnson to make such proposals as should prevent any revelation or confessions on his part which should criminate the President. But that the truth would in the end prevail—the whole plot would be revealed, and Johnson would suffer the full penalty of his crimes.

At the conclusion of the revelations, Senator Howard asked many questions bearing upon the subject of Andrew Johnson's crimes—and the answers, many of which were remarkably prophetic, all went to prove Johnson's knowledge and complicity in the assassination of President Lincoln. – At the conclusion Shannie came and said that Miss Elizabeth Barrett Browning was present and would give a Poem—also that at an early day she intended giving a long Poem thru darling for publication. – Mr Howard then proposed the subject of "Love" and a beautiful poem was improvised.

Friday, March 1st 1867

This evening Senator Howard and son called upon us. Darling was Influenced the latter part of the call, and we rec'd the following—

That since the last séance, they have been tracing out the Johnson letter to Jefferson Davis & that they had learned from the lips of Booth himself that in December 1862 and January 1863, he (Booth) visited Nashville, Tennessee ostensibly as an actor, but in reality as a Confederate spy. That at that time he had a number of interviews with

Andrew Johnson, who was then Governor of Tennessee. Such meetings were brought about by the means of the use of whisky—and from the fact that Booth knew Johnson secretly to be in sympathy with the Confederate cause, while he hated the Abolitionists & their party. Booth then had interviews with Johnson during which each exchanged opinion freely, and Johnson wrote a letter to Jeff Davis in which he offered—for a high consideration, viz a high position in the Confederacy—to turn Tennessee over to the Southern Confederacy. This letter Booth took to Jefferson Davis and then received it again into his possession, keeping it until about a year previous to his death, when he lost sight of it. – That Jefferson Davis would not accept Johnson’s proposal, but told him to fight for them in the union. – That Johnson had also written letters to other prominent southern men, such as [John] Breckinridge, [Nathan Bedford] Forrest and Jacob Thompson, and that that was the reason why he did not prosecute and try the leaders of the Rebellion—because they knew of his complicity in the crime. – That they thought such letter of Johnson to Davis was in one of two directions. That it was in existence twelve months ago and that they should trace in the direction of Col [Lafayette] Baker the ex-detective of the war department, and a disreputable woman with whom Booth had been associated. – That they would give us further information soon. They again repeated that the sister of John Surratt had had repeated interviews with him and had borne messages to him from Andrew Johnson, telling him to refrain from implicating either Johnson or himself on the assassination plot, and he should escape punishment & receive a large reward. – That she had succeeded in inducing him to accept the arrangement and defy Congress and the Courts. – That Johnson was so deeply implicated in crime and so inextricably in complicity with the southern Rebellion that he would not, and dared not,

act against them in any manner. – And that he accordingly would not execute any Bill of Reconstruction that was radical in its nature which Congress might enact into law. – That he would veto the present Reconstruction Bill.

The Influence then closed with a thrilling and eloquent description of the Judgment that would be awarded Andrew Johnson upon his entrance into spirit life.

In the late spring of 1867, Nathan Daniels landed a position with the reconstruction government in Louisiana. Nathan, Cora, and their baby girl moved to New Orleans in May amid grand predictions by the spirits about Colonel Daniels's glorious future in politics. He died in New Orleans of yellow fever four months later, on October 2, 1867. Their baby girl died, also of yellow fever, a few weeks afterwards, and Cora returned to Washington. In May, local spiritualists had formally organized themselves, as the First Society of Progressive Spiritualists and began meeting weekly in an assembly room on F Street, under the leadership of John Mayhew, a clerk in the Interior Department. Cora lectured there and continued to search for ways to usher the spirits into the corridors of the Government.

Andrew Johnson's pastor in Nashville had been Jesse Babcock Ferguson, a Church of Christ minister who had broken with his denomination and had become a spiritualist. In 1865, as Johnson began battling Congress over reconstruction policy, Ferguson traveled to Washington to deliver a batch of dispatches from the spirits to Johnson.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Letter of John Orvis to Thaddeus Spencer Sheldon, June 15, 1865; and letter of John M. Spear to Thaddeus Sheldon, June 15, 1865, Sheldon Papers, Darlington Memorial Library, University of Pittsburgh.

Several months after the impeachment, according to *The Baltimore Gazette*, Cora paid the President a visit, gaining entrance to the White House in company with Tom Florence, a spiritualist and the editor of the pro-Johnson Washington newspaper, *The Constitutional Union*. They entered the President's office:

But no sooner was the door again closed than the President was startled by the well-remembered horse-laugh of the "Late lamented Lincoln," with the words from the lips of the entranced mediums, "Let him laugh who wins." What could it mean? There was no mistaking the laugh, the manner, the expression. Col. Florence swears it was Lincoln's own laugh, and the President recognized it, and was dumb with astonishment. "Let him laugh who wins," said the spirit of the "Martyred President;" and his coarse good-natured laugh again rang through the Presidential Mansion. What did it mean? Ah! there's the rub! Mrs. Daniels explained not, but said Mr. Lincoln wanted to have a long talk with President Johnson on important matters of State, but would seek another opportunity when the President was less occupied with official duties. Before leaving, Mrs. Daniels was presented with a magnificent bouquet, in partial remuneration, perhaps, for the thrilling souvenir she had left of "the great martyr."⁵⁹

But if Johnson believed that Cora had brought Lincoln back across the dead-line to the land of the living, he would likely have regarded it as a haunting, as a vaguely worded threat akin to "He who laughs last, laughs best." Given Cora's previous messages from Lincoln about Johnson, this is surely the most likely way she construed

⁵⁹ As reported in *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1868.

this spectral visitation. It was a warning to him that he too would have to cross the deadline. And Johnson's gift to Cora of a bouquet would have appeared to be both a spontaneous gesture of gratitude to her for her "performance" as well a sacrificial offering to placate Lincoln's revenant spirit.