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First prepared in October 2006 by the Survival Research Institute of Canada (Debra Barr and Walter Meyer zu Erpen). Capitalization of any name or subject in the text below indicates that you will find an entry on that topic in the forthcoming third edition of Rosemary Ellen Guiley's *Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits* (October 2007).

King, John Sumpter (1843-1921)

Medical doctor, distinguished writer, psychical researcher, founder of the Canadian Society for Psychical Research, and an active participant in a large number of fraternal organizations, including the Masons and Odd Fellows.

John Sumpter King was born at Georgetown, Canada West (now Ontario), Canada, on 26 April 1843, the son of Stephen King and Margaret Hess. His mother was of United Empire Loyalist descent. As a young man, King worked for several years (1869-1870) on the editorial staff of Toronto's *Globe* newspaper under the Honorable George Brown, one of the fathers of Canadian Confederation. During this time, he was the Canadian correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, and a number of Canadian newspapers.

King completed his education at Victoria College, qualifying as a doctor in 1876. Victoria University granted him an honorary doctor of medicine (MD) degree in 1889.

A prominent Toronto physician, Dr. King was surgeon at the Andrew Mercer Reformatory for Females and the Industrial Refuge for Girls for 35 years. King was also medical director for the Home Life Association from its inception, until it was merged with Sun Life. He devoted much time to research work and was a frequent contributor to magazines and weekly papers. His historical accounts of the Knights of Pythias and the Sons of England Benevolent Society were published in 1890 and 1891.

Shortly after his first exposure to SPIRITUALISM, King's mother purportedly returned to him during a SÉANCE held in London, Ontario, in 1894, to prove her SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH. Margaret King (1807-1886) showed herself through the MEDIUMSHIP of American MATERIALIZATION medium Mrs. Effie Moss.

King's wife May did not approve of her husband's new-found interest in Spiritualism, and it was not until 1905, after May's acceptance of mediumship, that he focussed his attention on PSYCHICAL RESEARCH. For the eight years of its existence (1908-16), he was President of the Toronto-based Canadian Society for Psychical Research, which may have been incorporated in response to the re-establishment in 1906 of the AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH as an organization independent from the British SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.

In *Dawn of the Awakened Mind* (1920), King details his personal experience of

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post-mortem communication with departed family members,¹ including his second wife May King (ca. 1864-1911) who had passed to spirit on 29 September 1911. He also received communications from a number of spirit guides and well-known psychical researchers. King had complete faith in his main spirit CONTROL, the Neoplatonic philosopher Hypatia (370-415 AD).

Though the spirit communications described date from 1894 to 1917, most of the research was conducted in 1911-12. Among the sensitives consulted were the TRUMPET medium Mrs. Etta Wriedt of Detroit, the AUTOMATIC WRITING medium Miss Maud Venice Gates of New York State, the materialization medium Mr. J.B. Jonson of Ohio, and the Bangs sisters of Chicago whose rare form of mediumship produced precipitation paintings.

By the end of 1912, King's book was completed. During publication delays, he undertook further research, through the SLATE-WRITING MEDIUM Pierre L.O.A. Keeler at Lily Dale Assembly SPIRITUALIST CAMP. Those August 1917 experiments were documented in an addendum with photographic reproductions of the slates upon which the spirits had recorded messages through independent writing. King's former employer George Brown and prominent Spiritualists and psychical researchers Reverend WILLIAM STANTON MOSES, WILLIAM T. STEAD and FREDERIC WILLIAM HENRY MYERS were among those on King's private list of invited spirit communicators. Some researchers suspected that Keeler was a clever trickster, and in 1921 WALTER FRANKLIN PRINCE claimed to have exposed his slate-writing as fraudulent.²

Though King's approach to psychical research lacked the scientific rigor of today's parapsychology, he did attempt to conduct experiments to validate his beliefs. For example, writing to William T. Stead, he initiated a transatlantic experiment through Mrs. Wriedt who was visiting London, England. King also investigated hypnotism.

¹His first wife Martha E. King had died about 1874 (37 years before the 1911 séance). His mother Margaret P. King had died in 1886, his father Stephen King in 1894, and his second wife May E. King in 1911. A daughter of John and May named May Donna had died at birth, and his son George Herbert Sangster (Herbie) King died in 1916 when in his 50th year. Most of these dates are from *Dawn of the Awakened Mind*, p. 426.

²Interestingly, the British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace had reported some remarkable experiences of psychic phenomena with Keeler in Washington during his 1886-87 American lecture tour.

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During the years that she was ill, May King arranged a post-mortem code with her husband. In a séance with Mrs. Wriedt in Detroit, the spirit of May King used the words that she and her husband had agreed upon. Through the mediumship of Mrs. Wriedt and J.B. Jonson, King was convinced that he had made contact with his wife.

King died at Toronto on 14 February 1921. That he was by the end of his life a Spiritualist, as well as a psychical researcher, is almost certain. His funeral service was conducted by Mrs. E.M. Whitney, pastor of the First Church of Spiritualists, Hamilton. As a member of the Masonic Lodge, his pallbearers were fellow Masons.

Further Reading:

King, John S. *Dawn of the Awakened Mind*. New York: The James A. McCann Company, 1920.

McMullin, Stan. *Anatomy of a Séance: A History of Spirit Communication in Central Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004, pp. 85-106.

Prince, Walter F. "A Survey of American Slate Writing Mediumship." *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research* 15 (1921).