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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).

### **Partridge, William Charles (Bill) (1893-1984)**

Horticulturist, Spiritualist medium and minister, and a leading figure in Canadian Spiritualism. William Charles Partridge was born on 11 May 1893, the son of William Thomas Partridge and Mary Ann Potter, in Bradninch, Devonshire, where he spent his youth. Raised in the Church of England (Anglican), Partridge was, in his own words, "inclined to be religious,"<sup>1</sup> often attending Sunday school and other services, followed by choir practice. He sang in the choir until the age of 15 when his schooling ended and he moved to Exeter to pursue a three-year horticulture course. Apprenticed to a florist, he learned to love and understand flowers and plant life. As he grew older, Partridge would visit a large number of Christian churches in his search for truth.

In 1913, Partridge emigrated to Canada where he worked as a gardener for two Lords, Clarendon and Hyde, on their estate near Pickering, Ontario. In March 1916, he joined the Canadian Army, ironically thinking that "a trip back to the old country"<sup>2</sup> would be nice. He was shipped overseas to England, then spent 20 months in and out of the trenches in France and Belgium where he took part in numerous bloody battles as part of the 116th Battalion, Canadian infantry. On his first leave from fighting in France, Partridge was married to the Irish-born Annie Elizabeth Galway (1889-1977) whom he had met while in Canada.

Wounded at Fresnoy and suffering from dysentery, he spent almost five months recovering in England. Back in the trenches, he began to question the contradictory war propaganda of the British and the Germans who each claimed to have God on their side. Partridge would later write that "When I was on night guard in the trenches I would see visions of our boys in no man's land."<sup>3</sup> He felt that the SPIRIT world was looking after him. When the war ended, he took his demobilization in England and returned to the family estate, "The Willows," at Bradninch, Devonshire, where he ran the orchards and flower garden used to supply the local gentry with fresh flowers, fruit and vegetables. It was there that the Partridges' four children were born.

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<sup>1</sup>William C. Partridge, "The Partridge Family Haunted House" (nd).

<sup>2</sup>William C. Partridge, "The Partridge Family Haunted House" (nd).

<sup>3</sup>William C. Partridge, "The Partridge Family Haunted House" (nd).

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“The Willows” was a haunted house. At the age of about 12, Partridge had first heard spirit footsteps coming up the stairs with a heavy tread on one foot, in the brick house newly built by his father. The phenomena were not continuous, rather heard only occasionally. In 1919, he experienced knocks or spirit rappings “at the front door, a minute later at the back door, then under a chair on which my wife was sitting.”<sup>4</sup> These “heavy footsteps and knocks unceasing went on for considerable periods of time”<sup>5</sup> and were his first prolonged exposure to physical phenomena.

One day, a Spiritualist medium visiting from Manchester came to “The Willows” to buy some apples. Sensing that something was amiss in the home, he told Partridge to ask his father about his first wife. From that point, the family was convinced that the first wife Mary Louisa (Granger) Partridge (1841-1891) was the troubled spirit responsible for the HAUNTING. She was said to have been a God-fearing woman, who suffered before passing from Milk Leg or White Leg, an ailment of women after parturition, that caused her to walk with a heavy leg. She made her presence known by walking the stairs and halls of the house at night with her pronounced limp! On a second visit, the medium said that there was friction within the household, advising that Bill Partridge and family should get another home and predicting that in six months’ time they would be back in Canada. The prediction worked out accurately.

With the knowledge that spirit people were real and that a mother in spirit was taking an interest in his family’s future, Partridge attended a Spiritualist propaganda meeting held in Exeter. There he met a local medium and sat in her development class until he and his family departed for Canada in 1925. His continual search for truth had brought him to the Spiritualist study group; there were nurtured the seeds of a faith in SPIRITUALISM that became his avocation and a lifetime of study, personal development and teaching. In his own words: “I was a critical Christian, and am still a critical Spiritualist.”<sup>6</sup>

Partridge’s wife had also been drawn to Spiritualist study groups: “Annie Galway, my future wife, was uncanny, she had attended Spiritualist meetings in Belfast, Ireland, . . . with her Aunt Lizzie.”<sup>7</sup> There she had met James Porter Skelton

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<sup>4</sup>William C. Partridge, "History of Canadian Spiritualism" (1975).

<sup>5</sup>William C. Partridge, "History of Canadian Spiritualism" (1975).

<sup>6</sup>William C. Partridge, "History of Canadian Spiritualism" (1975).

<sup>7</sup>William C. Partridge, "Partridge Family Haunted House" (nd).

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(died ca. 1954-55) who would later also emigrate and become the first Secretary of the SPIRITUALISTS' NATIONAL UNION OF CANADA (SNU - see SPIRITUALIST CHURCH OF CANADA). "My wife to be unconsciously had psychic ability like myself. Very often she would read my mind and predict my future and she hadn't even studied MEDIUMSHIP."<sup>8</sup>

Resettling at Pickering, Ontario, Partridge ran the farm of Fred Richardson for whom he had worked before enlisting for war service. It was through the Richardsons that he had met his wife-to-be. About 1928, the Partridges moved to North Toronto where Bill managed the estate of one of Toronto's largest stock brokers. For many years, they lived on Keewatin Avenue. Following the stock market crash, Partridge was unemployed and the family experienced some difficult times.

Throughout this period, the Partridges pursued their interest in Spiritualism. On the advice of a neighbour, they attended Britten Memorial Church of Canada, but decided to send their children to Eglinton United Church. The Pastor of Britten Memorial Church was the Reverend Martha Stier McGuire (died ca. 1938), one of the most outstanding mediums in Canada. Through her mediumship, Partridge received a message about gold coins that his father had hidden, information which he was convinced could only have come from the surviving spirit of his father. On another occasion, through a developing medium, Mrs. MacNamee, Partridge was told that he had an Uncle Sam in spirit life, but that strangely the only information she could get was "Billy, Sam is here." Those few words were the code that Partridge and his uncle had agreed upon for test purposes in Exeter after World War I. To Partridge, it was "convincing proof that there is no death."<sup>9</sup>

In 1928, Partridge visited the cottage of the John and Margaret Fox family, which was significant for him as he had been converted to belief in Spiritualism through phenomena similar to the rappings of the FOX SISTERS (Leah, Margaret, and Kate). At the time, there were daily demonstrations of knocks, through the mediumship of Florence Cotterell.<sup>10</sup> "Anyone could get answers to questions, simply by sending out mental thoughts."<sup>11</sup> For seven years, the cottage was a weekend pilgrimage destination.

Partridge received great encouragement from Reverend M.S. McGuire and for three years sat to develop his own mediumship with her. One evening in circle

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<sup>8</sup>William C. Partridge, "Partridge Family Haunted House" (nd).

<sup>9</sup>William C. Partridge, "Partridge Family Haunted House" (nd).

<sup>10</sup>It is not possible to substantiate the correct spelling through an Internet search. W.C. Partridge spelled it "Cotteral." On the Internet the surname only appears as Cotterell, though not specifically in reference to Florence.

<sup>11</sup>William C. Partridge, "History of Canadian Spiritualism" (1975).

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an Indian spirit CONTROL threw him to the floor, in a trance. When he came to, he was told he had received healing power. He was advised to attend the Tuesday circle and start to heal the sick, which he did. There followed experience of the various phases of mediumship, through which he developed the gifts of CLAIRVOYANCE and clairaudience, psychometry, lecturing, etc. in quick succession.

In the early years of his mediumship, Partridge acquired the ability to produce “knocks.” Working with Charles A. Nixon, one of the founders of the NATIONAL SPIRITUALIST ASSOCIATION (NSA) OF CANADA, he tried his hand at TABLE-TILTING. The two men would put their fingers on a table and it would carry them the length of the Spiritualist church on Bathurst Street. During those years, Partridge witnessed and was impressed by the mediumship of the American ARTHUR AUGUST FORD who was a visitor to Britten Memorial Church.

Partridge became a gifted medium, able to receive and communicate spirit messages that provided information that only the deceased person and recipient knew about. On the 100th anniversary of the birth of modern Spiritualism in March 1948, he was honoured to participate in the demonstrations of mediumship in the Corinthian Hall at Rochester, New York, where the Fox sisters had held their first public meeting. Eventually, however, he became more interested in the philosophy of the Spiritualist religion than in proving SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH, which he accepted as fact.

Following a search for a supply of Christmas trees to earn money for his family, Partridge located property on the banks of the Muskoka River near Bracebridge, Ontario, that was subsequently purchased for use as a SPIRITUALIST CAMP. The Springdale Park Spiritual Association of Ontario was founded in 1938 in order to establish a summer camp with church and accommodation similar to that found at Lily Dale, New York, which the Partridges had visited several times.

To promote the purchase of Springdale Park lots by Spiritualists living in the city, Springdale Church, Toronto, was founded in 1939. At a service conducted by the association’s lawyer A.C. Macnaughton on 22 March 1942, Mr. Partridge was ordained as pastor of Springdale Park Spiritual Association (SPSA). For many years, Reverend W.C. Partridge was pastor of Springdale Church which operated on the SPSA charter until it acquired its own provincial letters patent in 1946.

With the development of his spiritual gifts, Partridge’s search for understanding and desire for continued education brought him to Reverend J.P. Skelton’s class, followed by the SNU course, from which he graduated (DSNU). That diploma also qualified him to demonstrate the gifts of the spirit in British SNU churches, which he did during his many trips to England to visit his daughter, especially after his retirement about 1961. In Britain, he would travel as a Spiritualist

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missionary to lecture in churches, including the Isle of Man church in Douglas where his daughter lived between 1974 and 1981. On two trips, he visited Harry Edwards at his Healing Sanctuary at Burrows Lea, Shere, Guildford, Surrey.

Following the Great Depression, Partridge worked at Canadian General Electric until retirement. Over the years, he was associated with, and President of, both national bodies, the NSA of Canada (apparently during the 1940s) and SNU of Canada (Past-President in 1957). He later expressed frustration that neither had clear objectives or direction.

In late 1957, SNU Past-President Partridge and NSA President Reverend BEATRICE GAULTON BISHOP were two of the main advocates of an "Assembly of Canadian Spiritualist Churches," that would allow the churches of both organizations to work together more closely. Partridge urged unification of the movement in Canada, and as a consequence "was not looked upon with favour"<sup>12</sup> in some quarters.

On 18 January 1964, Springdale Church became a member of the United Spiritualist Church of Ontario, which organization re-ordained W.C. Partridge on the same date.

After Springdale Church joined the SNU of Canada in 1967, the histories of the two organizations were closely linked for more than twenty years, with Reverend W.C. Partridge and Reverend Ruth Ann Dyke (ca. 1917-1993) playing an influential role in both organizations. At Partridge's urging, Springdale Church became increasingly active in the SNU with a view to bringing new and more progressive benefits to all member churches. During the years that Reverend R.A. Dyke was President (ca. 1976-1981), the renamed SPIRITUALIST CHURCH OF CANADA (SCC) was finally able to secure for its ministers equal rights and all forms of recognition enjoyed by other churches. With his direction and support, Ruth Dyke, one of his students, was able to realize Partridge's three main objectives: a course of education and accreditation for Spiritualist workers in all aspects of the religion was implemented; the long-desired change of name was effected; and in July 1981 marriage rights for SCC ministers within Ontario were received.

In 1976, due to Annie Partridge's failing health, the Partridges moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, to live with family who had relocated there. Bill remained active in Springdale Church until their departure. Though living on the West Coast, he continued to contribute to the Spiritualist movement through correspondence with Ontario Spiritualist ministers Ruth Ann Dyke (ca. 1917-1993), June Pauline Struthers (ca. 1926-2005), and Lillian Catherine Bain (1916-

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<sup>12</sup>"Saluting Them!," *International Spiritualist Review* 6, no. 5 (January 1965), pp. 8-10.



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2003) who had been his students.

Annie Partridge passed to spirit on 12 May 1977; Bill joined her in spirit on 4 September 1984, aged 91. Reverend W.C. Partridge with the support of his loving wife Annie was a leader among the Canadian Spiritualists of his generation. The Partridges were immigrants to Canada who brought with them their personal experiences of psychic phenomena and Spiritualism and the desire to continue study of life after death and mediumship. Partridge's faith and hard work created a summer camp enjoyed by Ontario Spiritualists for over four decades; his vision for the Canadian Spiritualist movement resulted in the Spiritualist Church of Canada obtaining for its ministers the same privileges and recognition as enjoyed by the clergy of other religious denominations.

### **Further Reading:**

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