

Please respect our copyright! We encourage you to view and print this document FOR PERSONAL USE, also to link to it directly from your website. Copying for any reason other than personal use requires the express written consent of the copyright holder:

Survival Research Institute of Canada, PO Box 8697, Victoria, BC V8W 3S3 Canada
Email: info@survivalresearch.ca Website: www.survivalresearch.ca

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).

Watson, Albert Durrant (1859-1926)

A doctor, astronomer, editor, poet and psychical researcher, Watson was born on 8 January 1859 in Dixie, Canada West (now Ontario), and was the son of William Youle Watson and Mary Ann Aldred. On 23 September 1885 he married Sarah Anne Grimshaw Clare (1861-1937), the daughter of Samuel Clare, in Toronto. They had seven children (two daughters and five sons). Watson died in Toronto on 3 May 1926.

For many years Watson was an active member of the Methodist Church and led a class for young people. In addition to being a member of Euclid Avenue Church, he participated in the Toronto Annual Conference, General Conference, General Board of Missions and the executive of the Methodist Social Union. According to the *Commemorative Biographical Record of the County of York* he was "a recognized teacher and leader in ethical ideals."

After studying at the Toronto Normal School, he taught school at Malton and Oakville before pursuing medical studies. Watson graduated as doctor of medicine (MD) in 1883 from Victoria College, Cobourg. In 1890, he received another medical degree from the University of Toronto to acknowledge his graduation as a Licentiate from the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in 1883. Watson practiced medicine for the following four decades.

A multi-talented man, Dr. Watson was an amateur astronomer and published several papers in this field. He became a member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada in 1892 and held several executive positions between 1910 and 1917. He had musical talent as well: several of his poems were published in Methodist and Presbyterian hymnals, and he composed alternate wording for the Canadian anthem which received a positive response. In addition, he was a prolific poet and author of prose. Compilations of his poems included *The Wing of the Wild Bird, and Other Poems* (1908), *Love and the Universe, the Immortals and Other Poems* (1913), *Heart of the Hills* (1917), *the Dream of God: A Poem* (1922), *Woman: A Poem* (1923), and *The Poetical Works of Albert Durrant Watson* (1924). Among his prose works were *The Sovereignty of Ideals* (1904), *The Sovereignty of Character: Lessons from the Life of Jesus* (1906), *Three Comrades of Jesus* (1919), the first book in the *Makers of Canadian Literature series*, about a poet, Robert Norwood (1923), and (with co-author Lorne Pierce) an anthology entitled *Our Canadian Literature: Representative Prose and Verse* (1922).

Please respect our copyright! We encourage you to view and print this document FOR PERSONAL USE, also to link to it directly from your website. Copying for any reason other than personal use requires the express written consent of the copyright holder:

Survival Research Institute of Canada, PO Box 8697, Victoria, BC V8W 3S3 Canada
Email: info@survivalresearch.ca Website: www.survivalresearch.ca

Although he received acclaim throughout Canada for his romantic poetry and other writing, Watson's accounts of his PSYCHICAL RESEARCH garnered even more attention. Already influenced in his creative writing by the cosmic consciousness expressed in the works of Walt Whitman and Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, he was enthusiastic in his investigation of the psychic abilities discovered in his former Sunday school student Louis Benjamin (born ca. 1887). In 1917 Benjamin had purchased a Ouija board for the amusement of his son and demonstrated for Dr. Watson the phenomena of the moving PLANCHETTE that resulted when he sat with his hands on it. He soon moved on to the delivery of SPIRIT messages received through trance speech. Between 1918 and 1920, Benjamin conducted a number of SÉANCES in Albert and Sarah's home. These sessions were carefully documented. As the president of the Association for Psychical Research of Canada, Watson detailed the messages received in *The Twentieth Plane: A Psychic Revelation* (1918) and *Birth Through Death: The Ethics of the Twentieth Plane; A Revelation Received Through the Psychic Consciousness of Louis Benjamin* (1920).

These reports on the communications allegedly received from deceased persons, particularly from individuals of renown, received mixed reviews. A public debate on *The Twentieth Plane* raged in various Toronto newspapers. Although she had dabbled in psychical activities herself, LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY, the author of *Anne of Green Gables*, characterized the efforts of the Watson group as "absolute poppycock."¹ Although many people stood by him, others were scathing in their criticism. Rather than agree to a church request to refrain from discussing psychical research with the young students in his Sunday school class, Watson resigned. During this period he also placed some distance between himself and Benjamin. Later he questioned the extent to which the medium's communications had been influenced by the minds and beliefs of those present at the sittings.

Dr. Watson joined the Baha'i faith, apparently in 1920. He had met Abdu'l-Baha during his 1912 visit to North America as the spiritual leader of the Baha'i community and the son of its founder.

In 1923 he concluded his research into spiritual and psychic matters with the publication of *Mediums and Mystics* (1923), co-written with Margaret Lawrence (1896-1973), who had the previous year adopted the Baha'i faith herself.

¹Lucy Maud Montgomery, journal entry cited in Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, eds., *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery, Volume II: 1910-1921* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 312.

Please respect our copyright! We encourage you to view and print this document FOR PERSONAL USE, also to link to it directly from your website. Copying for any reason other than personal use requires the express written consent of the copyright holder:

Survival Research Institute of Canada, PO Box 8697, Victoria, BC V8W 3S3 Canada
Email: info@survivalresearch.ca Website: www.survivalresearch.ca

Watson concluded that there are genuine, though little-understood psychic phenomena worthy of conscientious study, but warned that related research should be undertaken only by qualified investigators. His friend and fellow anthropologist Lorne Pierce (1890-1961) summed up his worldview in the following way: "He believed that we live in a spiritual world . . . the centre and core of all life and all matter is spirit."²

Further Reading:

Barr, Debra, and Walter Meyer zu Erpen. "Albert Durrant Watson," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, volume XV. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2005, pp. 1058-1059.

McMullin, Stan. *Anatomy of a Séance: A History of Spirit Communication in Central Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004, pp. 107-128.

²Lorne Pierce, "Albert Durrant Watson," *The New Outlook*, 19 May 1926.