

To a medium, the world was full of spirits. From *People From the Other World*, 1874, by H. S. Olcott.

On a hot summer evening in 1874, a group of people gathered upstairs in a farmhouse by the light of a single kerosene lamp. They were hoping to do something that science said was impossible—communicate with the dead.

They watched a stage at one end of the room. On it, behind a curtain, was a “spirit box” or wooden cabinet. Inside, a Vermont farmer named William Eddy sat in a deep **trance**. William was a medium. People said he could make ghosts appear.

Softly at first, then louder, weird music filled the room, though no one was playing an instrument. Then the audience gasped. A strange figure floated out of

the spirit box and across the stage. Its face glowed with an **eerie** light and it held a small bundle in its arms. A woman in the audience had lost her son in childbirth. She cried out, “Is that my baby? Is that my Charlie?” When the ghostly form lifted the bundle toward her and nodded, the woman fainted.

Beginning in 1874, people from around the world came to the Eddy family homestead in the town of Chittenden. They saw scenes like this one, and some even more fantastic.

The ghostly doings of William, his brother Horatio, and the rest of the Eddy family made them some of the most famous mediums of their day. And for a

time some people called Chittenden the “spirit capital of the world.”

Perhaps the Eddys got their odd gift from their mother, Julia. She was said to have second sight, the ability to see into the future.

The Eddy children certainly did not get their **supernatural** abilities from their father. Zephaniah Eddy was a farmer and a **practical** man. He had no time for fooling with spirits. There was too much work to do.

Even as children, William and Horatio heard voices and were visited by spirits. In the attic where the boys slept was the family spinning wheel. The ghost of an old woman appeared at night and spun yarn on it. The brothers were terrified at first, but got so used to her that they looked forward to the visits.

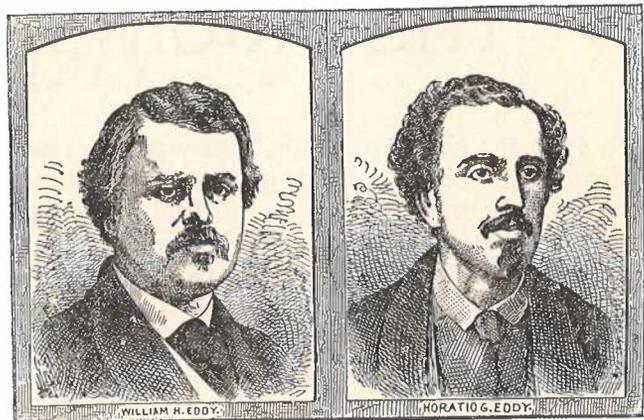


THE SPINNING GHOST.

The Spinning Ghost. From *People From the Other World*, 1874, by H. S. Olcott.

At school, when the Eddys were present there were strange pounding noises. Writing slates and stools flew through the air. Teachers scolded the Eddy children and the other students made fun of them. After a while they were told to leave school altogether.

Spiritualism, as speaking with spirits was called, became very popular. Spiritualist clubs were formed and newspapers published. People were interested in



The Eddy Brothers. From *People From the Other World*, 1874, by H. S. Olcott.

spiritualism for different reasons. Some were unhappy with their churches. Many wanted proof of a life after death or to talk with loved ones who had died. Others believed that mediums, with the help of the spirits, could heal the sick or tell the future. A gathering to talk to the spirits was called a seance. Before long Zephaniah made William and Horatio perform seances for money. For fifteen years, these farm boys toured the United States and Europe. Some people thought the Eddys were fooling them. Others thought they had super powers and were afraid of them.

But many people liked mediums and believed them. By the 1870s the Eddy brothers were back in Chittenden. Zephaniah had died and left them the family farm. They built a stage on the second floor of the house and held seances there six nights a week.

VOCABULARY

trance - a deep sleep

eerie - scary

supernatural - ghostly

practical - down-to-earth