



The Voice Box

Seeking to Establishing Knowledge and Understanding

[/www.the-voice-box.com](http://www.the-voice-box.com)

/tvbwebmaster@btinternet.com

The Physical Mediumship of the Bangs Sisters and an examination of their precipitated Spirit Portraits.

By N. Riley Heagerty

It is August, the year is 1911. A large audience has filled to capacity the auditorium at the world famous Chesterfield Spiritualist Camp in the State of Indiana, America. They have come to witness a demonstration of psychic power, one of the most unique and marvelous in the entire world. A select committee has arranged beforehand that upon entering the building, all have been given a numbered ticket, the stub of which is torn off and put into a large vat to be thoroughly mixed up; later on, one stub will be randomly drawn from the collection. Now, after a close examination by the committee to see that there are no markings or paint of any kind, or signs of chemical treatment, a large plain canvas is placed on an easel in the centre of the stage. The spirit mediums who will demonstrate the phenomena now enter the auditorium, they are sisters and appear to be about 35 to 40 years of age. Both take their seats on the rostrum, one situated on each side of the easel and clearly four to five feet from it; they will never touch the canvas throughout the entire demonstration.

A member of the committee now reaches in and selects from the vat one ticket stub and reads the number aloud to the audience; it belongs to a Mrs. Alice Alford. Mrs. Alford and her husband are now invited to come up and take a seat on the stage; they will be sitting for a portrait but in this particular instance the painting will not be of the Alford's; the artist and the subject of this session are from another dimension; the world of Spirits. When all is ready, the mediums slowly bow their heads and close their eyes as if in prayer and deep concentration; the silence in the auditorium for five straight minutes is so absolute that the air itself seems to stand still. Suddenly, many in the audience lead forward in their chairs, sitting rigidly, their eyes tense and fixed on the canvas, from which a thin, vapour-like cloud, or shadow it seems, sweeps

across it, pulsates, and then flickers out. After a few more tense moments, shades of definite colour begin to appear, as if successive layers of fine dust have been thrown, or precipitated on to the canvas to form a cloudy background and this also seems to pulsate and flicker and then quickly disappear. On and on it goes for several minutes; the other-worldly artist it seems, is making preliminary sketches, and trying out different colour schemes. Suddenly, all at once, the background slowly and steadily now precipitates into view; clearer and clearer it comes, only this time with it there is an astounding addition; three pairs of eyes have suddenly appeared on different parts of the canvas; two pairs of which are open and the last, situated directly in the centre of the canvas, are closed. The two open pairs immediately disappear and the closed eyes remain only to also instantaneously disappear; the audience gasps in astonishment.

With each successive phase of the unfolding phenomena, the background becomes clearer and clearer and now, a faint outline of a face and bust slowly precipitates itself into view, disappearing and reappearing several times before remaining in focus on the canvas. It is the unmistakable likeness of a young girl, perhaps 14 to 15 years old: many in the audience are now standing, some pointing in wonderment. Gradually, the appearance becomes more clearer and more distinguishable; she is transcendently beautiful and her hair, clearly auburn brown, falls luxuriously to her bare shoulders, revealed by the white dress she is wearing having been pulled down. Around her neck she is wearing a black onyx teardrop necklace, and pink roses surround the top of her dress as embroidery. Her eyes are closed.

With the portrait now having been completely precipitated on to the canvas, to the utter and absolute astonishment of all, the eyes suddenly open, and the audience thunders in applause. To the front of the stage now steps the Alford's, clearly shaken by the experience, and Mr. Alford announces to the gathering that the portrait is an exact likeness of their deceased daughter, Audrey. The Alford's, as it turns out, are a prominent family of Marion, Indiana, are not Spiritualists in belief, and this was their first visit to Camp Chesterfield. Mrs. Alford wore around her neck, hid from sight, a locket containing a photograph of her daughter almost duplicate in likeness of the spirit picture obtained, but different in poise and position. The mediums had not seen the locket picture or any photo of the child, nor had they ever made the acquaintance of the Alford's. The finished portrait was precipitated on to the canvas in twenty-two minutes. The spirit mediums of this extraordinary event, *The Bang Sisters*.

Within the vast and marvelous records of American physical mediumship, one of the most outstanding chapters belongs indeed, to the turn of the century mediums, the Misses Elizabeth S and May

E Bangs, of Chicago, Illinois. Their gifts included above board, independent writing in broad daylight (mostly slates), and independent drawing and painting; all forms of fully developed clairvoyance, materialisations, and direct voices, but their most wondrous and spectacular phenomena was that of precipitated spirit portraits in full colour. In researching these mediums, three things initially and not surprisingly, stand out. First, like the majority of the most powerful and famous physical mediums from this country, many of whom were the highest ranking in Spiritualism, they too lived and developed their many gifts within the Great Lakes region of the North-eastern United States (see *The Spirit Zone Newsletter*, Aug 1994), a mystery zone of electrical energy in this section of the country said by the spirits themselves to be perfect for the manifestation of physical phenomena due to the great bodies of water and the dry, crisp atmosphere; the Bangs sisters' hometown of Chicago, Illinois is situated right on Lake Michigan, secondly that they were in fact, siblings, giving us yet another outstanding example of a genetically connected powerhouse of mediumistic force. *Other examples of this type of 'industrial strength' mediumship which comes to mind is of course the Fox sisters, the brothers Davenport, the Misses Moore, the Eddy brothers and family, the Berry sisters, the Jonathan Koons family, the Misses Dunsmore and the list goes on, and thirdly, in the case of May and Lizzie Bangs, there is not one single definitive and complete book as far as I know, in existence about these sister mediums and I find this to be absolutely unbelievable considering the nature of their phenomena and the vast amount of years put in for the cause of Spiritualism and physical mediumship by these wonder workers.

Research material that I found had to be collected piece by piece and page by page over a long period of time. This in itself is very good research practice as it involves extreme patience like everything connected with physical mediumship does. I have had to work very, very hard for every bit of research material I have ever uncovered, some has involved years; make no mistake though, it is always a labour of love and I attribute all I know of this wonderful subject to perseverance and persistence; a continuing unfolding process, the education which automatically comes when one is patient while following the trails of truth. With most of our most famous physical mediums there is nothing recorded of their early, childhood lives; the very beginnings of their visions, sights and sounds, an area I find to be one of the most blessed and wonderful, in many cases, has simply been lost to the ages. With the Bangs Sisters I was fortunate to find one source containing information on their early days.

'Transcendence In Oil (The Bangs Sisters)', *The National Spiritualist*, July 1, 1940. Who were these miracle-working women? Born of a typical American family named Bangs, they were

reared in average American surroundings. These sisters, Lizzie and May, were scarcely past toddling age when they began astonishing the neighbourhood with phenomena of a very unusual sort. Pieces of coal falling seemingly from the ceiling to the floor of their home - coal that bore no similarity whatsoever to any ever seen in the surrounding country - was one of the first visible instances of the girls' strange power. By their fourth or fifth year's spirit rapping's, voices from the world beyond, and the moving of heavy pieces of furniture by invisible forces were within their grasp. Strange, indeed, for girls scarcely past babyhood, and certainly beyond comprehension of childish minds. They must have suffered more than their share of qualms at their difference from girls of the same age.

Physical manifestations, such as materialisations of hands, automatic writing, independent slate writing, full-form etherialisation, clairvoyance and clairaudience were by now almost daily occurrences. Within the next few years an even more remarkable ability was demonstrated by the sisters. Something no medium had ever achieved before - spirit communication by typewriter. Later, when word of the spirit paintings got out, Lizzie and May Bangs were now famous indeed. This new power baffled the keenest intellects. The portraits reproduced were work of high order as well as excellent likenesses. The conditions under which the paintings were made precluded all possibility of deception. When one considers that an artist would require at least five hours to produce even a poor portrait, the fact that the Bangs portraits only required from twenty minutes to three hours becomes more astounding. (Less and less time was required as the mediumship developed - NRH)

The story of the paintings and the history of the Bangs girls were headlined in papers and magazines throughout the country. Fakirs and magicians tried to imitate the performance. They came, were unmasked, and passed in steady procession. Sceptics reversed their opinions and wrote favourable notices. Meanwhile the sisters carried on quietly and serenely, unmoved by the storm raging around them. Such headlines as: 'The Facts of Immortality Verified' left them unmoved. They had a job to do and they did it. Caring nothing for the pomp's and vanities of this world, they wasted no precious time on shams. They lived comfortably but simply. Their lives were dedicated to helping others: the needy, the sick in body and soul. With only a strand of hair, or perhaps a message locked tight between slates - mute pleas of supplication from aching hearts - to help them, the sisters were able to bring what had seemed forever gone into the light of day. Countless were the thousands who received comfort and happiness in this way. Many famous men and women who travelled to their doors to criticise, left singing hymns of praise.

The Bangs Sisters, according to themselves, and from what I have

gathered were mediums from the time they were born: the phenomena revealed itself throughout their entire childhood and, thanks to the sympathetic and understanding nature (obviously) of their parents, friends and the Spiritualists, they were not 'burned at the stake' and their glorious gifts were able to be fully developed and thousands were helped because of it.

There would be no exaggeration in saying that Elizabeth and May Bangs were two of the finest mediums in the world for independent writing, done above-board and in full light. Slates were used and served, more or less, as a tiny 'cabinet' for the spirit operators. Rarely was both of the sisters needed for this phenomena unless extra power was required. Sitters would usually bring their own slates and blank sheets of paper; these would be put into an envelope or simply folded and put between the slates and in ways inscrutable to mortal man - as is all spiritual phenomena until he enters the world of Spirit himself - words would be precipitated on to the blank pages of paper, usually in ink, a small bottle of which would usually be placed on the table near the slates.

Without a moment more of hesitation, let us now move to the files my friends and examine some of the outstanding moments of the Bangs and their independent writing. Included also is a brief 'spirit telegraph' experience in the first excerpt. From 'Neither Dead Nor Sleeping' by May Wright Sewall, 1921, comes the following testimony which I have taken up after the authors arrival in Chicago: 'The second day after my arrival I separated myself from my friend, and presenting the letter of introduction furnished by Mr. G arranged for a professional interview with its recipient at four thirty pm the next day. When the hour arrived rain was falling heavily and the wind was violent. Miss Bangs (May) said that the conditions were unfavourable. To my inquiry how the storm could affect the conditions, her reply was that she did not know how, but that as a fact 'the electrical conditions of the atmosphere do modify the vibrations, and they say everything depends on vibrations'. In assertions of fact, Miss Bangs was as positive as other psychics I had questioned, apparently vaguer in explanation, and even more ignorant of the causes of phenomena. She said she had always from her childhood 'been accompanied by phenomena, 'but that of its causes she knew nothing; had never thought about cause; it did not interest her. I gained no new knowledge of principles, but I added two new facts to my accumulation of material for reflection. For the first time I received independent writing on paper, and also carried on a long coherent, satisfactory conversation by means of a private telegraphic code. As this was my first experience of them I shall describe both processes.

Miss Bangs and myself sat on opposite sides of a small table which with our two chairs, a carpet, a few framed photographs on the wall, and a few trifles on the mantel above a small fireplace, constituted

the sole furniture of a small back parlour. I think its dimensions were not more than eight by ten. On top of the table were two slates and a bottle of ink. As the process mentioned last was the first employed I describe it first. I propounded questions to my husband exactly as if he had been present in the flesh, and his replies were made as if by telegraph; the tick, tick coming to the ear exactly as if clicked on the machine at the telegraphic office, was read by Miss Bangs as an arriving telegram would be read by a telegraph operator. The answers and comments, like my questions, pertained to subjects, persons, places and events which in the nature of things, must have been utterly unknown to the operator; but there was not an instant's hesitation nor was there an irrelevant word; and, as events proved, where the conduct of persons in relation to matters not yet matured was involved there was not one mistaken opinion uttered. My husband told me that he had never before used this method of communication: I next wrote a letter containing numerous questions, folded it with several sheets of blank paper and sealed it in an envelope addressed to my husband; Having washed off two slates, I placed the sealed letter between them, tied them fast with my own handkerchief, and held them firmly in my hands. Miss Bangs then dropped some ordinary black ink on a small bit of ordinary blotting paper, and placed it on the upper surface of the top slate, I holding the slates firmly all the time, and I alone touching them. In a few minutes Miss Bangs said that my letter was answered. I thereupon untied the slates and on opening the envelope I found that the paper which I had put in blank was covered with clear script in black ink in a writing resembling but not duplicating that of my husband. There were six pages, which when read proved to be an orderly, coherent, categorical reply to my letter. The answers were numbered to correspond with numbered questions. I was too astonished to have any wish but to withdraw to reread this novel communication'.

From *Glimpses of the Next State*, one of the great classics of Spiritualism and physical mediumship, by Admiral W Osborne Moore, comes the following letter he received from a gentleman of considerable influence and position in Canada. It was dated October 19, 1908, and its contents influenced Admiral Moore to go to America and investigate the Bangs Sisters. I quote the letter in its entirety: 'Our next experience was at Chicago, with the Bangs Sisters, of whom we had heard both good and evil reports. We were, in consequence, specially alert. I will leave you to judge of what we obtained there. We were told by friends who had visited them to write our questions before going to the house, and place them, with a number of blank sheets of stamped or initialed paper, inside an envelope gummed and sealed. This we did, using paper from a Toledo hotel that was decorated with a gilt monogram. We reached Chicago early on the following morning. At nine o'clock we had found the Bangs' residence, and secured an immediate séance, before the arrival of their numerous clients. We sat with Miss May

Bangs. To this day she is ignorant of our names or where we came from; nor had she any inkling of our visit or its purpose. We accompanied her, each in turn, into a comfortable little boudoir on the sunny side of the house, looking out on a bit of lawn; the only window remained open. In the centre of the room was a table, four feet square, covered with a woolen cloth. The medium sat opposite to me, about a foot or more from the table; the only object on the table was an open inkstand. I said I had brought with me some questions in a sealed envelope, and hoped to obtain replies through her mediumship. She said, "We will try". She then fetched a pair of hinged slates, the frames of which were covered with dark cloth, gave them to me, and resumed her seat, saying: 'Place your letter between the slates, close them, and secure them with these stout rubber bands; lay the slates on the table, in front of you, and place both hands flat on top of them'.

The medium's instructions having been carried out, we engaged in general conversation. Three times she interrupted the talk to ask: "Is the name or place correctly spelt?" (Foreign names mentioned in my questions), showing that some knowledge of what I had written was reaching her. If I assented, or made a slight correction, she would write on a pad resting on her knee; then resumed our conversation where it had dropped. About half-an-hour was thus spent, when three distinct raps were heard and felt by me, proceeding, apparently, from the centre of the table. Miss Bangs then said: "The séance is over; you have obtained what you are to get; you may open your envelope now or later". I opened the hinged slates, found the envelope as I had placed it, untouched and still sealed, thanked the lady, and left the room, when my brother passed in for his turn. While waiting for my brother, in the adjoining room, I slit open the end of my envelope with my penknife, and found, besides my questions, nine and a half pages of the blank paper covered with writing in ink, as if with a steel pen, duly numbered, and written at the instance of the spirit friend to whom I had addressed four out of five questions, and signed in full. The replies were categorical, giving or confirming information of great value to me personally; referring to facts and happenings of forty years ago, which the spirit and I alone were aware of; and adding the names of individuals whom I had not named in my questions, but whom we both knew in the past, and who had participated in the events referred to by me. The reply to the fifth and last question was in the form of greetings from spirit friends who were known to me when they were in earth life, and now come to me as so-called 'guides'.

When one writes rapidly a blotter is necessary at the turnover to a new page; this, apparently, was not required by the spirit writer, for the ink is the same depth of black at the foot as at the top of the pages. The handwriting of the last message (and each signature at the bottom of it) differs from that which contained replies to my first

four questions. It is not claimed that this writing is done by spirit friends themselves, but, at their dictation, by the medium's control, who has become expert in this form of manifestation. Can telepathy account for these replies? Can it explain the transfer of the ink from the bottle on the table to the folded blank pages within the sealed envelope between the slates under my hands? It would take a very fast writer at least an hour and a quarter to write what the spirit performed in half-an-hour, and this is leaving out of consideration the deliberation required for penning the involved replies to my questions. I regret that they are of such a personal nature that I cannot even send you the extracts. My brother's replies covered about thirteen pages; among them were three signed notes from three different spirit friends who had come to him in my house here, or at Detroit, and at the Jonsons' in Toledo'. (Direct-Voice with Mrs Etta Wriedt in Detroit, and Materialisation séances with Mr. and Mrs. Ben Jonson, Orchard St, Toledo, Ohio).

Report by Admiral W. Usborne Moore:

'10 to 12 (noon). 19 January 1909. Atmospheric conditions good. I took to the Bangs Sisters a letter containing two sheets (four pages) of questions. In the envelope I put in four blank sheets of hotel paper marked with a private mark. The envelope which contained these six sheets was gummed and sealed with my signet-ring. I had written twenty-three questions to my guide. I was received by May Bangs in the same small room, and, as before, the room was flooded with light. I put the letter between her two slates, which are covered with wool at the edges to exclude the faintest ray of light. She took hold of the double slate ends with one hand while I put four rubber bands round the slates, as I had done two days previously. The slates were then put on the table, the same little vessel of ink was placed on top, and over all, was placed Bristol-board. From this moment May Bangs had nothing to do with the slates; they were in my own possession under my hands. The psychic and I sat opposite to one another, she leaning back in her chair, writing on a pad of paper. After we had been sitting, talking for a quarter of an hour, May Bangs began telling me what my questions were, and answering some of them. Presently she said: "Tear off the corner of one your visiting cards, so that you can identify it again; put it on the slates, and we will see what happens to it". About fifteen minutes later she said: "Why do you write to your relative in such a formal style? Write a postscript on a piece of paper, naming your wife in the same familiar way as you would if writing to this spirit in life". This I did without her seeing what I had written, and put the piece of paper, doubled up, also on the slates. She then went on as before, repeating my questions within the sealed envelope. At 11.10 the psychic said: "Your card has gone into the letter". When an hour and three-quarters had elapsed from the time we began the sitting, three knocks on the table announced that the writing was finished.

I now opened the slates. Inside I found my packet intact, with seal untouched. On the outside of the envelope was written: 'The little slip [my postscript] has been arranged to your hat in the other room'. This was signed by an initial (-) the Christian name of my guide. I slit open the envelope at the top, and found inside it (a) my questions, contained in four pages; (b) eight pages of reply from the spirit, in ink, as if written with a steel pen; (c) my visiting card. I then went into the drawing room, where I had left my hat, found that it had been moved, and that inside the lining was my postscript. Before I left, May Bangs read out to me the questions in my letter, which she had written on her pad as she saw them in the astral light. They were all correct in sense, though not in actual phrasing; and the curious thing was that she read them out in precisely the proper consecutive order - (1), (2) up to (23). With some reluctance, she later eventually surrendered the pages of the pad to me; it is one of the most curious documents in my possession. (One that I would trade my car for to have in my personal archives. - NRH).

Testing The Ink. Sir William Crookes and Lithium Citrate:

To test whether the ink brought to the sittings by W Usborne Moore with the Bangs Sisters was the same ink that was precipitated on to the blank pages by the spirits, Sir William Crookes (1832-1919), one of the greatest physicists of that century, suggested to Moore that he add the chemical lithium citrate to his ink beforehand, go through with two or three sittings with May Bangs for independent writing, and then send to him the pages containing the spirit writing; Crookes could then, under spectrum analysis, prove whether or not this was the ink used by the spirit writers. Under these exact conditions of control; the sitter bringing blank pages of paper sealed into an envelope, the envelope tightly secured by him between two slates, the ink pot, filled with his own ink, placed on top of the slates, and the medium, for the duration of the sitting, not even touching the slates or the table, there is no human being on the face of this earth who could accomplish the feat of having replies, let alone ones of a personal nature, precipitated through the envelope and on to the blank pages without the aid of the Spirit World.

By later spectrum analysis, lithium citrate was discovered in the ink used by the spirits. This conclusively proved that in some extraordinary and mysterious way, Moore's own ink was used to write the messages in the sealed envelope between his own slates. Moore had also laid his visiting card on top of the slates and tore off one corner for identification; he also had written a postscript to his questions on a separate piece of paper and placed it alongside the visiting card. The former found its way into the envelope, while the latter, in accordance with a message on the outside of the envelope, was discovered in the other room in Admiral Moore's hat. I will leave it up to the readers to decide what they believe. This is

testimony based on the observations of Admiral W Usborne Moore, who was a distinguished Naval Officer for Great Britain, in command of warships specially fitted out for scientific research, and Sir William Crookes, one of the most famous physicists of that age. (We will be hearing more from Usborne Moore in this article - NRH).

The gift of precipitated spirit portraits by the Bangs Sisters did not begin until the autumn of 1894. During the early periods of their development, it was necessary to curtain the canvas, or place it in a dark chamber, and several sittings were required to complete the picture. As the gift developed, Elizabeth and May were able to demonstrate the phenomena in full light' Initially, the portraits were produced as follows: two identical paper mounted canvases in wooden frames were placed together, face to face, and then leaned up against a window with the lower half resting upon a table. Each sister would sit on one side of the table and pinch the canvases together with one hand. The window curtains would be drawn up close to the frames on either side and an opaque blind drawn over the canvases. This procedure was arranged so that the only light coming into the room itself was through the canvases, which were translucent. The sitter(s), in most cases, would sit right at the end of the table, directly facing the canvases, and by doing so, watch the entire process unfold right before their very eyes. After a quarter of an hour the outline of shadows would begin to appear and disappear, the artist usually making his preliminary sketches, and then, at a rapid pace the portrait would come into full view. When the frames were separated, the spirit portrait would be found on the surface of one of the canvases, usually the one closest to the sitter. In the earlier days, though the paint was greasy to the touch, it left no stain whatsoever on the other paper which covered closely the other canvas. Later on, the portraits were precipitated as if by an airbrush, and only one canvas was needed; some took as little as five minutes to complete, and some were precipitated in full sunlight right on the front porch of the Bangs Sisters' house.

Art experts have examined the portraits and they cannot explain the media used by the spirit artists; the pictures are not charcoal, oils, crayon, pastels, ink, water colours, or any other known substance. The material has been compared to the fine dust on a butterfly's wings. Admiral Moore, in *Glimpses of The Next State* said about the material, 'The stuff of which the picture is composed is damp, and rubs off at the slightest touch, like soot, it comes off on the finger, a smutty, oily substance'.

Miss May Bangs wrote in a letter to Mr. James Coates, 17 September, 1910:

'The room is shaded sufficiently to cause all the light from the window to pass through the canvas, thus enabling the sitter to witness the development and detect the least change in the

shadows. No two sittings are exactly alike. Usually in the development of a portrait the outer edges of the canvas becomes shadowed, showing different delicately coloured lines, until the full outline of the head and shoulders is seen. When the likeness is sufficiently distinct to be recognised, the hair, drapery and other decorations appear. In many cases, after the entire portrait is finished, the eyes gradually open, giving a life-like appearance to the whole face'. People who sat with the Bangs for portraits were requested to bring a photograph of the departed if one existed, but were never requested to produce it. The spirit portraits were not copies of the concealed photograph. When completed, the subject would have a different facial expression, clothes, or even the age of the person would be slightly altered; the colour tones of the face always rich, deep and lifelike. Many of the portraits changed when taken home. The hair on some would be altered or changed to look as it had when the subject was on the earth. Blouses and dresses for instance, would change to seem more familiar, and in several wondrous cases, the eyes would open and then close.

Mr. John W Payne, Director of The Citizens Bank in New Castle, Indiana, speaking in September, 1905, of the portrait he obtained of his father who had died 14 years previously: 'It was made in the daytime in an ordinary room that was not darkened. The frame containing the canvas set on a stand before the window. Mrs. Charles Payne and Mrs. John Weesner, who do not believe in Spiritualism, were with me, and we sat within five feet of the picture. The two Bangs Sisters, the mediums through whom the likeness was produced, sat on either side of the table and supported the frame, each with one hand. No brushes, paint, crayon, or other substance of any kind was used as far as we could tell, and it was light enough to have seen a pin on the table. The sisters had never seen or heard of my father, nor a photograph or likeness of him. All they asked was that I fix his features in my mind. The picture was not made in spots or a little at a time. At first it was a faint shadow, then a wave appeared to sweep across the canvas, and the likeness became plainer. It was a good deal like a sunrise I got brighter until it was perfectly plain and every feature visible. Until the picture was completed, the eyes were closed and then they opened all at once, like a person awakening. It did not take more than half an hour and is the best picture of my father we ever had'.

Mrs. Gertrude Breslan Hunt, Economic and Social Lecturer from Norwood Park, Illinois, said in 1909: 'I did not remove my eyes from the canvas, and would stake everything I possess that no hand touched the canvas after I placed it in the bright light of the window, until the picture was finished. The background appeared first then in a few moments the whole face appeared, with the colours of life. I criticised the pose, and asked for a full face view. The whole face faded out and was rapidly sketched again; I remarked that the hair was too light, and there, where I sat, I saw the shadows creep into

the waves of hair and it darkened. I asked that more colour be put into the cheeks and the canvas blushed to the tint it now bears; the sleeves of the robe were corrected also, and in a few hours the picture was completed, and a competent artist has stated that he could not finish such a picture in less than three days, working eight hours each'.

Dr Daughtery who attended the Science Church of Spiritualism in Richmond, Indiana in the early 1920s, sat for a portrait of his deceased wife, Lizzie, and she then precipitated on to the canvas. He then asked the spirit operators why the twins, Mary and Christina, their little daughters in spirit, could not come, and they then appeared on to the canvas in front of their mother. Dr Daughtery himself, then appeared on to the canvas standing behind them all. A family group portrait; he, in earth-life, his wife and daughters in Spirit.

A few of the testimonies given regarding the Bang Sisters:

Edward G Pierce, a Chicago Business Man, said of the Bang Sisters' mediumship: 'In less than half-an-hour I recognised the picture of my nephew, in life-like colours. There was no picture of the child present. The only picture ever taken of him was about three years before he passed away, and this was in possession of his folks, ten miles from the psychic's home. His mother readily recognised the spirit-picture as a true likeness of her boy as he appeared just before he passed out. It proves to us that our boy still lives and is with us the same as when in earthly form'.

Lyman C Howe, the noted American writer and lecturer said of his experience: 'There were two photographs of Maude enclosed in a sealed envelope and placed against the lower backside of the canvas. These had not been opened or in any way exposed to view until the sitting was closed. The sisters had never seen her, and so far as I know and believe, they had never seen her photo. The picture is unlike either photo, and is more perfect and life-like than any photograph she ever had. I mentally asked her to have a yellow rose in her hair, and to write her name "Maude" on the lower margin, and when the picture came out, the rose appeared in the hair, and "Maude" is written on the lower margin, as I mentally requested. I did not tell anyone of the request until the picture was finished. It is the most beautiful and satisfactory phenomenon I ever witnessed'.

A letter to the Bangs Sisters from Syracuse, New York, dated 21 May, 1910, said concerning the arrival of their spirit portrait by mail: 'Our Dear Friends: For such we must call you. The painting arrived safely, and to say that we are both well pleased with it does not half express our sentiment. Our little darling (their child, who had passed away two years previous to the portrait - NRH), looks just as

though he was ready to step down and out of the frame, he is so natural. We fully realise no earthly artist could possibly produce such wonderful work. One cannot see where the picture is started or finished, so perfect is the blending of colours. We notice the appearance of a certain little ring on the third finger of his left hand, the partial request of his mamma's. This marvelous work has been a great revelation to us; one year ago we would hardly have thought this manifestation possible, and we feel very grateful to you for your efforts in securing for us such a wonderfully satisfactory likeness. May you have grand success in all the coming years of your life, that we trust the Over-Ruling Intelligence may prolong to a ripe old age, that others may have similar blessings that we are in possession of through your instrumentality. Very Sincerely Your Friends, Mr. and Mrs. Milford Badgero. (The spirit portrait done for the Badgeros' was precipitated as a result of their mental request only; there was no photograph).

A letter from Dr Carpenter, Olin, Iowa, dated Saturday, June 20, 1896, to *The Light of Truth*.BR> 'On April 25, 1896, I wrote a letter to the Bang Sisters, of No 3 South Elizabeth Street, Chicago, Ill, to have them ask their guide, Capt W Stevens, to ascertain through my wife in spirit life if she could and would give me her picture. On the morning of May 9th I received an answer saying if I would go there the week of May 10th, she would do so. Accordingly, on the 12th I went to the above named mediums in Chicago, Ill. The 13th I spent in having canvas prepared and had a box made 24/30 inches in which I put the prepared canvas. Not, however, before I carefully examined and marked same so I could fully identify it. I then nailed it securely shut. The box was then placed under a table leaning against the wall in which position it remained, the medium sitting at one end of the table and myself at the other. After sitting from 10 minutes past 10 o'clock am until 10 minutes past one pm the medium held the slate under the table and received this message, "we have exhausted your patience, open the box". We accordingly opened the box and to my great surprise and joy beheld a complete life sized picture of my wife and child in the spirit world. The picture is so natural and life-like that many of my neighbours and friends fully recognise it although they have been in spirit life for 33 years'.

Séance Report by Admiral W Usborne Moore.

'On Monday, March 1, 1909, I went to the Bangs Sisters' house, and found that they had sent to the town for two panel canvases, and there was considerable delay. At last they arrived, covered with paper that was wet, and I exposed them in the sun for about twenty-five minutes to dry. We sat for the full length-picture of Lola at 11.40. At 11.46 the figure appeared on the further side of the canvas next to me. It was roughly finished by 11.51, and placed on a chair at the side of the room, still developing. At 12.10 we were told to cover it and leave it, and return a 3pm. The mediums were not disengaged

till 3.30, when we sat opposite the picture again for twenty minutes. Some changes had occurred in the interval, improving the picture much. When I left at 12.10 I had expressed the opinion that the figure - then with bare arms - was too girlish, and I had also wished for a locket and chain to be put on the neck. I left a locket, similar to the one worn by Lola in earth life, close to the picture. On my return the arms were covered with sleeves, and the chain and locket were around the neck; the dress also had been finished with embroidery, etc., and other improvements had taken place. At 7.30pm I returned to the house, and found the picture had undergone further improvements, especially in the sky and background. I mentally desired that the locket should be made larger, and that the monogram should be impressed upon it. No-body was present when I inspected the locket on this occasion; the mediums were not at home; I removed the locket at the foot of the picture, and took it away with me. My next visit was at 10.20 the following morning, March 2, 1909. I then found that the monogram had been imprinted on the locket, not exactly a copy of the raised letters as on the real locket in my possession, but the three correct letters were there; one line was omitted, and the locket itself, as I had requested, was enlarged. Shadows had been added, improving the picture.

'Conjurers, Fraud and The Bangs Sisters', by Admiral W Usborne Moore:

'The efforts of bona-fide conjurers should never be despised by investigators into Spiritualism. If they can pick up a fraudulent medium, so much the better for us. Provided they relate truthfully what they have seen and how they account for it, they cannot possibly do any injury to genuine psychics. Unhappily, they cannot all confine their mystifications to the stage, but carry their legitimate deceptions into private life, where they are not legitimate; and they often weaken their influence by committing themselves at the first start to theories of fraud before they have witnessed the phenomena which are the basis of discussion. In recent times no psychics have been so long and so constantly under fire of criticism as the Bangs Sisters. I record the fact, but entirely without surprise. The manifestations which appear through their mediumship are of such a startling nature as to render it in the highest degree improbable that anyone, however experienced he may be as an investigator, can credit the accounts of what takes place, unless he has actually seen the various phenomena that occur. Many have been the efforts to show that what happens in their presence is the effect of pure conjuring on their own part. All have failed'.

After Admiral Moore had met with Dr Isaac K Funk, the noted author and chief proprietor of Funk and Wagnall's Publishing, in March, 1909, and had told him about the phenomena taking place in the presence of the Bangs Sisters, Dr Funk paid the expenses of Mr. Hereward Carrington, the clever psychical investigator and conjurer,

to go to Chicago, investigate the Bangs, and report to him the phenomena. Dr Funk, who himself had investigated the Bangs, had an extremely high opinion of their genuine mediumship. Carrington, who was unaware of the fact that Admiral Moore had sat extensively with the Bangs in January and March, 1909, published a scathing, negative report about the Bangs in the *Annals of Psychic Science*, an English journal of which he was the American agent. The Admiral goes on to say: 'After waiting one year and a quarter after his investigation, Mr Carrington published a long article in the journal (mentioned above), accusing the Bangs Sisters of fraud. I do not know if this article was verbatim the same as his report to Dr Funk, but the latter did not see it till April, 1911, and disapproved of its publication. As it was published in an English journal, the Bangs Sisters knew nothing of this scurrilous production; I was the first to inform them of it, in January, 1911'.

The plan of the room layout given by Carrington in his article was so wrong and blatantly false it was as if he was describing another house altogether. When Admiral Moore returned to Chicago in January of 1911, his sole mission was to put to rest the accusations of the conjurers and prove, once again the genuineness of the Bangs Sisters. The following are excerpts of the conversation between the Admiral and the Bangs: Admiral Moore: 'Certain medium-hunters in this country, and a first rate conjurer in England (who is quite sincere in believing you to be conjurers like himself), have spread reports about you very much to your detriment - one of the Americans I mention (Carrington), has written an article in an English magazine, saying that in June, 1909, you cheated him, quoting extensively from another person'. This is the exact quote Carrington referred to *Journal of the SPR*, Vol. X: 'The writer', he said 'claims to have seen the tricks by means of a small hand mirror which he held beneath the table. He found that, under cover of the writing pad placed against the edges of the slate resting on the table the slates were wedged open by means of a small rubber wedge, the letter, when abstracted, was dropped on to a sort of 'gridiron' arrangement which lay on the carpet. It was promptly drawn backwards under a slip of the door into the next room where Miss Lizzie Bangs, the other sister, steamed the envelope open, answered all the questions, sealed the envelope back shut, and then conveyed it back into the room. In the meantime in the ink in the cup had time to evaporate so that it appeared to have been used'.

Admiral Moore then said to the Bangs: 'I do not suppose that either of these persons had the courage to send you a copy of their charges. You know me, and are quite aware that I have entered this room having full confidence in the genuineness of what I saw with you in 1909'. Admiral Moore then added that he wanted to test them completely again for a portrait and a letter, but he would 'upset' their usual conditions and direct the proceedings himself.

To this, Lizzie Bangs replied: "Mr. Moore, we trust you, and will submit to your wishes; but we warn you that the very knowledge of what the man has said in the English magazine will upset conditions to such an extent that I doubt if you will be successful. The man you mention was never in this house. We know his description, and should sense hostility if anybody came in that way". No arrangements were made for him or anyone else by Dr Funk in 1909, as he describes; nor have we ever sat three times for one person, for a picture, in one day. Do what you like, and tell us what to do'. Admiral Moore stated in his record: 'Imagine the conditions: Table shifted to a part of the room to which it was a stranger; the psychic who functions alone in the phenomena of writing within sealed envelopes at the usual sittings for this purpose (May), placed with her face towards the southern light streaming into the room; both women seething with indignation at cowardly attacks published in England; the suspected door wide open; the door into the hall wide open; and Lizzie, the person who, it is alleged, hides behind the suspected door and writes replies, in the room'. Lizzie Bangs said: (condensed) 'You have no idea how this sudden and complete upset of our usual conditions affects us. We have no objection to a gradual altering of our accustomed habits, but to come suddenly upon us and change all our conditions in one day is more than any sensitive can stand - the strain is too great. If you had not told me of these slanders, I assure you we would never have consented to your demands. We will never do it again for anyone'.

Admiral Moore tested the Bangs for a grueling five days, January 28th to February 1st, 1911, and the ordeal, according to Moore 'left both sisters much exhausted'. May Bangs could hardly walk, and Lizzie, though calm, had evidently reached the limits of endurance. After his series of tests, which were a complete and total success for a precipitated portrait and independent writing - the researching aspect of which even left me totally exhausted - the Bangs Sisters triumphed, and Admiral Moore proved his case again. He conclusively stated: 'Either the author of that article has never been inside the Bangs' house, or he is incapable of making ordinary observations with accuracy. The attack on these psychics, without sending them a copy, and in an English magazine which he knew they would not see, is an act that requires no comment from me'.

Carrington had also claimed that David P Abbott had succeeded in duplicating the Bangs Sisters portraits by trickery exactly. The Admiral replied that he made a number of tests, and that he read carefully the expose by Dr Krebs, which was furnished to him by Dr Hodgson, that he knew the method employed by Abbott, Marriott and Dr Wilmar, that it surpassed in skill almost every conjuring trick he had ever witnessed, but that their conditions were as different from those at the séances of the Bangs Sisters as 'a locomotive is different from a teapot'. It was the conjuring performance of these

clowns as a matter of fact which convinced him even more of the genuineness of the Bangs Sisters.

Examining the Portraits of the Bangs Sisters: Lily Dale, New York, May and September, 1996. Luckily for me, I live right in the middle of this 'Spirit Zone' I have referred to in my research, for it affords me many opportunities to unearth many facts concerning the awesome physical mediums from this geographical area who have blessed our movement. Where raw physical power is concerned, especially in these dual power-sibling situations, the Davenport Brothers will always be, to me, unequalled in this regard - no fastenings or pinioning ever devised in the entire history of their mediumistic lives in which the spirits could not relieve them from, usually in seconds; the more perilous and demanding the situation even life threatening at times, the more their power would increase, their guides more aggressive. But the Bangs Sisters, Lizzie and May, and their stupendous precipitated spirit portraits; objective physical phenomena which can be seen, felt, and absorbed by all of the senses in this modern day still; the story of their lives and their extraordinary manifestations including words written in ink, precipitated right through the slates and sealed envelopes and on to folded blank pages: this, to me, is almost as glorious as it gets.

To see and closely examine the actual spirit portraits of the Bang Sisters, for me, was a form of enlightenment. Although almost a century old, the portraits are as fresh looking as the dew glistening in the sun on the rose petals in my yard this morning. The wooden frames that hold the portraits have aged but the paintings have not. Some of the pictures, especially that of William Mervin and the young girl, Pat Murphy, look as though they are about to speak; another, that of a young woman, seemed to change her very expression and the direction she was looking when I was there. The portraits seem more like windows, the spirit looking through from the outside. The beautiful portrait of Pat Murphy, with her long golden curls, represents the earlier period of the spirit portraits; brush strokes, or whatever they are, can be seen on the canvas. There is no glass on this portrait and I was given permission to touch it with my finger. It looks as though someone simply stood in front of the canvas and painted the figure with paint and brushes an invisible artist and his subject. The rest of the paintings I examined were all of the later periods, representing the actual precipitation phenomena by the Bangs. These magnificent pieces of spirit art were precipitated in full light right in front of the sitters' eyes and, in most cases, under test conditions. They are so different, wondrous and unlike anything I have ever seen that it is hard to actually put it into words. The colouring and fleshy tones of the faces, where one texture ends and one begins, not a brush stroke is to be seen; the entire portrait looks as though, like a cloud of smoke, or dust, simply drifted into the room and situated itself, or landed itself, bit by bit, on

to the canvas. Although the figures appear life-like, and almost moving, there is, without question, a transcendent countenance on their faces which gives the impression that the observer is indeed in the presence of something not of this world. The blues, reds, whites, gold's and flesh tones are nothing like the hues with which we are familiar. The fine dust of the butterfly's wings is a perfect description of the other worldly material on the canvas. Is it not one of the most wonderful things that we could ever have the opportunity to see and understand, that spirits, in their mysterious and glorious ways use the pigment and scent of flowers, sounds and musical notes, vibrations on every level, minerals of every kind, textures, hues - on and on it goes with their non-stop relationship with Nature, even perhaps, the dusty wings of the silent harbinger of peace itself' the butterfly' how utterly wonderful.

Although I am trying to describe the indescribable, what I can say of them is absolutely unlike any of the others; no two are alike. The facial colours are different, even with the two Indian's faces, one being more of a copper colour and one being olive coloured and lighter. Hair, clothes, background, everything is different on each portrait. The portrait of Leolyn Pettingill is a bust and face portrait only, she is shrouded in a mist with a white rose in her hair, the light golden colour of which is impossible to describe. The Indian, Smart Weed, is an almost full length portrait, more than five feet high; she appears to be standing in a grove in front of marble steps; a heavenly mist slightly shrouds the background of trees and wild roses which are everywhere. The figure is so life-like that she looks as though she is about to actually step out of the frame. Her gorgeous jet black hair is pulled forward in two ponytails, braided in the middle of each and almost waist length. She has a gold band around her head and bracelets on each wrist of the same; there are numerous strands of pearls around her neck and in her left hand she holds a bunch of light pink roses. The unnamed portrait is the young woman who seemed to change her expression and the direction in which she was looking. Her eyes, that of an indescribable realm of stunning blue only add to the penetrating gaze of hers which seems to look right through you. Her bright golden hair is pulled up into a bun on top and there appears to be one gold earring on her right ear; the dress of pure white she wears is bowed at the shoulders and a thin necklace of gold graces her bare neck. In ways that can hardly be described, I felt that his young woman was watching me; following me with her gaze the entire time I was there. The feeling I had was one of irritation on her part for she was the only one without a name and as this was, on my part, a mission of love and honour for the spirits, I have named her Emily, in honour of Emily French, the Direct Voice medium. The younger Indian, Blossom wears a yellow canvas-like gown of some kind with the collar pulled high up to the neck; the skin is more of a fleshy colour, and pink strands of beads or pearls fall about her; her eyes, set deep within her face are piercing brown. William Mervin,

mentioned earlier, wears a dark black suit and vest; a pin of some kind is situated on the top section of his tie; he sports a handlebar style moustache. This portrait, to me is the most life-like I have ever seen. The young girl, Pat Murphy, wears a nightgown and adds to the absolutely heavenly countenance of this angel; her brownish-golden hair, in waves and ringlets flowing down; once again, the eyes, the ever present eyes of these magnificent works of art looking through you from the other life in which they dwell.

The portrait of Leolyn Pettingill was precipitated, under test conditions in the lounge of the hotel (the hotel was named after her, Leolyn), and the rest were precipitated in the home of the Bangs Sisters on Library Street in Lily Dale. I had the opportunity to examine their house and as you can well imagine, to say it was a thrill is putting it lightly my friends.

Bibliography

Time is Kind, by Mariam B Pond, 1947.

The Heyday of Modern Spiritualism, by Slater Brown, 1970.

The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism, by Leah Fox Underhill