

# IN THEIR WORDS

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## Spiritualism in Brattleboro, 1886-1889: One Man's Contact with the Afterlife through Letters

*The letters from Edward Edwards's deceased family members were doubtless intended to provide him with feelings of support and comfort, and to allay his loneliness in his last few remaining months.*

By JERRY CARBONE

**T**he popularity of modern Spiritualism in the United States is recognized to have begun in March 1848 with Maggie and Kate Fox of Hydesville, New York, who claimed to have communicated with the dead through raps on the wall and furniture in their house.<sup>1</sup> Vermont was not far behind this initial episode. Achsa Sprague (1827-1861) of Plymouth Notch, Vermont, became a famous trance me-  
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*Vermont History* Vol. 86, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 2018): 31–45.

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dium lecturer in 1854 after a sudden recovery from a disease that left her bedridden and crippled. She attributed her miraculous recovery to the intervention of spirits.<sup>2</sup>

Brattleboro had its own famous medium, T. P. James, an itinerant printer, who settled in the town in the 1870s. James called himself the “Dickens medium.” He published part 2 of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, claiming to channel the spirit of author Charles Dickens. James also published a Spiritualist newspaper, *The Summerland Messenger*, from 1874-1876.<sup>3</sup>

By the 1880s there were approximately eight million Spiritualists living in the United States and Europe.<sup>4</sup> The Vermont Spiritualist Association was founded as early as 1860 and had quarterly meetings throughout the year that attracted speakers from New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont.<sup>5</sup> On April 7, 1882, the organization convened in Brattleboro in honor of the thirty-fourth anniversary of the Spiritualist movement in the United States. Several area residents attended the meeting and were nominated to be its officers: Dr. A. B. Smith (Putney), president; Sarah A. Wiley (Rockingham), vice-president; Loren M. Howe (Brattleboro), secretary. Edward Edwards of Brattleboro was in attendance and joined a committee to review a proposal to form a local Spiritualist association.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE EDWARDS FAMILY

Edward was born on July 29, 1813, in Guilford, Vermont, the son of Benajah Edwards and Mary “Molly” Stowell. Benajah came to Guilford from Coventry, Connecticut, in 1777 at age five. He married Mary Stowell of Guilford, and they had twelve children. At 18, Edward moved to Bernardston, Massachusetts, to live with a relative, and at 21 he learned the trade of carriage maker in Deerfield, Massachusetts, perhaps from R. E. Field, who set up a business there in 1817.<sup>7</sup> Edward moved to Rock Island, Illinois, (where his family had moved), for a short time before relocating back to Guilford. At this time he went to work for Asa Miller, an established carriage maker in Brattleboro. After his employment with Miller, Edward moved to Keene, New Hampshire, where he owned and operated a business for thirty years. Edwards served two terms in the state legislature from Keene, but returned to Brattleboro in 1872 and entered into a carriage-making partnership with Asa Miller and his son, Sidney. At that time he built his home in Brattleboro at 28 Prospect Street (now 70 Prospect Street), and in 1874 he built a shop on Frost Street, where he worked until his retirement in 1885.<sup>8</sup>

Edward was a Universalist.<sup>9</sup> He married his first wife, Amanda Big-

elow, on May 3, 1841.<sup>10</sup> She died on August [22 or 23], 1860. Edward married his second wife, Mary Stone, on September 12, 1861.<sup>11</sup> They lived together nearly twenty-four years until she died on January 30, 1885. The marriages produced no children.

After the death of his second wife, Edward remained at his Prospect St. home with his sister, Mary Taylor, who came to live with him after her husband Jeremiah Taylor died, sometime after 1884.

#### THE EDWARDS COLLECTION

The Edward Edwards collection at the Brattleboro Historical Society consists of twenty-four handwritten letters, purportedly authored by the spirits of his two deceased wives, brothers, sisters, a niece, and even his mother, between 1886 and November 1889. These letters were transmitted through three trance mediums: Mrs. L. E. Ball, probably of Montague, Massachusetts; Mrs. Cheney; and Mr. Samuel Thompson, Kingston, New York.<sup>12</sup>

The trove of letters was donated to the Brattleboro Historical Society in May 1995 by Dorothy “Dot” (Edwards) Robbins and her sister, Clarissa (Edwards) Ketcham, who were Edward’s great-great grand nieces. The twenty-four letters were attributed by the mediums to these eight family members:

- Amanda (Bigelow) Edwards, (1813-1860), first wife, 7 letters;
- Mary (Stone) Edwards, (1830-1885), second wife, 9 letters;
- Luther Edwards, (1793-1863), brother, 1 letter;
- William Edwards, (1795-1848), brother, 2 letters;
- Zeviah Edwards, (1805-1852), sister, 1 letter;
- Sarah Edwards, (1816-1866), sister, 2 letters;
- Betsey Phidelia Edwards, (1821-1847), niece, 1 letter;
- Mary “Molly” (Stowell) Edwards, (1771-1839), mother, 1 letter.

According to Clarissa Ketcham all of the above relatives (except for Edward’s wives) died in Illinois.

#### WHO WERE THE MEDIUMS?

It is difficult to verify the identities of the three mediums who were named by Clarissa Ketcham in her donor letter to the Brattleboro Historical Society.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, she did not provide any source documentation for her information. The medium “Mrs. Cheney,” for whom no residence or location information is given, may have been a wife of Lorenzo Cheney, who was married several times and in 1860 worked as a clerk with Edward in his carriage business in Keene and lived in his home.<sup>14</sup>

Mrs. L. E. Ball may have been “Mrs. Lydia E. Ball” of Montague, Massachusetts, whose death announcement in the *Turners Falls (Mass.) Reporter*, of July 3, 1901, at age 78, described her as a “very estimable woman, very intelligent, a great reader . . . She had spent her summers in Lake Pleasant for many years.”<sup>15</sup> The description of this person seems to suggest the character of some women spiritualists of the day, many of whom were suffragists, abolitionists, and free thinkers.<sup>16</sup> “Mr. Samuel Thompson” may have been the medium identified in the spiritualist newspaper, *The Light of Truth*, of August 8, 1893, which described a meeting at Lake Pleasant: “As yet there is but one materializing medium here, Mr. Samuel Thompson.”<sup>17</sup>

The mediums’ craft was accomplished through trances, which were an outgrowth of the practice of mesmerism in the early nineteenth century and included public demonstrations of an induced trance and connections with the spirit world.<sup>18</sup> Such demonstrations were performed in the village of Lake Pleasant, Massachusetts, at the annual meetings of the New England Campmeeting Association from 1874 to 1913. It continues to be the oldest continuously existing Spiritualist center in the United States. Lake Pleasant is approximately twenty-seven miles from Brattleboro, and Edward Edwards may have been able to find his three mediums there.<sup>19</sup> A list of members of the association in 1879 included four people from Brattleboro and two from Readsboro, Vermont.<sup>20</sup>

### THE LETTERS

How were these letters composed? Was the medium the only person in the room with Edward when they received and recorded the communication from the spirit? Or might there have been a transcriber such as Edward’s sister, Mary, who recorded what the medium spoke? Perhaps a group was present. “Psychography” was a means of communication in which mediums and subjects gathered for a séance with blank sheets of paper on a table. When communication was established with the spirit, words would appear on the blank paper.<sup>21</sup>

The letters from his deceased family members were doubtless intended to provide Edwards with feelings of support and comfort, and to allay his loneliness in his last few remaining months. Spiritualists believed that direct interaction with deceased relatives would provide insight into the spirit world. Edward’s active participation in the formation of a local Spiritualist organization in 1884 suggests that he would have been receptive to letters coming from his dead relatives through mediums.

Communications from Edward’s two wives especially fill this role, as they both write of their fondness for one another and their reassurances

to him that they will be waiting when he makes his transition to the new life.

The text for the letters that appear in this essay has been transcribed by the author. All punctuation is from the original text, as are the underlines. If no punctuation is provided, none is given. This convention might make the letters more difficult to read but it more realistically conveys the stream of consciousness that the trance medium may have experienced as she or he channeled the deceased informant.

A few of the letters include dates, and a few are numbered, but the set does not appear to follow any chronological order. In addition, some letters have a note identifying the medium, but most do not, so one cannot determine who the medium was. Nor is it clear where these letters were composed. One letter implies that Edward was present with one of the mediums while she was in a trance. The others give no clue if Edward was present for the transmission.

The first letter in the set, from Edward's first wife Amanda, is dated 1886, which I believe may have been added after the letter was written—or perhaps much later—as the date is in different handwriting than the letter. On the top margin in the same handwriting as the date is the note, “Best of all.”

My dearest one, Be patient just a little longer for you will, after a little, come over to me and then you will indeed be blessed in the assurance that you have been through the worst of the trouble and are near the land of sunshine.<sup>22</sup> Remember that there will be a great deal to make you happier then as though you did not understand this might power and force that has been around you still more until there will be no dread in death but an eternal joy you have been doing a great good and I will help you about it and bring you more good to do for your consistent life and looking forward to life over here is a reproach to many who claim to be ready to go to Heaven through the doors of the church you have been feeling sick of late and do not know how much there will be in the future for you but learn to trust to us and know that all is well; now dear husband I have been with you through all of your bereavements, and helped you when it was darkest. I helped your Mary for I was glad to sign her release or help her about it, there was joy over here and it has been many a pleasant talk between us as to how happy we will be with you over here. remember there is no jealousy over here and we live happily. May God bless you and help you and bring you happiness.

Your loving wife, Amanda Edwards

The phrase “your bereavements” may have referred to the many deaths of close relatives in Edward's life. Besides the deaths of his two wives, almost all of his immediate family members—mother, father,

nine siblings, and their spouses—had passed. Amanda also notes that in the spirit world “there is no jealousy over here and so we live happily.” This phrase may be an allusion to the philosophy of free love that was embraced by some Spiritualists of the day.<sup>23</sup>

The next letter, noted as “No. 1,” was probably written in 1887, two years after Mary’s death. She tells Edward of Amanda’s help in her transition and refers again to Spiritualism with the metaphor, “meet in the land beyond the possibilities of ‘good-byes’”:

My Dear husband, Amanda has been more than a sister more than a friend to me it was her hand that guided me over her voice that welcomed me here her sweet tender care that took away the fear of death and showed me life eternal I stand today where I can do our good I came first to you because my grave is the newest \_\_ because that the two years of my spirit life has been just like one sweet song. Ah mourn not for me try to feel that I have found you so lonely I have laid my head upon your shoulder and said to you rejoice but you heard me not. I see how precious everything is to you that was mine you have been feeling a peace that few felt because you know me so well you know that heaven would be heaven. I wait for you. We are content. Yours until we meet—in the land beyond the possibility of “good byes” being spoken.

Another undated letter from Mary states her strong belief in Spiritualism and hints that perhaps people such as Edward’s sole living siblings—brother, Solomon, and sister, Mary Taylor—do not take his belief in Spiritualism seriously, and may even laugh at him. Mary Edwards also suggests that Mary Taylor is ill and may not be long for the mortal world, which might indicate the letter was sent later in 1889. She encourages Edward to release her—“do not try to hold her back”—and then Edward would need Mary, from the spirit world, to care for him.

My dear Husband, Amanda has been trying to write and now I will try and give you a word of consolation. I see first how you feel and I know that house does not seem like home any more. I think you have been doing a great deal of good by talking of these things kindly. I know better now what is meant by spiritualism it is a strong hold to me now it makes me feel content and happy and I know that I shall soon be with you more closely for your dear sister will come over and then you will need me. Do not try to hold her back. let the light shine into her life. Now dear husband I do not think we were very far wrong in telling you that you might again have someone to care for you and make you happy—you are not old in heart and if ever one felt the need of companionship they feel it now as they are reaching out into the dimness that comes before entering another life you will have me to help you instead of laugh at you and I will do all I can for I want you happy you look as though there was something that would make you happy if we could only open the spiritual

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sight and make it better for you. For you have a mediumship: we do come to you in dreams and try to make you happy. Oh: I want to thank you for your patience with me and for your love and kindness. I want you to know that I know and love you I would like to write to others but I cannot. Your Mary

The letter labeled no. 5, from Edward's sister Sarah, may have been written before Mary Taylor came to live with him while Mary's husband was still alive:

My Dear Brother I would like to come to you and help you but it is hard to get hold I want you to have some one in your home to love you and care for you. I see just how blessed I am in this that comes to me that you call death. Oh how weary you have grown since Mary left you. Never mind me [seems to be word missing] will help you, your loving sister, Sarah.

The only letter from Edward's brother Luther, labeled as no. 2, which may have been written in 1886, mentions a jibe that Benajah, Edward's father, cast about the beliefs of the "old religion."

My Dear Brother, We are nearly all over here you are not coming to a lonely place/ Your two wifes seem to be so happy together. I do not know which will be the one who will be chosen to walk through spirit life with, but—I do know—they both care for you. Father laughs about the old ideas of religion.

A letter from Amanda, labeled no. 3 and perhaps written in 1886-1887, discusses the joy that is possible after death: "I could understand how death could make you weep and me happy at the same time."

My Darling Husband If I could only drive away every sorrow and throw away every tear if I could but feel the power to make you know how happy I am now blessed and how pure. If I could only show [here there was a caret symbol to insert the word] you that there is something better in store for you than life can give I would have indeed been glad but as I cannot do all I want to I will do what I can I will make your heart bright in the darkness and your soul happy in the feeling that you can be a help to others while you stay but to save me I cannot seem like like [word repeated] myself I cannot take away the old loneliness of your heart..I cannot take away the longing you have to mourn me I know you will not forget me. Death was not what I thought ...why it was a rest ... it was a pleasure it made me feel so glad it made my life so beautiful. The old suffering form was life—behind and the beautiful new life was around me. I could understand how death could make you weep and me happy at the same time. That is the mystery of dying dear the great sweet peace and rest. God help you to be patient and bide your time ... Yours in love, Amanda.

Edward's brother William writes two letters. In the one labeled no. 4, perhaps written in 1886-1887, he urges Edward to read about Spiritualism and to spread the word:

My Brother, If I can only give you a greeting I will come. I want you to get many books and papers and spend the winter in studying this philosophy that will make you able to teach others. Don't be lonely don't feel badly I have been doing you good I know that you have been a help to others. God bless you, Brother William

In his second communication with Edward, William seems to apologize for not believing in Spiritualism while he was alive, "but I like many others was bound":

My dear Brother I have found that you were right and I was wrong for this is a truth and it will ever be one. I am sorry I did not do more about these things to make me wiser, but I like many others was bound; we all come to you to acknowledge the truth of this which comes to you and I believe I can do that which will help you on your way. Keep what you have while you live and use it for the good of your life. You will never want. God bless you, William Edwards

#### MATERIALIZATION OF THE SPIRITS

From the very beginning of the movement, mediums would include strange physical phenomena in their sessions, which were called "spirit circles." Eventually "spirit rooms" were constructed where "visitors could regularly encounter demonstrations of spirits enlivening dead matter," such as floating pistols, and what was called "personating," where the medium would be possessed by the spirit of famous or infamous dead people.<sup>24</sup> It wasn't until the decades after the Civil War that many Spiritualists' goal was to materialize the full body of a spirit, which would "appear in pale gauzy attire, and roam around the room."<sup>25</sup> As this type of medium activity became common, the number of fraudulent activities grew as well. By the 1880s, when these letters were written, many Spiritualists and mediums were concerned with damage to the reputation of the movement and turned to detectives and police investigators to expose charlatans.<sup>26</sup> At this time laws and regulations were also being passed against the practice of Spiritualism. At the 34th annual Vermont Spiritualist Convention in Brattleboro, March 30 through April 3, 1884, speakers advised sending representatives to legislatures to oppose actions against Spiritualists. Edward Edwards was present at this convention.<sup>27</sup>

Edward's wives speak of materialization or the physical presence of a spirit. On July 28, 1889, Mary writes through the trance medium known

as “Mr. Samuel Thompson” that she must save her strength for materialization:

My dear loved one I am more pleased than I can express. Oh what a blessed pleasure this is that we can return to our loved ones also that you can be brought into so close communion with those gone before and it is a great benefit to you as well as ourselves. I can not write you more as strength must be saved for materialization. I am with [word(s) illegible]. Mary

These communications were given through Mr. Samuel Thompson of Kingston NY July the 28th 1889

On the very next day, July 29, 1889, Amanda writes:

Dear, Dear, Husband You have given me a great pleasure in giving me the opportunity to materialize myself for my dear when we can come through a material form it pleases us much, but all cannot materialize. But when we can it advances us much more rapid. Oh my dear I would not be in with life again although I am constantly drawn to you and are with you much to soothe and comfort you—there is much brightness in store for you—Oh there is only one step from one sphere to another some spirit differs from another same as people on earth the better the life led here the brighter the return to their earth friends give me every opportunity it is a pleasure. Your loving wife Amanda Edwards.

The following letters are neither dated nor numbered. Mary (Stowell) Edwards reassures Edward and speaks of her husband, who will try to visit him:

My son: a loving mother returns through this medium although I cannot control as I would after a while I want to tell you we all return to those we love and much more readily to those who are connected. I am here with my dear ones far back beyond your recollection. father is here he will try and come to you through this method. We love to come. I have watched over you long and earnest. Your loving mother

A letter from Luther’s daughter, Betsey “Phidelia,” again mentions Edward’s loneliness and the “props” that he has leaned on and are now gone. She says her friends do not feel her presence and she offers her support to Edward:

My dear Uncle, You are lonely and we want to come to you all of us and tell you that it is possible for us to give you help and comfort. I want to make your life brighter.

Dear Uncle I can come to you and often do but my own friends do not know me or feel me as you do. We are feeling that there has been a change in your life. One by one the props fallen that you leaned upon one by one have you felt your hopes had died out but it is not

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so it is not true, for there are no dead, and we you call so are your most constant watchers.

I have been to my home and they know me not. I have tried to bring about all that I could for you. I know you feel lonesome at home in your life. I will help you. Phidelia

Other undated, unnumbered letters refer to relatives who are dead but apparently cannot communicate with Edward. In one, Mary mentions “brother Daniel,” who may be his brother-in-law, Daniel Bigelow (1826-?):<sup>28</sup>

Amanda wants me to tell you this that brother Daniel is here but cannot write himself I will come again

Your loving Mary Edwards

#### AN “UNSETTLED MATTER”

Two letters, perhaps written in late 1889, from Mary and Edward’s sister Zeviah, run one after the other, implying that they were done in one sitting with the medium. The document also states that Edward is not at home for the communication and may have traveled to the medium’s residence. The letter is signed by the medium, Mrs. L. E. Ball, Montague, Massachusetts.

In this mysterious dual letter, Mary hints at an “unsettled matter” between herself and someone she cannot name. She also states that she feels “all right” about someone named “James,” and that something good will come his way well before the end of the year. She mentions that Edward may receive some money.

Mary’s father, Buckley Stone, resided until his death in 1881, at the age of 84, with his other daughter, Octavia, who was married to James W. Russell. The Edwards and Russell families both lived in Keene, New Hampshire, until Edward sold his business and moved to Brattleboro in 1872. The “James” Mary refers to may have been her brother-in-law. Was “the good coming to James” his election victory as alderman in Keene’s second ward in November 1889?<sup>29</sup>

Now I have something to say to you about the little matter I left unsettled between myself and a certain person whose name I cannot give. I wish you would tell James I feel all right toward him and hope sometime to meet him ~~so we can~~ where I can have a conversation with him. He will have something good come to him before this year passes away. My sister is dear as ever to me [dear . . . me inserted with a caret] and I am always near her. I want to say to you be careful of your health do not tax your strength too much at your time of life you ought to give up all care as much as possible and take all the comfort you can. I am glad of the opportunities I have come to com-

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municate with you and will if possible show myself in materialized form before you here or at least very soon don't wait if you feel inclined to go for I will come at some other time and place. Your wife has some news that will surprise you when you get home like them I am with them at the first meal you take after you get home. The money you felt doubtful of getting will come all right, and you will be glad for the other party's take more than your own. You would ask if I am happy I am very well contented but shall be far happier when you come to join me here. Not yet, not yet.

The second letter, again perhaps written in late 1889, begins on the same page as Mary's, and is from his sister Zeviah. It also reassures Edward of this new place where his relatives dwell and reaffirms the "souls immortality."

My dear brother, I am glad you ask for me to come and with a few words I will tell you we are all together in a home here which seems as real to us as ever our earthly home. I do not regret the past as I feel that I did my duty as far as I could under existing circumstances.

I have not much to write about for you know I never cared to write much I hope you will always be as well off as you are now and have more proof every day of your life at the souls immortality. Your sister Zeviah Mrs. L. E. Ball, Montague Mass.

#### JOHN SAUNDERS OR JOHN SANDERSON

Two of the more perplexing letters are from Amanda; they have the same content except for the named person within each letter. In the first letter, perhaps written in late 1889, "John Saunders" is mentioned, and in the second identical letter the name written is "John Sanderson." Was this a transcription error by the medium or really two different men?

Yes, dear husband I will come first for I was first in your heart and love but do not think I am unhappy in you having taken the steps you did after I left for your comfort and welfare was what I cared most for.

Yours has been a checkered life but the last ten years have been more to you than all the rest of your life.

Sister Sarah is here with me and John Saunders [written as John Sanderson in second letter] is one of your band. You may think it strange that he should come but if you will take a little pains [this word is inserted vertically] to find out you will not wonder ask the old gentlemen that often meets you at the store.

Who was John Saunders/Sanderson, and what does she mean by "[he] is one of your band"? *The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals* has a searchable archive,

which refers to a printed lecture on Spiritualism given by George Baldwin, a pastor at the First Baptist Church of Troy, New York. The lecture was sponsored by the “Young Men’s Convenant Band,” on whose committee was a John Saunders.<sup>30</sup> Is it possible that through the Spiritualist association network Saunders may have been an acquaintance of Edwards, and the “band” referred to in the letter may have been his committee? Troy, New York, is seventy-five miles from Brattleboro, but I have been unable to find any other evidence linking the two men.

#### THE WILL

The most poetic communication in the set of letters comes from Mary Edwards in the last letter from the set:

Nov 23 1889

My Dear Companion

The birds of Hope are ever singing within your soul.

The lilies of Youth ever brighten and beautify your lonely pathway.

The shadow that some times over take you soon flee away. You know that loved ones wait at the Portals to bear you in to your rest.

Even the little worries and dissatisfactions will all sink out of sight when the morning of spirit life and love breaks for you.

You’ll look back and wonder if these little sand heaps were the mountains that hinders your progression.

Life is a problem that cannot be solved in the final earth life.

What a blessed thought that death is only an entrance to greater knowledge larger sharing and eternal growth.

We shall all be united in the great bond of love.

M. E.

According to his obituary in the *Vermont Phoenix*, “[Edward] died at his home on Prospect Hill of heart disease after an illness of less than 24 hours” on February 12, 1890, just a few months after the last letter from his deceased relative in November 1889.<sup>31</sup> The obituary described him as “a man of rare simplicity and transparency of character, earnest, sincere and faithful in every relation of life, and one whose absolute integrity could be relied upon implicitly.”<sup>32</sup> Edward’s sole living siblings, brother Solomon and sister Mary, died later in 1890.

Edward’s last will was probated on March 29, 1890, at the Marlboro District Court.<sup>33</sup> An estate valued at \$48,460 was appraised, over half of which was his building and equipment related to his carriage trade. He bequeathed his house and all his real estate in Brattleboro to his

Nov 23-1889

My Dear Companion,  
 The birds of Hope  
 are ever singing, write in  
 your soul.  
 The birds of Faith ever  
 brighten and beautify your  
 lonely pathway.  
 The shadows that some-  
 times overtake you soon  
 flee away. You know  
 that loved ones wait at  
 the Portals to bear you  
 in to your rest.

Letter sent to Edward  
 Edwards of Brattle-  
 boro, Vermont, by his  
 deceased second wife,  
 Mary, through an un-  
 identified medium,  
 dated 23 November  
 1889. Courtesy of the  
 Brattleboro Historical  
 Society.

Earthly little worries and  
 dissatisfactions will all  
 sink out of sight, when  
 the morning of spirit life  
 and love breaks for you.

You'll look back and  
 wonder if those little  
 sand heaps were the  
 mountains that hindered  
 your progression.

Life is a problem  
 that cannot be solved  
 in the final earth life.

What a blessed thought  
 that death is only an  
 entrance to greater knowl-  
 edge larger charity and

eternal growth.

We shall all be reunited  
 in the great bond of  
 love.

M. E.

nephew, Abbott S. Edwards, with a condition that he would pay \$100 to Edward's niece, Florence Russell of Keene, New Hampshire, to arrange the erection of a monument with a "suitable inscription" on his burial lot in Woodland Cemetery, in Keene, the town where he had spent some thirty years of his life.<sup>34</sup> He also bequeathed to Abbott and wife Emily all his household furniture. The remainder of the estate, after claims were paid, went to his niece, Florence Russell, and to Florence McGill of Moline, Illinois, who was the granddaughter of his brother William. There were some small claims on the estate, but none was from his relatives or the mediums.

### MANUSCRIPT

The Edwards letters are housed at the Brattleboro Historical Society, History and Research Room, 230 Main St., Brattleboro, Vermont, on the third floor of the Brattleboro Municipal Center. There are no cataloging or accession numbers for this collection. The donation came to the Society in 1995 from a great-great grandniece and Brattleboro resident, Dorothy (Edwards) Robbins (1905-2003). A letter of inquiry to clarify the persons mentioned in the letters sent from BHS volunteer Mary Lou Buchanan to Dorothy's sister, Mrs. Harry M. Ketcham (Clarissa Edwards, 1912-2002), elicited a response providing valuable genealogical information. Dorothy and Clarissa grew up in Brattleboro in the Edward Edwards home.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Karen Abbott, "The Fox Sisters and the Rap on Spiritualism," Smithsonian.com Blog, 30 October 2012, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-fox-sisters-and-the-rap-on-spiritualism-99663697/>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 109. See also the historical novel based on Achsa Sprague's life and papers: Sara Rath, *Seven Years of Grace: The Inspired Mission of Achsa W. Sprague* (Barre, Vt.: Vermont Historical Society, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> T. P. James, ed., *Summerland Messenger. A Journal of Art, Literature and Science, for the Progressive Lyceum and the Family Fireside* (1874-1876?), Brattleboro, Vt., then Boston, and Amherst, Mass. See the International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals database with images, [http://www.iapsop.com/archive/materials/summerland\\_messenger/](http://www.iapsop.com/archive/materials/summerland_messenger/) (hereafter cited as *IAPSOP*), accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Abbott, "The Fox Sisters," paragraph 15.

<sup>5</sup> "Vermont Spiritualist Convention," *The Burlington [Vermont] Weekly Sentinel*, 8 June 1860, p.2, col.6, GenealogyBank.com, <http://genealogybank.com>, accessed 24 February 2018.

<sup>6</sup> "Spiritualist Convention," *Vermont Phoenix and Record and Farmer* (Brattleboro), 7 April 1882, image 2, column 6, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, database with images, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>7</sup> George Sheldon, *A History of Deerfield, Massachusetts: The Times When the People* [etc.]... (Deerfield, Mass: Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, 1896), 2: 921, <https://books.google.com>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>8</sup> "Edward Edwards," obituary, *The Vermont Phoenix* (Brattleboro), 14 February 1890, image 2, column 7, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>10</sup> “Vermont, Vital Records, 1720-1908,” database and digital images, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), accessed 15 November 2017, entry for Edward Edwards, 3 May 1841, Guilford, Windham County, Vermont; citing State of Vermont, Vermont Vital Records through 1870.

<sup>11</sup> “New Hampshire, Marriage and Divorce Records, 1659–1947,” database and digital images, <http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 30 December 2017, entry for Edward Edwards, 12 September 1861, Keene, Cheshire County, New Hampshire; citing New Hampshire Bureau of Vital Records, Concord, New Hampshire.

<sup>12</sup> Letters from the Edwards siblings and wives via mediums Mrs. Cheney, L. E. Ball, and Mrs. Samuel Thompson to Edward Edwards, 1886–November 1889; Edward Edwards Letters, “Letters” box, Research Room, Brattleboro Historical Society.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Lou Buchanan (Brattleboro Historical Society volunteer) to Mrs. [Clarissa] Ketcham, 1 August 1995; Edward Edwards Letters, “Letters” box.

<sup>14</sup> 1860 United States Census, Cheshire County, New Hampshire, population schedule Keene, page 65 (stamped), dwelling 445, family 506, Lorenzo Cheney, database with images, <http://ancestry.com>, accessed 30 December 2017; citing NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 668.

<sup>15</sup> “Montague,” *Turners Falls (Mass.) Reporter*, 3 July 1901, p.3, The Montague Public Library Digital Archive, <http://montague.advantage-preservation.com>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, “Diverse Communities: Research Spiritualist Ancestors,” Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Springboard-News and Notes*, blog, posted 11 February 2016, <http://bcgcertification.org/diverse-communities-researching-spiritualist-ancestors/>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>17</sup> “Lake Pleasant,” *The Light of Truth*, 19 August 1893 (vol. 13, no. 7), p.1, *IAPSOP* database, <http://www.iapsop.com/archive/materials>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>18</sup> “Inducing Trance,” *IAPSOP* database, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>19</sup> “From Well Established Roots,” accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>20</sup> “List of Members” [New England Campmeeting Association (1879)], *IAPSOP* database, [http://www.iapsop.com/spirithistory/1879\\_lake\\_pleasant\\_spiritualist\\_campmeeting\\_association.html](http://www.iapsop.com/spirithistory/1879_lake_pleasant_spiritualist_campmeeting_association.html), accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>21</sup> William S. Moses, *Direct Writing by Supernormal Means* (London: Office of “Light,” 1882?, 3rd edition), 14, [http://www.iapsop.com/ssoc/1882\\_\\_moses\\_\\_direct\\_writing\\_by\\_supernormal\\_means.pdf](http://www.iapsop.com/ssoc/1882__moses__direct_writing_by_supernormal_means.pdf), accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>22</sup> “Land of sunshine” is code for the afterlife. The phrase appears 888 times in the *IAPSOP* database, <http://www.iapsop.com/search.html>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 134.

<sup>24</sup> “Trying the Spirits,” *IAPSOP* database, [http://www.iapsop.com/spirithistory/spirit\\_materialization.html](http://www.iapsop.com/spirithistory/spirit_materialization.html), accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> “The Spiritualist Convention,” *Vermont Phoenix*, 7 April 1882, p.2, [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/8841612/34th\\_annual\\_spiritualist\\_convention/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/8841612/34th_annual_spiritualist_convention/), accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Almira Larkin White, *Genealogy of the Ancestors and Descendants of John White of Wenham and Lancaster, Massachusetts, 1638-1900*, vol. 1, (Haverhill, Mass.: Chase Brothers, 1900), 521, <https://books.google.com>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>29</sup> “Election Results,” *New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), 11 December 1889, vol. 91, issue 50:8, at GenealogyBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>30</sup> George Baldwin, *The Witch of Endor and Modern Spiritism* (Troy, N.Y.: Times Books Printing Establishment, 1872), *IAPSOP* database, <http://www.iapsop.com/>, accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Vermont State Archives and Records Administration, “Vital Records, 1720-1908” database with images, <http://ancestry.com>, accessed 30 December 2017; death record for Edward Edwards, image 919; citing State of Vermont, Vermont Vital Records, 1871–1908; New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>32</sup> “Edward Edwards,” obituary.

<sup>33</sup> “Vermont, Wills And Probate Records, 1749-1999,” database and digital images, <http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 30 December 2017, entry for Edward Edwards, 3 December 1886, Brattleboro, Windham County, Vermont; citing Probate Records, 1781-1918; Vermont. Probate Court Marlboro District; Windham County, Vermont, Probate Records, Vol 33, 1887-1888; Vol 34-35, 1888-1892; Vol 36, 1892-1895.

<sup>34</sup> “Edward Edwards,” Woodland Cemetery, Keene, New Hampshire, memorial 128870243, *Find-A-Grave*, database with images, <http://findagrave.com>, accessed 30 December 2017.