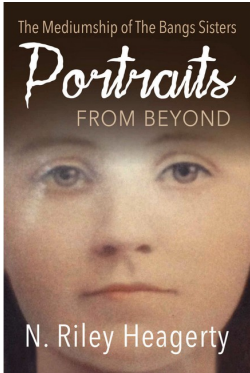


Portraits From Beyond: The Mediumship of the Bangs Sisters

by N. Riley Heagerty



The Bangs sisters were genuine mediums with a very unusual gift. Through the extraordinary mediumship of the Bangs sisters they developed the ability to produce full color 'precipitated paintings' produced by a spirit guide. This occurred in broad daylight without either of them touching the canvas!

Author N. Riley Heagerty offers the testimony of two "debunkers" who had their theories as to how the two sisters duped people, but he then discusses the weakness of their theories. He concludes with

his opinion that the Bangs sisters were mediums of the highest level. Again, I don't know how anyone can look at the portraits and the testimony as to how they were produced and believe otherwise.

Lizzie and May Bangs were sisters living in Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through whose mediumship slate writing and 'precipitated spirit paintings' occurred. Little has been written about them and N. Riley Heagerty has sought to fill the gap by gathering contemporary accounts from books, journals and newspapers, both for and against the pair, with examples of the



portraits produced during their mediumship. This is a compilation of contemporary accounts with commentary.



According to Mr. Heagerty, Elizabeth Bangs (known as Lizzie) was born in 1859, and Mary (known as May) was born in 1862. Their mother was a medium and they themselves became mediums in childhood, allowing a lengthy apprenticeship before they struck out on their own. In 1874 they appear to have experienced a poltergeist, and according to their mother, Meroe, this was the beginning of their communication with

spirits. They exhibited a wide range of phenomena, including materialization; they practiced clairvoyance, clairaudience, automatic writing, slate writing, and even communication by typewriter whereby messages would appear on the machine with no apparent human intervention.

Mr. Heagerty also devotes part of the book to messages conveyed by means of writing on blank pages inserted between two slates along with specific questions, often in an envelope, the slates then secured by stout rubber bands. Intelligible responses to questions posed by sitters, apparently written by spirit communicators, were then obtained.

The precipitated paintings, beginning in 1894, are the most noteworthy aspect of their mediumship. Precipitated art is defined as spirit art formed without the intervention of the medium. The portraits produced during the Bangs sisters' séances were produced generally

by propping a pair of framed canvases on a table in front of a window, with the curtains pulled around them. A picture would gradually appear, sometimes the details being altered, or the eyes opening, as the sitters watched. For example, in one case a portrait



appeared with the subject sporting a full beard; however when the sitters pointed out that in his later years he had trimmed his beard to a goatee, the portrait changed, so where a full beard had been before, now there was a goatee. In another sitting, a sitter had a photograph of the deceased relative in his pocket, but this was not shown to anyone. The portrait was identical to the photograph, but the individual portrayed, while he had been in the habit of wearing a Masonic pin, had not had it on when posing for the original photograph, and hence it was not present in the precipitated painting. In response to a *mental request* by the sitter, a pin was added to the portrait in the same position it had been worn in life.



A dubious aspect is that sitters often brought a photograph of the person whom they wished to contact. Working against this theory in Mr Ghose's case was the fact that the painting had captured his deceased son's particular colouring, which could not be ascertained from a black and white image. That implied the artistic intelligence was working from more than a photograph.

It has been claimed that the sisters' output was produced more quickly than a human painter would be able to work, and secondly they have no visible brush strokes. [The Hett Gallery at Camp Chesterfield](#)

[in Indiana](#) has 26 of the Bangs' precipitated portraits. Get the book on [Amazon](#).