

Biography of Sophia Williams

Sophia Williams is most remembered as the medium used by researcher Hamlin Garland in uncovering buried crosses to which he was directed by spirits, as explained in Garland's 1939 book, *The Mystery of the Buried Crosses*. Williams was primarily a non-professional direct-voice medium and the author of a 1946 book, *You are Psychic*. She was from Chicago, Illinois, and lived for a time in California, but little else is known about her personal life, including her dates of birth and death.

Garland, then living in California, recalled receiving a letter from Dr. Nora Rager of Chicago, which read: "Will you permit my friend, Mrs. Sophia Williams, to call upon you? She is a remarkable psychic, but not a professional medium. She makes no charge for her sittings and, as she is now in Los Angeles, I hope you will see her. I am sure she would interest you. She has given many demonstrations of her power here in my office in the presence of several of my fellow practitioners. She produces independent voices in the light."¹

At the request of Dr. Rager, Dr. Leon H. Poundstone, a dentist, wrote to Garland telling of his experience with her. He said that he had placed a synthetic filling in one of her teeth and while holding the celluloid matrix in place for the three-minute duration required for the material to set, his dead wife began talking to him. Her voice came in "very distinctly," he reported. "Mrs. Williams' mouth was wide open, I had one hand in her mouth holding the matrix, her head was tipped back and her throat full of saliva," Poundstone wrote.²

Garland recorded that when he first met Williams, in July 1937, he was favorably impressed. He described her as young, attractive, and apparently perfectly normal in mind and body. "She answered all my questions with hu-

morous understanding of their inner significance," he added.³ She informed him that she was not a trance medium and did not require darkness, not even a red light. Nor did she require flowers, prayers, a particular time of the day, or any paraphernalia except a trumpet or megaphone, which was to amplify the voices. Moreover, she declined payment for her services.



Williams immediately impressed Garland with her psychic and mediumistic gifts. As a first test, she accurately psychometrized an object that Garland handed her. Then, in full light, Garland heard the voice of his old friend, Henry Fuller. It was necessary to place the large end of the trumpet against Williams' breast and for Garland to listen on the small end. The voice became stronger as Garland spoke to it. Since Garland had mentioned Fuller in a previous book, he reasoned that Williams could have read the book. Thus, it was not particularly evidential, even if the voice sounded like Fuller's. But then another voice broke in and identified himself as Lorado, his brother-in-law who had died the previous Octo-

ber. This was more evidential since Garland was reasonably certain that Williams could not have known of him. Moreover, Garland noted that Fuller addressed him as "Garland," while Lorado addressed him as "Hamlin," just as they had done when alive.

The most convincing evidence came, however, when a voice addressed the stenographer, Gaylord Beaman. "Gay, this is Harry," the voice was heard. When asked for a last name, "Friedlander" was given. The astonished Beaman explained to Garland that Harry Friedlander was a friend who died in a plane crash in San Francisco Bay. The spirit then gave some details concerning the crash.⁴

After the first few sittings with Williams, Garland devised a transmitting box with 60 feet of wire connecting with another box containing a receiver and amplifier. The purpose was to isolate the medium from his questions to the spirit communicators. With the medium two rooms away and behind two closed doors in Garland's home, she could neither hear Garland's questions nor see what he was pointing to or looking at, and since the spirits answered him with detailed information, Garland concluded that this was further evidence that Williams was not providing the answers.

Following the series of sittings with Williams, Garland concluded that she was the person who could best help him in his search for some mysterious buried crosses. A number of crosses and other artifacts allegedly unearthed by Gregory and Violet Parent between 1914 and 1924 had been given to Garland two years earlier by Gregory Parent, who told Garland that his wife was directed to them by "dead souls." They were said to be buried by North American Indians during the missionary period of California. Gregory Parent informed Garland that the communicating spirits told him that there were more to be found, but his wife had died. Having read of Garland's interest in psychic phenomena, Parent suggested that Garland might want to follow up.

Garland and Williams then set out to find additional buried artifacts. The spirits would tell them where to go, where to stop, which direction to walk, and then where to dig. They found 16 artifacts, similar in substance and design to those collected by the Parents, in 10 widely separated locations. Some were in deep gullies, others high on cactus-covered hills far from the highway. One was hidden in a ledge of sandstone behind a wall of cactus plants which Garland had to chop away before finding it.

The mystery of the buried crosses remains as one of the most intriguing and evidential cases in the annals of psychical research.

In her 1946 book, Williams wrote that she became interested in psychic phenomena after seeing a few demonstrations of various kinds and then reading books on the subject. She decided to see if she could develop as a psychic. "For four years I sat quietly each day learning the art of relaxation and complete detachment," she wrote. "During those years I advanced my knowledge through information received by raps, automatic writing, clairvoyance, and clairaudience. At times when my family and friends took part in sittings, partial materializations also appeared. After four years of these extraordinarily interesting experiences we suddenly began to hear a squeaky high sound in our home. We looked about to see if it came from steam radiators or loose boards. Finally, we became aware of the fact that the noise sounded like words being spoken."⁵ Williams went on to explain that at first the voice was weak and difficult to understand, but as she developed and began using the trumpet, the voices became clearer. She added that the voices came through in many different languages. She stressed the need to achieve absolute relaxation as a first step and then sit in a state of expectancy with the mind cleared of all conscious thoughts and memories. "Conscious thought must be avoided – consciously trying not to think is thinking," she pointed out.⁶ She further mentioned that the moment one begins to analyze the process, the production

stops and that an open mind is an absolute necessity.

As Williams came to understand the direct-voice method of mediumship, the spirits use teleplasm (ectoplasm) to mold an artificial voice box and make sounds which are recognizable as a sort of toneless human speech.

“I am certain that much of the information and phenomena I receive comes through intermediaries, those personalities who exist in another space dimension or function at a higher rate of frequency,” she wrote. “It is apparent to me that when these personalities pass into the next dimension they carry with them all of the habits, faults, and ideas, which they retain until they learn to progress.”⁷



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¹ Garland, Hamlin, *The Mystery of the Buried Crosses*, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1939, p. 48.

² _____, p. 319.

³ _____, p. 48.

⁴ _____, p. 52.

⁵ Williams, Sophia, *You Are Psychic*, Murray & Gee, 1946, pp. 75-76.

⁶ _____, p. 26.

⁷ _____, pp. 55-56.