

Pioneer of the Month

Correcting the
Historical Record

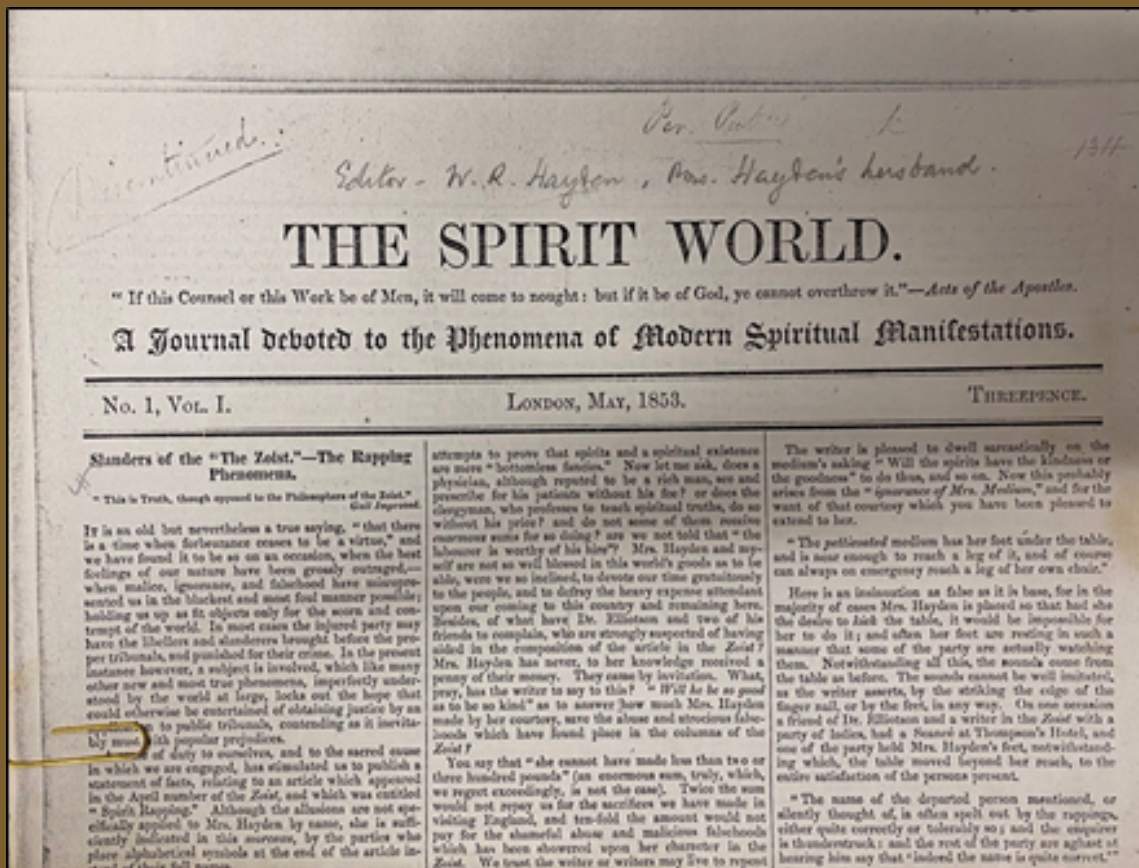


Pioneer of the Month

Correcting the Historical Record: The First Spiritualist Newspaper Published in the U.K.[1] —Sharon DeBartolo Carmack DSNU

It's been a long-held belief that David Richmond, with the help of David Weatherhead, of West Yorkshire, published the first Spiritualist newspaper in Britain called *The Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph* in 1855. But this isn't quite accurate.

In May 1853, William R. Hayden, husband of Maria B. Hayden, the American medium who brought Spiritualism to the U.K., actually published the first Spiritualist newspaper in Britain. It was called *The Spirit World: A Journal Devoted to the Phenomena of Modern Spiritual Manifestations*. [2]



[1] This article is excerpted from Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, *In Search of Maria B. Hayden: The American Medium Who Brought Spiritualism to the U.K.* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Scattered Leaves Press, 2020), available on all Amazon marketplaces.

[2] A copy of *The Spirit World* is archived at the British Library in London and in the Catherine Crowe Collection, University of Kent Special Collections and Archives, ref. Crowe/Bio/F191887.

An editor and newspaperman in America, Hayden decided to published his eight-page newspaper in response to the negative press his wife was receiving. His lead article/editorial refutes the claims made by Dr. John Elliotson that Maria was a fraud.

Some of William's English friends advised him against such a retaliation, saying that William did not sufficiently understand the English mind, and he would end up doing himself and Maria more harm than good. His friends felt he should take a dignified approach and stay silent.[3]

But William forged ahead.

The rest of the newspaper consists of reprinted articles and letters of interest from other publications supporting Spiritualism, such as *The Leader* (London), *Spiritual Telegraph* (New York), *The Times* (London), and the *Morning Post* (London). He also published communications from spirits and testimonials for Maria's mediumship.

William, like Maria, also helped others develop their mediumship by publishing in *The Spirit World* guidelines for development. He suggested sitting for half an hour without any distractions with the intent to connect with the spirit world. He reminded the reader it may take more time, but half an hour is good to start.

In sitting for the *rappings*, sounds, or movement of articles, it is better to sit in a circle of six or eight persons around a table, remaining very quiet, for an hour each evening.

There is no objection to conversation, so long as there is no debate or argument.

Admit no new member into your circle after it is formed, if it can be avoided, as it disturbs the harmony, and will require a longer period.

On no account admit a scoffer or jester into the circle, as he will prevent success. When the sounds are heard, let one member of the circle ask the spirit to designate who are the mediums. After ascertaining who is the medium or mediums, let the one named take a common alphabet, and desire that the spirit should give the circle further directions; but do not ask frivolous questions, as by so doing you will receive like answers.

[3] William R. Hayden, "Seven Years with the Spirits," *Banner of Light*, 30 Jul. 1857, p. 3.

William assured the reader that this was the method used in the United States, and that some mediums developed “without any preparation or desire on their own part.”[4]

After William’s newspaper and editorial appeared, several of his friends recanted their original opinions, agreeing that much good came for the cause of Spiritualism. “The only bad effect arising from its publication that we are aware of,” William wrote in his memoir, “was that it sorely annoyed Dr. Elliottson [*sic*], and he worked himself into a ‘towering passion,’ at our audacity and presumption. By Dr. Elliottson’s cowardly conduct towards us, he lost many of his warmest friends and able supporters....”[5]

William’s newspaper was a one-off, but it was none the less *the first* Spiritualist newspaper published in Britain. It would be more accurate to say that Richmond and Weatherhead’s newspaper was the first *continuously published* Spiritualist newspaper in Britain, thereby giving William R. Hayden his rightful place in Spiritualist history.

[4] *The Spirit World*, May 1853, p. 6.

[5] Hayden, “Seven Years with the Spirits,” *Banner of Light*, 30 Jul. 1857, p. 3.