

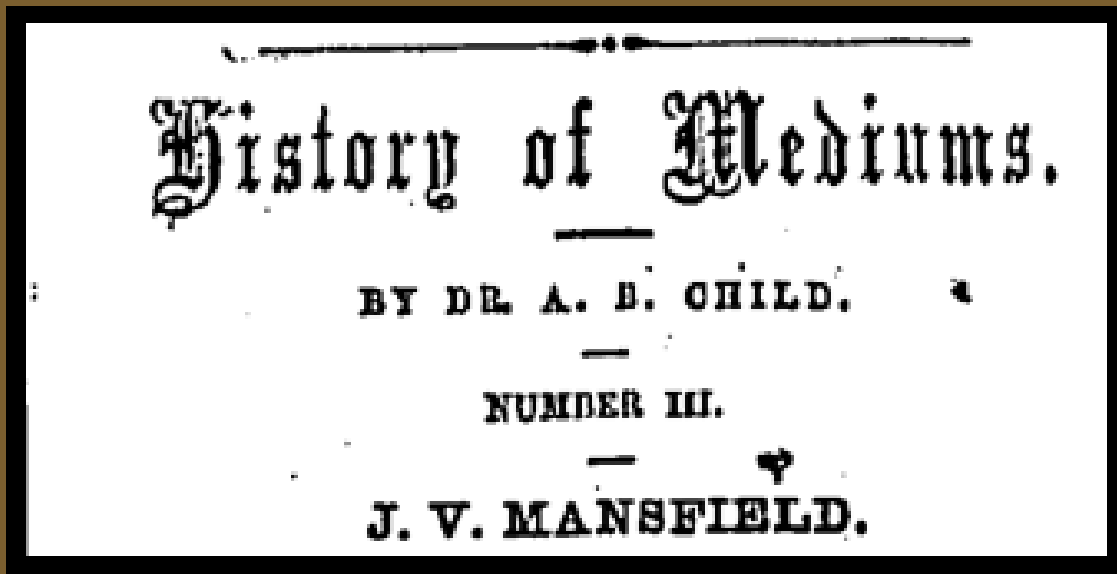
Pioneer of the Month

James V. Mansfield



Once again, we bring you another little-known pioneer I discovered while researching the biography of Maria B. Hayden, M.D. This profile of James V. Mansfield (1817-1899), writing medium, comes from the 19 June 1858 issue of Banner of Light, pages 7-8, and was written by Dr. Asaph Bemis Child. It's a long profile, so I have abridged it here.

—Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, MFA, DSNU



Mr. Mansfield is well known to to [sic] the public as a writing medium of extraordinary and peculiar developments.

We propose to sketch—but very briefly—a history of his mediumship, and some incidents of his early life, that may have favored his medium development.

Mr. M. is a member of the Methodist Church, in “good standing,” and has been for seventeen years past.

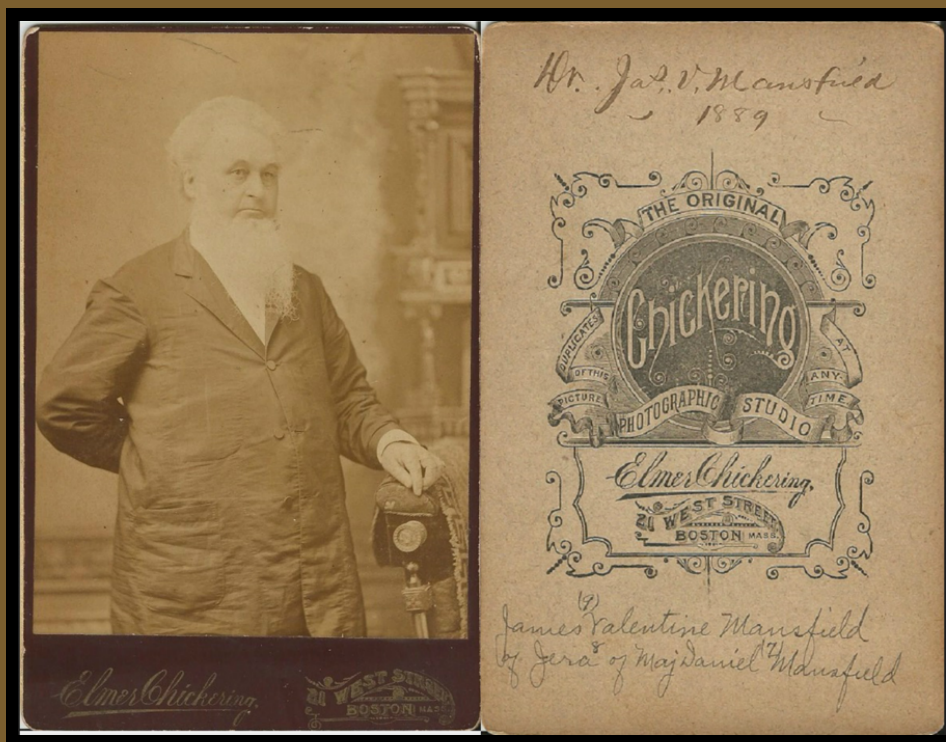
He was born in Southbridge [Massachusetts], in the year 1817.[1] At the age of seventeen, he had a very severe attack of typhus fever, by which his system was so much prostrated and enfeebled, that he was confined to his bed, in an almost helpless condition, for three years. There may not be a doubt but that this long and painful illness had a mighty, though unseen

[1] According to the vital records of Dudley, Mass., “Volentine Mansfield,” was born there on 8 Apr. 1817 to Jera and Lucretia Mansfield. Massachusetts, Town Birth Records, 1620-1850, Ancestry.com. The parents' names match the information in the death records for James V. Mansfield in Ipswich, Mass., died 2 June 1899, but give his birthplace as Southbridge, Mass., and his mother's maiden name as Lucretia Corbin. Massachusetts, Death Records, 1841-1915, Ancestry.com. For more information about Mansfield, see “The Spirit Postmaster: Some Notes on J. V. Mansfield, Part One,” by Marc Demarest, <http://ehbritten.blogspot.com/2013/06/the-spirit-postmaster-some-notes-on-j-v.html>

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and unrecognized influence in developing and preparing him for his present usefulness as a medium, though near twenty years have elapsed since his recovery.

From his earliest recollections in life, to the present time, Mr. M. has seen spirits almost daily. He sees them really and tangibly, and converses with them as mortal converses with mortal; he hears their voices as he hears the voice of any mortal, and answers the same. He calls spirits at his pleasure, and seldom fails to get a response. In this way he gets information that is interesting and useful in his every-day life. How beautiful, how pleasant, how valuable is this power; it is the key to the fountain of knowledge, and the gateway to power, freedom, and heaven.... Many, many times, when he has been alone, spirits have audibly spoken to him, and have warned him of approaching danger, and have told him of coming events; and he has found their prophecies ever reliable and truthful. This capacity of communing with spirits in a normal condition,[2] has, through his whole life, gradually increased, and is greater now than at any previous time.



Photograph posted on FindAGrave.com, Memorial #184854894.

At Mr. Mansfield's first sitting in a circle of Spiritualists, it was communicated to him through another medium—"Sit one hour in fifty-four consecutive days, and you will be a writing medium." This he did; and on the fifty-fourth day his hand was mechanically moved to write.

[2] That is, fully conscious and not in a trance state.

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Shortly after, Mr. Mansfield was developed as a medium for answering sealed letters; and so many applications were made to him, that he was forced to choose between his former business[3] and this, and deeming that it was his duty to devote himself to the cause, he chose the latter alternative, sacrificing, therefore considerable pecuniary interest.

Since, modern Spiritualism has caused him to recognize his medium powers in other directions, which is about three years; through him doors have been opened and shut without physical touch; tables have been raised eighteen inches from the floor without contact with any person or any thing, and suspended in mid-air a number of seconds in the open light, and no person within a number of feet of them; to these manifestations many persons can bear witness....

Mr. M's tie, for the last three years, has been devotedly given to answering sealed letters, without breaking the seal.[4] Sealed generally in such a way as to preclude the possibility of reading them, or knowing what they contain, without opening them. The spirits move his right hand to give the answer while his left hand is held in contact with the letter. Thus he writes answers, and returns the letters, with the answer written through his hand to the writer, or answers the letter in the presence of the person who wrote it. Every answer given is an answer to the questions contained in the letters. The average number of letters sent for answers, and returned without answers, is one in every five; and four in every five are answered with correctness; and every answer has a test.

13	611 791	James V. Mansfield	42	M	Writing Medium	5,800	3,500	Mass				
13		Mary H. "	32	f				Nt				
14		John W. "	11	M				Seam	1			
15		Mary G. "	6	f				Mass	1			
16		Mary Lake	41	f	Seamstress	1	2,500	Eng				
17		Mary Byan	30	f	Servant	2	500	Ire				

1860 U.S. federal census, Massachusetts, Suffolk Co., Chelsea, p. 773, Ancestry.com. James V. Mansfield was forty-two, his wife Mary H. was thirty-two, his son, John W. was eleven, and his daughter Mary G. was six. Also in his household were two domestics: Mary Lake, born in England, age forty-one, a seamstress, and Mary Byan, born in Ireland, age thirty, a servant. This census shows his occupation is "writing medium," with the value of his real estate at \$5,800 and the value of his personal property at \$3,500. Both were considerable sums for that day. The value of his real estate today would be about \$176,815 and his personal property about \$106,698.

[3] According to the 1855 Massachusetts State Census, Suffolk Co., Chelsea, p. 29, Ancestry.com, he was a "trader."

[4] Mansfield, according to his obituary, became known as the "spirit postmaster." *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 7 June 1899, p. 4, GenealogyBank.com.

DR. J. V. MANSFIELD

Ipswich, June 6—Dr. J. V. Mansfield, who was well known throughout the world among those who accept the philosophy of Spiritualism as the "spirit postmaster," died Saturday.

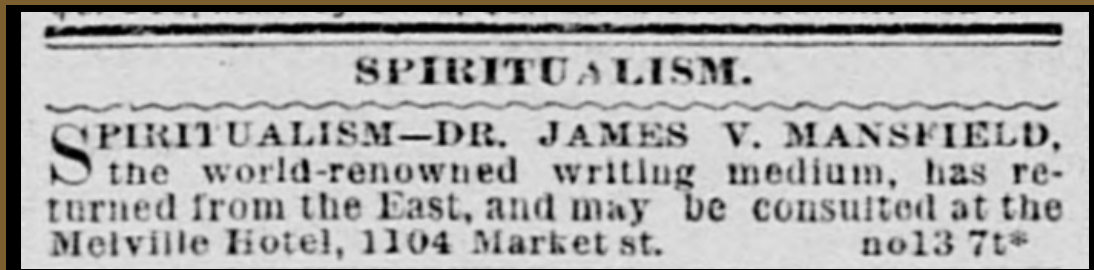
From the days of the infancy of that belief until within a very few years Dr. Mansfield had been a central figure in the spiritualistic ranks.

Dr. Mansfield became a member of the firm of Hibbard & Mansfield, doing business on State st., Boston.

The term postmaster, so long used in connection with his work, was really a misnomer. His claim was that the letters used were dictated to him through a muscular movement of the index finger of his right hand; that the same movements which are used by a telegrapher were used through him by the unseen power which he averred controlled him.

Dr. Mansfield claimed that from childhood, even before he could talk plain, he was able to distinguish forms, which to other members of the family circle of which he formed a part were not visible.

The philosophy of answering letters in this way, no science on earth can explain, independent of the recognition of some unseen power and intelligence. In the last three years Mr. M. has written thirty-one thousand answers to letters, twenty-one thousand of which have been written and sent free, without any pay, or any demand for pay; about ten thousand he has received compensation for, which compensation has fallen short of the expenditures of his family, during that time, and office expenses....



Advertisement in the San Francisco Call, 15 Nov. 1890, p. 4, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

From skeptics he has had very severe and unkind things said and written to him. But these sayings he passes over as easily as he can, without allowing them to turn him or change his course, for he knows that he is doing right,—he is fulfilling a good mission....

Sealed letters have been written to him for answers in Hebrew, Greek, Spanish, French and Chinese, and, correct answers have been returned written in the same language through Mr. M.'s hand, which languages to him are perfectly unknown....

Seventy-four portraits of spirits have been painted by artists, alone from the description written through Mr. M.'s hand. Sixty-one of the seventy-four have been recognized by the friends of spirits as being good likenesses of them before their decease.

Mr. M. is visited by all classes of men; mostly by men of thought and research; ministers of all denominations, from all parts of the country, have sought to test his powers, or commune with spirit friends through him.... [There follows several detailed examples. The writer says there are more examples that could fill many volumes.[5]]

What is recorded here is enough to show Mr. M.'s extraordinary medium developments; and more than enough to convince and satisfy any mind divested of prejudice, and imbued with reason, in the recognition of powers acting through his organism foreign to his own intelligence.

[5] The James V. Mansfield Papers are housed at the University of Michigan, Clements Library, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clementsead/umich-wcl-M-2930man?id=navbarbrowselink;view=text>. The site also gives a biography of him.