



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: Postscript: The Ghost in the Camera

Full Citation: Donald Cunningham, "Postscript: The Ghost in the Camera," *Nebraska History* 87 (2006):140

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH2006PSGhost.pdf>

Date: 7/24/2012

Cataloging Information:

Names: William H Mumler, Mrs L Carter

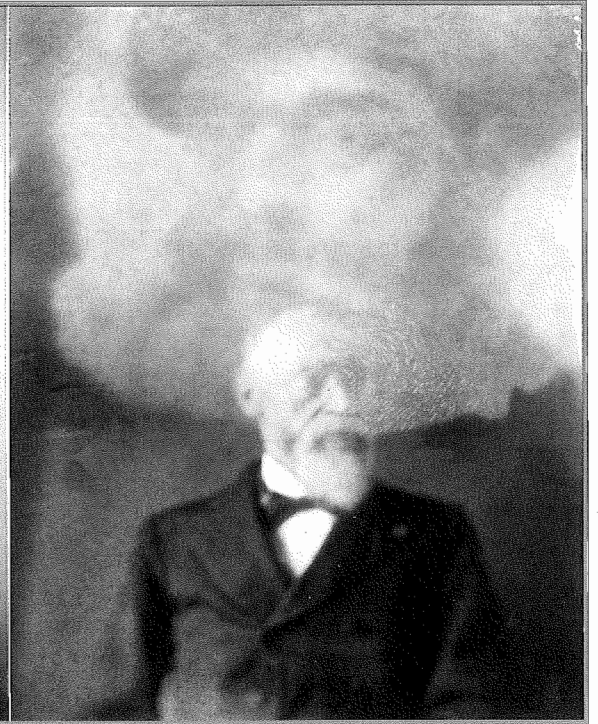
Nebraska Place Names: Lincoln

Keywords: William H Mumler, Spiritualists, Mrs L Carter, spirit photographs

Photographs / Images: two photographs from the Elliott Coues Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, subjects and photographers not identified



NSHS RG3507-11-7



NSHS RG3507-11-6

GHOSTS? SPIRITS? WISPS OF ECTOPLASM? In 1861 Boston photographer William H. Mumler discovered that he could produce a second, “ghostly” image on his photographic plates if he deliberately re-exposed them for a short time. He claimed he had photographed actual ghosts, and using an appropriately costumed (or completely uncostumed) second subject, the double exposures were a perfect way for less-than-ethical Spiritualists—a movement founded on the belief that the spirits of the dead can communicate with the living—to offer photographic “evidence” to those willing (or anxious) to believe in the phenomenon.

The Spiritualist movement was widespread in the years following the Civil War, when bereaved relatives hoped to communicate with sons and husbands killed in battle. In the years 1890–1895 the Lincoln city directory listed five clairvoyants.

The *Lancaster County Daily Fair News* for September 7, 1882, including a front-page classified ad, headlined “Spirit Photography,” that read, “Mrs. L. Carter, spirit photographer, is in town and will take pictures for a short time at Clements gallery, Eleventh street.”

Oddly, spirit photographs had a wide following even though “ghost” images were relatively common in early photographs. Emulsions required long exposure times, and a moving vehicle or a walking person, moving too fast to be “seen” by the emulsion, might briefly pause, allowing a semi-transparent image to be recorded on the plate, then move on without being “seen” again.

These two spirit photographs are from the Elliott Coues Collection at the Nebraska State Historical Society. The subjects and photographers are not identified. ■

DONALD CUNNINGHAM