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Seeking the Sweet Spirit of Harmony: Establishing a Spiritualist Community at Cassadaga, Florida, 1893-1933

by JOHN J. GUTHRIE JR.

IN March of 1899, a prominent Spiritualist from Amelia, Ohio, J. Clegg Wright, sent a letter to a medium residing in Cassadaga, Florida. Wright informed Emma J. Huff that he planned to attend the following year's Spiritualist convention in the Sunshine State. Congratulating her for having a "fairly good meeting this year," he added: "It must be a hard region in which to sow the seed of progressive thought. The South Land is behind. It is cursed by the heel of old religion— a monstrous tyrant. He puts the eyes out of all his subjects."¹ Wright's letter reveals much about the attitudes that many northern Spiritualists held toward the region in which the emerging religious community at Cassadaga had taken root. To some Spiritualists who had never traveled below the Mason-Dixon Line, Florida at that time appeared as a stereotypical southern state populated by people whose values stood in stark contrast to northern culture. Yet at the same time, Wright's letter provokes numerous questions concerning Florida's "spiritual frontier" at the turn of the century. Such queries warrant exploration by historians.

Indeed, only during the last few decades have scholars begun examining the history of Spiritualism in the United States. Much of this work has advanced the notion that mainstream Americans

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1. J. Clegg Wright to Emma J. Huff, Amelia, Ohio, March 25, 1899, Vince Owens Collection, Cassadaga, Florida.

have viewed Spiritualists as religious outsiders.² Accordingly, the Spiritualists' belief that a person's identity and existence continues on after death in the spirit plane, coupled with their conviction that the living can communicate with spirits through the assistance of a medium, posed a serious threat to the creed of the dominant Christian groups. Conventional Protestant churches thus scorned Spiritualism for its unorthodox ways. Neither accepted nor tolerated by the mainstream, Spiritualists found themselves relegated to the margins of American culture.³

Ann Braude has argued that Spiritualism "became a magnet for social radicals," particularly for those who advocated women's rights and the abolition of slavery. Taking Braude's cue, historians are now paying greater attention to Spiritualism and its linkage to nineteenth-century reform movements. Still, these studies all but ignore Spiritualism's place in the twentieth century and have slighted some of the more moderate— if not conservative— aspects of the religion and its followers.⁴

Founded in 1894 by northerners, Cassadaga is the oldest Spiritualist community in the South. Since most scholarship dealing with Spiritualism focuses on the origins and evolution of the faith in the North, an exploration of Cassadaga's history has enormous

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2. Although I have used mainstream-fringe for analytical purposes, two historians question the utility of such conceptual distinctions. See R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York, 1986); Mary Farrell Bednarowski, *New Religions and the Theological Imagination in America* (Bloomington, 1989).
 3. See, for example, Robert W. Delp, "Andrew Jackson Davis: Prophet of American Spiritualism," *Journal of American History* 54 (June 1967), 43-56; Idem, "American Spiritualism and Social Reform, 1847-1900," *Northwest Ohio Quarterly* 44 (Fall 1972), 85-99; R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology and American Culture* (New York, 1977). For the fundamentals of Spiritualism, see *Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp: 1997/98 Annual Program* (Cassadaga, 1997), 9, 26, 36-37.
 4. Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston, 1989). For recent scholarship along these lines, see Richard Kyle, *The Religious Fringe: A History of Alternative Religions in America* (Downers Grove, Ill., 1993); David J. Hess, *Science in the New Age: The Paranormal, Its Defenders and Debunkers, and American Culture* (Madison, 1993); Catherine Wessinger, ed., *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations Outside the Mainstream* (Urbana, 1993); Sally Jean Morita, "Modern Spiritualism and Reform in America" (Ph.D. diss. University of Oregon, 1995). For a recent work that places greater emphasis on the religion's followers, see Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington, 1997).

potential. Clearly, if Spiritualists found themselves “marginalized” in their native North, it seems probable that they would have failed to harmonize with southern culture, which was dominated by Christian fundamentalism. On the one hand, southern Protestants have embraced three basic convictions: that the Bible is the true word of the Lord; that individuals have direct and intimate access to God; and that Christian morality is defined in terms of personal and individual ethics.⁵ On the other hand, Spiritualists— though lacking a creed— believe in an infinite intelligence, affirm that communication with the dead is a proven fact, and abide by the Golden Rule’s decree to treat others as one would treat oneself.⁶

Spiritualism, moreover, stemmed from “nineteenth-century Christian anxieties concerning the ascendancy of science as a master interpretation of the world.” The religion, according to scholar Phillip Charles Lucas, “seeks to reconcile religion and science by empirically demonstrating the survival of the human personality after the death of the physical body.”⁷ Because of this, Spiritualism does not quite jibe with the common convictions of southern Protestants, who may have viewed Spiritualists as religious deviants. And as John B. Boles has noted, a comprehensive history of southern religion would include the so-called nonconformist sects beyond the religious orthodoxy. By most accounts, Spiritualism would fall under this category. A local study of Cassadaga, therefore, promises to further an understanding of southern culture. In fact, historians of the South are just starting to realize how narrowly focused studies can illuminate a region’s development. In a recent and important study of Vicksburg, Mississippi, for instance, Christopher Morris has suggested that the “accepted notions of what we have come to understand as southern culture” may need revising. Likewise, historians may also want to reconsider some of their assumptions about southern religion.⁸

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5. Samuel S. Hill, “Religion,” in Charles Reagan Wilson, William Ferris, Ann J. Abadie, and Mary L. Hart, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 1274.
 6. *Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association: 1894-1994 Centennial Issue* (Cassadaga, 1994), 7.
 7. Gary Monroe, Kristin G. Congdon, John J. Guthrie Jr., Sidney P. Johnston, and Phillip Charles Lucas, *The Spirit of Cassadaga* (Philadelphia, 1997), 3.
 8. John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Essays in Honor of Sandford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge, 1987); Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860* (New York and Oxford, 1995).

With the above in mind, this article investigates the first forty years of the Spiritualist community at Cassadaga. Based primarily on newspaper accounts, church records, and other documents, the following will address several questions including: How did the local Protestants react to this group of religious outsiders? Did they extend the hand of fellowship to the newcomers? Or did locals view the Spiritualists as a threat to community morality and consequently persecute them? In considering these questions, this essay shows that Spiritualists at Cassadaga fit nicely into the mainstream of American middle-class culture, despite their unorthodox faith. They were steeped in Protestant American traditions ranging from capitalism to republicanism. The seemingly ordinariness of Cassadagans explains in part why local Protestants tolerated and accepted Spiritualists living and practicing their unconventional faith in the area. But an equally important factor that explains why locals received the Spiritualists hospitably was that Volusia County at the turn of the century remained an underdeveloped rural agrarian community. Its need of outside capital to spur development, coupled with the notion that expenditures by these so-called religious outsiders would provide this stimulus, prompted many residents to actively encourage the establishment of a permanent Spiritualist camp meeting site in the county.

In 1847, Andrew Jackson Davis, a founder of modern Spiritualism, wrote: "The great movements of the day are all advancing the public to [a] desirable consummation." Advocates for the abolition of slavery, the repeal of capital punishment, the prohibition of alcohol, and other social reforms, Davis suggested, would help establish a universal system of happiness representing "the harmony of all created things, and typify the . . . majesty of the Divine Creator." Although other Spiritualists displayed similar concerns, when agitating for social reform they often remained loath to adopt the radical path blazed by extremists. Instead, they recommended a course of gradual reform taken one step at a time. A more radical approach, they feared, would prove impracticable and destructive. The more moderate world view of Spiritualists became apparent following John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859. With tempers raging in both the North and the South, leading Spiritualists advised restraint. An editorial in the *Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher* renounced the use of force and implored all Americans to come sit down "and reason together." Such moderation led aboli-

tionist Parker Pillsbury to denounce Spiritualists as dead weights in the cause of freedom and progress.⁹

Because of such ridicule, Spiritualists possibly became a bit alienated from a significant number of antebellum reformers. In addition, Spiritualists learned that even within their ranks conflicts proved long and bitter. Between the years 1872 and 1893, personal feuds stirred animus and undoubtedly contributed to Spiritualism's failure to maintain solidarity at either the national or local level.¹⁰ In the spring of 1877, to illustrate the point, a group of Spiritualists in Chautauqua County, New York, arranged to hold a camp meeting on Willard Alden's farm on the eastern shore of Cassadaga Lake. Alden furnished a grove for the Spiritualist gathering, free of charge. In September the meetings convened for six days and most Spiritualists who attended considered them sufficiently successful to warrant a ten-day meeting in 1878. Alden, however, died the following winter. Consequently, his heirs wanted a percentage of the gate receipts as payment for the use of the family's property. Due to these money matters, a spirit of unrest plagued the next two seasons. In August 1879, a faction of the Spiritualists proposed securing new grounds and organizing a camp meeting independent of the Aldens'. To that end, they chartered the Cassadaga Lake Free Association and purchased land adjacent to the Aldens' farm for holding their annual meetings. For several years the two sites competed with each other to attract Spiritualists to their summer engagements. Eventually the Cassadaga Lake Free Association purchased the twenty-three-acre Alden grove. With this merger the site now known as Lily Dale became the foremost Spiritualist camp in the United States. It was dedicated to free thought, free speech, and free investigation.¹¹

Dedicated to such principles, Spiritualism is truly democratic in that the religion questions hierarchical traditions while placing great trust in human reason. Not surprisingly, Spiritualists often had considerable difficulty reaching a consensus over their internal

9. Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations and a Voice to Mankind* (New York, 1847), 788, 690, 692, 742; Delp, "American Spiritualism and Social Reform, 1847-1900," 86, 87, 91.

10. Delp, "American Spiritualism," 94.

11. John P. Downs and Fenwick Y. Hedley, eds., *The History of Chautauqua County, New York, and Its People* (New York and Chicago, 1921), 421-25; Joyce LaJustice, compiler, "Lily Dale Chronicle: History As It Happened" (Lily Dale Assembly, 1984, photocopy) 26-31, in Owens Collection.

affairs. In the early 1890s, for example, Spiritualists embarked on an effort to achieve national consolidation by forming the National Spiritualists Association (NSA). In the midst of this, a Spiritualist from Buffalo, New York, Joseph W. Dennis, complained that Lily Dale was attempting to control the NSA convention and make it a “sideshow” for its particular interests. To support his claim, Dennis said that several years earlier Moses Hull, a celebrated Spiritualist leader and convert from the Seventh Day Adventists’ pulpit, had lectured in Alden’s Grove in opposition to the Lily Dale faction. Consequently, “the Lily Dale crowd” directed much animus at Hull and his friends. What is more, Dennis questioned the competency and integrity of Harrison D. Barrett, a man destined for the presidency of the NSA. A future editor of *The Banner of Light*, Barrett was widely known among Spiritualists for his work in their cause. Lily Dale resident Emma J. Huff refuted Dennis’s charges. While conceding that she had great hopes for her Spiritualist community, Huff claimed that the “Powers of Light” had announced that the time had come for a new regime to select a place for concentrating “the forces that shall evolve and project the knowledge that shall bless every child of Earth.” She believed that “wise and good spirits [were] working. . . to bring this about and they had chosen. . . Lily Dale to be a Mecca.” Inasmuch as Lily Dale represented the world spiritually, she further contended that the convention was captured by “the whole body of Spiritualists,” who loved the cause, and not by a narrow faction confined to Chautauqua County. Although Huff agreed that Barrett lacked “business ability,” she believed that he “held the spirit of truth in his heart” and would provide valuable service in the general work of Spiritualism.¹²

Against this backdrop of national organizational infighting, George P. Colby announced in January 1893 that the National Spiritual and Liberal Association would soon meet at DeLeon Springs in Volusia County, Florida. The organizers expected at least one thousand people to attend, including some of the most distinguished Spiritualists in the nation.¹³ Many Volusians, no doubt, viewed the Spiritualist convention as an economic opportunity

12. Joseph W. Dennis to Emma J. Huff, Buffalo, New York, November 21, 1893; Emma J. Huff to Joseph W. Dennis, Lily Dale, New York, October 1893, Owens Collection; *Light of Truth Album: Prominent Workers in the Cause of Spiritualism* (Columbus, Oh., 1897), vii.

13. *Volusia County Record*, January 14 and 21, 1893.

worth exploiting. If a thousand people attended the inaugural session in 1893, it seemed reasonable to expect even larger crowds at future meetings. Because of this, many locals worried less about Spiritualists' convictions and more about Spiritualists' money. In short, they believed that expenditures by Spiritualists on goods and services would bring prosperity to the county.

The novel Spiritualist organization then assembling in Florida confronted an external but timeworn menace to their religion. Before the initial meeting could convene, talk and allegations of fraud provided grist for the local rumor mill. In late-nineteenth-century America, Spiritualism as a religious belief remained unpopular and was "universally denounced by the [mainstream] churches." In general, they claimed that Spiritualism was a lie practiced by frauds. Whatever the grounds for such allegations, impostors have plagued Spiritualism's good reputation since its birth. As historian Ann Braude put it, once mediumship demonstrated a potential for monetary gain, "fraudulent mediums imposed themselves on the public, and some indeed profited from deception."¹⁴

Small wonder, then, that some locals cast a dubious eye on the Spiritualists visiting Florida in 1893. Yet in response to such skepticism an editorial in a local newspaper claimed: "We have as much respect for a person who is sincere in his spiritualistic ideas as we have for those happy in the enjoyment of any other religious belief. Because fraud and impostors have crept into the teachings of Spiritualism it affords no argument to denounce all those who are enjoying the comforts and promises they sincerely find in its doctrine. Firmly . . . fixed in the belief of Spiritualism can be found people among the best in their communities." The paper thus extended to the Spiritualist outsiders the hand of fellowship and hoped that the people of Volusia County would always treat them with large measures of charity and tolerance. So when local hostility toward Spiritualism first produced accusations of fraud, the county newspaper rallied to the defense of the religion.¹⁵ The local newspaper's favorable response to the Spiritualists visiting the county, moreover, may have surprised some of the faithful. The southern press in the past had generally attacked Spiritualism as subversive of Christian morality. In the process, southern newspapers had linked Spiritualism with abolitionism, women's rights, and other antebellum social re-

14. Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 30-31.

15. *Volusia County Record*, January 14, February 4, 1893.



George P. Colby (c. 1895). Most residents recognize Colby as the founder of the Spiritualist community at Cassadaga. *Photograph courtesy of the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association, Cassadaga.*

form movements, which had emanated from the North and which had little appeal throughout the South.¹⁶

On January 29, 1893, Harrison D. Barrett of Lily Dale, New York, called the DeLeon Springs meeting to order. After a brief but earnest welcome address, Barrett congratulated his listeners for “basking in the glorious sunshine in the open air in the bright sunny South,” instead of “shivering around their coal stoves in the bleak North.” He then introduced George P. Colby who delivered a lecture titled, “What came ye out into the wilderness to seek?”

16. Robert W. Delp, “The Southern Press and the Rise of American Spiritualism, 1847-1860,” *Journal of American Culture* 7 (1985), 88-95.

Speaking before an engrossed audience, Colby provided great “satisfaction even to those of orthodox proclivities.” The same crowd also responded enthusiastically to Mrs. M. C. Thomas, “favorably known throughout the South as a . . . lecturer of great power,” and A. B. Clyde, “the great silver-tongued orator from Ohio.” Such an array of talent, a reporter pointed out, would afford locals “an excellent opportunity to investigate Spirituualism.”¹⁷

The reporter’s prediction “rang true,” for local interest in the meetings grew steadily. In February an excursion from nearby DeLand brought in three hundred people who joined a crowd of three hundred already gathered to hear the various speakers scheduled for a Sunday meeting. Colby’s lecture that day proved “especially fine,” containing “poetic imagery from first to last.”¹⁸

Such oratory aside, many visitors came to the meetings merely to quench their curiosity about Spiritualism. A correspondent for the *Volusia County Record*, for example, went to investigate the authenticity of Dr. W. S. Rowley, a “spirit telegrapher” from Cleveland. Using an ordinary battery with a Morse Key sounder, Rowley gave one of the “most remarkable demonstrations ever witnessed in a public assembly.” According to the journalist, unseen operators ticked off long messages from the spirit world without Rowley’s hands ever touching the key. Although some sneered and others scoffed at the phenomena, the reporter believed what he saw. If the critics are “so blind they will not see and so deaf they won’t hear,” he claimed, then “it is their misfortune, and their ignorance is deserving the heartfelt pity of all intelligent people.”¹⁹

While convening in DeLeon Springs, the Spiritualists Association appointed a committee to select a permanent location for their winter camp. Members of this committee visited St. Petersburg, Tampa, Tarpon Springs, and other points on the west coast of Florida hoping to find a regular site for their annual meetings. Shortly after this, they embarked on a similar mission to St. Augustine, Daytona, and New Smyrna. The Association agreed that they would decide where to locate the camp at the next meeting of the board. Meanwhile, fearing that the Spiritualists would choose a different site, civic leaders of DeLeon Springs met to discuss the possibility of raising \$2,000 in municipal bonds to induce the

17. *Volusia County Record*, January 14, February 4, 1893; *Light of Truth Album*, iii.

18. *Volusia County Record*, February 11, 1893.

19. *Ibid.*, February 18, March 4, 1893.

Spiritualists to locate permanently within their town limits. Following brief debate they quickly raised \$750 and then moved enthusiastically to accrue pledges for the balance.²⁰ With an eye on economic development and monetary rewards, these locals apparently welcomed the Spiritualists with open arms and urged them to locate the camp in their community.

After canvassing the state for a more favorable permanent location, the trustees of the National Spiritual and Liberal Association settled on DeLeon Springs. Apparently several factors influenced the board's decision. For one, they chose the original site because John B. and H. H. Clough had generously donated twenty-five acres of land to the Association. Once subdivided, sales of lots from the parcel would provide much needed revenue for the organization. In addition, the citizens of DeLeon Springs remained united in their efforts to make northerners feel both welcome and appreciated in the community. To that end, they promised to erect a large auditorium in the near future.²¹

Sweetening DeLeon Springs' offer further, the Clough brothers proposed building an extravagant two-hundred-room brick hotel "at the earliest moment." This structure, in combination with private boarding houses and restaurants, would furnish ample accommodations for northern guests as well as for visitors from the South. All this, one DeLeon Springs booster observed, "will add much to the natural advantages of our lucky neighbors, and advance the 'boom' several degrees."²²

Yet despite the efforts of community boosters, and regardless of the Association's prior announcement, the Spiritualist colony did not take root in DeLeon Springs. The Spiritualists instead established a permanent site on George Colby's property about three-quarters of a mile south of Lake Helen and six miles from DeLand. Interestingly, whenever Spiritualist leaders discussed a permanent location for the camp, Colby had usually remained silent. Only after the board had considered all possible options did he even suggest that organizers visit his property. According to Colby, spirits had selected the place twenty years earlier when he was liv-

20. *Ibid.*, February 18 and 25, 1893.

21. Federal Writer's Workshop Project (hereinafter FWWP), "Lake Helen's Southern Cassadaga's Spiritualist Camp," February 1, 1939, p. 5, in Owens Collection; *Volusia County Record*, March 25, 1893.

22. *Volusia County Record* March 25, 1893.

ing in Wisconsin. His Indian spirit-guide, Seneca, subsequently advised him to go south and help establish a great spiritual center where thousands of believers could congregate. Following this “imperative command,” Colby went to Florida, traveled south up the St. Johns River, and landed at Blue Springs in Volusia County. The morning after he arrived, Colby fell into a trance. Spirit-guides then allegedly led him “through the pathless wilds” to where the Spiritualist colony would settle. As Seneca had prophesied, Colby viewed a “Promised Land” of lakes and high bluffs. In 1880 he filed a homestead claim for seventy-five acres. Four years later the government granted him title to the land destined to become a mecca for the Spiritualists.²³

When Colby filed his claim, “Florida was very much a frontier state,” according to historian Samuel Proctor. It was “isolated from the rest of the South, and it would remain so for many decades.” This proved particularly true for Volusia County. The Seminole Wars, poor transportation links with outlying areas, and other factors had impeded population growth, and in 1860 the federal census counted only twelve hundred people living in the county. Most residents were yeoman farmers who owned between one hundred and two hundred acres of land and lived in sparsely settled areas. During the Civil War, to further illustrate its lack of development, the Volusia wilds became a favorite refuge for Floridians trying to avoid service in the Confederate Army. In fact, not until the 1870s when the infusion of northern money spawned considerable growth, did the county begin emerging from the frontier. In 1870, for example, an entrepreneur from Ohio, Mathias Day, launched a settlement that became Daytona. Six years later a thirty-eight-year-old industrialist from New York, Henry Addison DeLand, founded the community that bears his name. These efforts and those of other northern developers helped increase Volusia County’s population from 3,294 in 1880, to 8,467 by 1890.²⁴

23. FWWP, “Southern Cassadaga,” 3-5; *Volusia County Record* September 2, 1895; *Florida Times-Union*, September 2, 1895; Janie Henderson, *The Story of Cassadaga* (Cassadaga, 1996), 12-15.

24. Samuel Proctor, “Prelude to the New Florida, 1877-1919,” in *The New History of Florida*, edited by Michael Gannon (Gainesville, 1996), 268, 272; Michael G. Schene, *Hopes, Dreams, and Promises: A History of Volusia County, Florida* (Daytona Beach, 1976), 59, 71; T. Stanton Dietrich, *The Urbanization of Florida’s Population: An Historical Perspective of County Growth, 1830-1970* (Gainesville, 1978), 204-205.

Demographics aside, only mediums Emma J. Huff and Marion Skidmore had bothered to accept Colby's invitation to visit his remote piece of land.²⁵ Both women had played crucial roles in founding and maintaining the Lily Dale Assembly in New York. They assumed similar roles in establishing Cassadaga. In fact, since the inception of Spiritualism, women have played important parts in leading and organizing the religion. Women attained the special status of the medium because their attributes harmonized with the nineteenth-century ideology of domesticity. Séances usually took place in the medium's home, a setting widely regarded as "women's separate sphere." Female mediums thus outnumbered their male counterparts and Spiritualism created a unique opportunity for women to assume a "public role in American religious life."²⁶

Colby's property made a powerful impression on Huff and Skidmore. To these influential mediums, the "lovely site" possessed a sense of spiritual harmony. Still, Huff insisted that in order for the camp to succeed, Henry Flagler's railroad must serve it. Six years earlier Flagler had purchased "the thirty-six mile Jacksonville, St. Augustine, and Halifax Railroad," which served as the first leg of his Florida East Coast System. However, since Flagler did not own the one line reaching Lake Helen at the time, Huff's enthusiasm waned. Yet happily for the two mediums, Flagler purchased the railroad three weeks later. In March 1894 the Spiritualist Camp at Cassadaga became a reality. Members formed a non-profit stock company—the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualists Camp Meeting Association (SCSCMA)—and began planning camp activities for the following winter. In December George Colby topped the Clough's gift at DeLeon Springs by donating thirty-four acres of land for a permanent meeting site.²⁷

The Association aimed "to form an educational center where the highest truths of Spiritualism [could] be taught." It pledged to do this, "not only for the benefit of their friends in the South," but also for those Spiritualists who wished to escape the rigors of northern winters. Meanwhile, the Association drafted a set of bylaws to govern its internal affairs. Of these, Article Twelve highlights one of

25. Paula M. Vaught and Joyce LaJudice, *Lily Dale Proud Beginnings: A Little Bit of History VI* (Lily Dale, New York, 1984), 12-13; Downs and Hedley, eds., *History of Chautauqua County, New York*, 421-24.

26. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 150; Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 82-116.

27. Proctor, "Prelude to the New Florida," 269; FWWP, "Southern Cassadaga," 7. See also Edward N. Akin, *Flagler: Rockefeller Partner & Florida Baron* (Kent, Oh., 1988).

the Camp's more enduring folkways—sobriety. This bylaw prohibited selling or distributing for free, alcoholic beverages within the Camp. With this measure, Cassadaga went dry twenty-six years before the Baptists, Methodists, and Women's Christian Temperance Union succeeded in their quest to prohibit alcohol statewide. The Spiritualists' attitude toward liquor inched closer to that of the more conservative elements of Florida society. On February 8, 1895, after months of preparation, the Association opened its first season and one hundred people attended the three-day event held at Colby's home.²⁸

The next year, hoping to draw larger crowds to its second season, the Association extended a cordial invitation to all who were interested in Spiritualism, regardless of caste or color. If their cause paid unjust tribute to caste, custom, or selfish power, Cassadagans feared that they would fail to meet the salient principle upon which their faith was founded—namely, “Universal Brotherhood.” Thus Camp leaders requested all to come and experience the spiritual harmony that the faith promised to deliver. In this respect, the Camp made an effort to reach out and touch the African American community living in the vicinity. Even so, most blacks initially shied away from Cassadaga. They disappeared from the streets after sunset, mused one observer, and watched the Spiritualists attending the meetings with much reticence. According to a local white's biased account, African Americans evidently feared northern Spiritualists as “ghosts or goblins.” A year later, however, the local black community had apparently overcome its initial fear of the Camp. In 1897, Professor William F. Peck addressed a large delegation of blacks and told them that the spirit world “had been chiefly instrumental” in bringing slavery to an end. As he put it, Spiritualists were their best friends. Peck claimed that abolitionists Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, Elijah Lovejoy, and the “sainted” Abraham Lincoln, had all followed the principles of Spiritualism.²⁹

28. *Volusia County Record*, December 14, 1895; Henderson, *The Story of Cassadaga*, 15; Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association (SCSCMA), “By-Laws of the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association,” January 15, 1895, Book of Records, Owens Collection; *The Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting, General Statement 1903* (DeLand, 1903), 3; Frank Alduino, “The Noble Experiment in Tampa: A Study of Prohibition in Urban America,” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1989), 6; John J. Guthrie Jr., *Keepers of the Spirits: The Judicial Response to Prohibition Enforcement in Florida, 1885-1935* (Westport, Conn., 1998), 26-32.

29. *Volusia County Record*, January 11, 1896, February 11, 1893, April 3, 1897.

When Peck spoke most southern whites probably would have excluded Phillips, Garrison, Lovejoy, and Lincoln from their pantheon of heroes. And although Peck's actions would not have necessarily violated southern racial taboos, southern whites would have likely bristled at the sight of a white professor lecturing to a black audience. Furthermore, Florida law then mandated segregation of the races, so Peck might have unwittingly violated several Jim Crow statutes. Existing race relations in the area, therefore, could have stirred animosity between locals and the seemingly more tolerant Spiritualists at Cassadaga. But if it did raise tension, local whites must have suppressed their true feelings, for Emma Huff reported that the people of the South had cordially received the "Spiritualist Yanks." Besides respecting the rights of the Spiritualists, native Floridians had also extended many favors to the community that enabled the newcomers to plant deep roots in Volusia County.³⁰

Regardless of such goodwill, allegations of fraud again disrupted the harmony between the Spiritualists and the local community at the end of 1896. The Cassadaga controversy stemmed from an incident that occurred in Boston, Massachusetts, and involved two popular practitioners at the Camp—the materializing medium O. L. Concannon and his wife, Edella, a platform test medium. While the details surrounding the episode remain sketchy, according to one eyewitness, when Mr. Concannon performed a séance in Boston a member of the audience called him a phony. Although some excitement ensued, the accuser failed to produce either a wig or the garment that led to his allegations. Nevertheless, the issue followed the Concannons to Cassadaga. One editorial in the local paper attempted to vilify the Concannons without maligning the entire community. "There are too many sincere and earnest believers in the faith," it said, "to have [Cassadaga's] plans upset by the exposure of frauds such as Concannon." Some locals, however, defended the Concannons. In a letter to the same paper, Mrs. J. F. Leavitt wrote: "If this account is proven a mistake, will the Christian world be as ready to deny [it] as they were to circulate the story, I wonder?"³¹

This time the Association moved quickly to keep a minor problem from erupting into a serious crisis. In doing so, it dealt directly

30. See Jerrell H. Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History: The Enduring Influence of Florida's Black Code," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 55 (January 1977), 277-98; *Volusia County Record*, December 5, 1896.

31. *Volusia County Record*, February 15 and 29, December 5 and 26, 1896.

with the issue by conceding that some mediums worked almost entirely for selfish ends. Their moral natures, according to the Camp's spokesperson Emma Huff, had "never been quickened to perceive the ethical side of Spiritualism." Still, she did not mean that they lacked psychic power. According to Huff, some "genuine mediums" not only had powers sufficient to produce manifestations to satisfy their insatiable greed, but also remained weak enough to attempt a counterfeit. Yet such shams, she claimed, would be detected in the end and "subjected to the penalty that falsehood [must endure] when coming in contact with true spiritual power." Every movement toward unknown heights, Huff continued, would always battle the "countless enemies who strive to clog the wheel of [progress]." God had his devil, Jesus had his Judas, and, as she put it, "Spiritualism has its jokes and frauds." For a time Huff's rhetoric managed to silence the accusations of fraud leveled at the Camp by certain locals.³²

In 1897 both Concannons participated fully in the annual meeting, and it appeared that the worst of the controversy was behind them. In the early months of the year, newspaper accounts lauded their work. In mid-March, moreover, eleven Cassadagans signed a testimonial confirming the authenticity of the manifestations conducted by the Concannons. While such support must have comforted the couple, the following month "a reliable source" reported that Mr. Concannon had an experience in Palmetto, Florida, similar to the Boston episode. Apparently a group of skeptics disrupted and harassed Concannon during a séance. This event inspired a non-Spiritualist to pen a letter on behalf of the Concannons to the *Volusia County Record*. Although she was not personally acquainted with these mediums, her letter asserted that "their doctrines should be respected by those who attend their worship. If they believe them frauds and do not agree with them in their belief, they are not compelled to attend their séances, and should they do so, they should be ladies and gentlemen enough to behave themselves. It is to no one's credit to attend anything that is morally and socially correct, and make a disturbance."³⁴

All the while, within Cassadaga support for the Concannons remained steadfast. At the season's closing ceremony Mrs. Concan-

32. *Ibid.*, December 19, 1896.

33. *Ibid.*, March 13, 1897.

34. *Ibid.*, April 3, 1897.

non “gave the spirit descriptions” with such accuracy that many eyes welled with tears. According to a future president of the Association and former executive officer of the Ohio Spiritualists’ Association, Eber W. Bond, she was a comely instrument for the spirit world to employ. “May she ever be faithful to her guides,” he added, “and strengthen her well earned reputation for genuine medium tests.”³⁵

After the Camp’s third season came to an end, the Concannon controversy still lingered. In perhaps the final word on the matter, the *Volusia County Record* published an unsigned letter in August. Alluding to the Concannons, the writer said: “Public opinion used to burn heretics and witches for being eccentric, and now people are often cruelly persecuted for having ideas of their own, even in supposedly liberal and enlightened communities. We should do all we can to make the world we live in better and brighter, and a good way to do so is to serve on our own shortcomings, rather than on other peoples’.” The following spring a guest lecturer at the Camp reaffirmed that Spiritualists had little tolerance for impostors by strongly denouncing “those mediums who practice[d] fraud at their séances.” With that, the issue seemingly faded away. No longer distracted by accusations of fraud, life at Cassadaga returned to its ordinary routines, supporting Braude’s observation that the historical weight of Spiritualism falls more with the masses of faithful followers who made it a popular movement than with a few sensationalized frauds.³⁶

Despite the allegations of fraud, Cassadaga flourished in 1897. In March the town dedicated a new auditorium. For the occasion residents had beautifully decorated its rostrum with flowers, roses, and especially orange blossoms. In addition, they hung flags of the world’s nations across the top of the stage, spreading like a fan from the center where they had prominently placed “Old Glory.” Spiritualists proudly and conspicuously displayed the flag of the United States as an emblem of the American creed. “[T]rue Americanism,” they believed, “embraced the principles of human brotherhood and sisterhood.”³⁷

35. *Ibid*; *Light of Truth Album*, 11.

36. *Volusia County Record*, August 7, 1897, February 26, 1898; Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 31.

37. Downs and Hedley, eds., *History of Chautauqua County, New York*, 424.

After speeches by Peck and Colby that emphasized the importance of establishing a permanent Spiritualist center in the Deep South, Caroline Twing of Westfield, New York, made a stirring appeal for funds to pay for the auditorium. The spectators responded quickly. At a time when \$150 would have purchased a five-acre orange grove with 125 trees, less than four miles from the DeLeon Springs Railroad Depot, Twing's audience donated over \$100 for the cause. Such generosity encouraged Cassadagans to anticipate "great improvements" in the coming year.³⁸

In February 1898, with expectations soaring, Dr. Hubbard H. Brigham formally opened that season's meetings. After giving a hearty welcome to those present, he urged them to feel at home in southern Cassadaga. A subsequent invocation by Abbie E. Sheets of Michigan appeared to bring the heavenly powers in such close rapport, mused one member, that "a sweet spirit of universal harmony prevailed." At the time "human sorrows and antagonisms were forgotten and all the world [was] kin in this peaceful atmosphere of divine perception." In the season's finale, Sheets praised the good work they had accomplished and implored her listeners "to live the life of moral elevation which was the basis of the spiritual religion."³⁹

Due to that season's remarkable success, the outlook for 1899 seemed full of promise. The Association formed a class to study "the Vedantic philosophy as given by the Swami Vivekananda, [a] representative from India at the World's Congress of Religions." In addition, the management considered extending its meetings from January through March in 1899. All these plans, they hoped, would maintain their high standard of merit and make the upcoming season fully equal to that of 1898.⁴⁰

On the heels of such success at Cassadaga, in late 1898 the *Volusia County Record* published four letters written by "Nero," a non-Spiritualist. In each of these the author reflected on the Spiritualists at Cassadaga. The content and tone of the letters suggests that Nero wanted to bridge the gap between Spiritualism and Christianity. One aspect the two faiths shared was their relatively shallow roots in the county. To be sure, the Spanish had brought Catholicism to Florida in the sixteenth century and four Methodist Episcopal ministers had ridden the Volusia circuit in the 1840s. But no

38. *Volusia County Record*, March 13, April 3, November 6, 1897.

39. *Ibid.*, February 12, March 26, 1898; *Light of Truth Album*, xvi.

40. *Volusia County Record*, December 31, 1898.

Christian churches existed in the county until 1870. In that year members of the Methodist Episcopal Church finally managed to construct two crude buildings that had a combined seating capacity for one hundred worshippers and cost \$100 to build. During the next few years, itinerant ministers from Orlando and elsewhere held infrequent services in those churches. In 1880 thirteen DeLand residents met and organized the town's First Baptist Church. The next year Reverend A. L. Farr led the congregation in constructing a temporary place to worship. Three years later they erected a more spacious building that could accommodate eight hundred people and cost nearly \$16,000. By 1887, the Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians had all constructed churches in DeLand. In nearby Lake Helen, moreover, John P. Mace built that town's First Congregational Church in 1889. Three years later a Baptist congregation, originally organized at Lake Winnemissett, relocated and built a church in Lake Helen. Apparently, Protestants had only a small lead over Spiritualists in establishing a permanent material presence in the county.⁴¹

In the first of Nero's letters comparing Christianity with Spiritualism, he said, "Here is a sect who believe a good deal as I [save one] distinction." From his perspective, Spiritualists believed in the Christ within themselves, the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man. While noting that all Spiritualists did not "practice all they preach," Nero countered, "our church folks don't always [measure] up to my standard of what they should be, or always follow the teachings of. . . Christ." Nero claimed to have known some of the Cassadagans for years. The only negative thing he could say about them was that they did not belong to his church. And since the Constitution guaranteed religious freedom, he decided to "allow his neighbors to worship God after the dictates of their own conscience as long as they did not disturb [others]." On that tolerant note, Nero said he would "go down and hear some of their lectures this winter." Of course, he would do so only if his wife raised no objections.⁴²

41. Schene, *Hopes, Dreams, and Promises*, 60, 83, 90; *Daytona Beach News Journal*, April 28, 1957. For an example of how Spiritualists interacted with the "religiously informed" elsewhere, see Sandra Sizer Frankiel, *California's Spiritual Frontiers: Religious Alternatives in Anglo-Protestantism, 1850-1910* (Berkeley, 1988).

42. *Volusia County Record*, November 5, 1898.

She disapproved vehemently. Initially, however, Nero disregarded her objections and regularly visited the Spiritualist grounds during December. On his first sojourn to Cassadaga he noticed that the community seemed to be expecting more people than in previous years. The first buildings erected by the now ubiquitous Yankees, said Nero, had undergone some much needed repairs. He also dropped by the village library hoping to read some of the “fine books” on its shelves. Later when Nero’s spouse learned of this, she became outraged. “Infidels could read Christian works with profit,” she fumed, but Christians could not benefit from reading the works of infidels. That abruptly ended Nero’s ventures to Cassadaga.⁴³

A year later the prospect for full attendance at the upcoming meetings had never seemed better. Because the Association had secured “some of the best talent on the Spiritual rostrum,” guests had booked most cottages and rooms for the 1900 season. Material changes proved equally significant. Workers had nearly completed construction of the Webster Sanitarium, “one of the finest buildings in the county.” For Cassadaga, then, the new century seemed promising. Two decades had elapsed since “beneficent spirits” had purportedly led George Colby to the site where he and others would form a center for the work of the spirit world. Even so, the wise guides never led the faithful to believe that the avenue to success would follow an unimpeded course. Spiritualists knew that to overcome the many barriers that “ignorance has always placed in the highway of progressive thought,” they needed patience, strength, and fortitude.⁴⁴

The numerous obstacles that Spiritualists encountered in establishing Cassadaga tested their mettle. Considering the initial economic disadvantages— the limited public finances of the state following the “Freeze of 1895,” and disappointing private funding because of the prolonged national recession of the 1890s— the Camp’s success had proved phenomenal. For every stumbling block Spiritualists encountered at Cassadaga, they discovered a seemingly comparable amount of aid. In general, locals had hospitably received members of the Association and usually offered them the warm hand of fellowship. While the press provided generous and fair coverage of the various Camp activities, Cassadagans

43. *Ibid.*, November 26, December 18 and 24, 1898.

44. *Ibid.*, November 25, 1899, January 27, 1900.

received a great deal of assistance from the railroads and other businesses in the vicinity. The Florida East Coast Railway, for example, sold tickets at half fare on Saturdays, which were good for return on Mondays during the season. Such courtesies made it possible for the Association to bear the financial burden that the meetings entailed each year. Because of this Huff asserted: "Be assured that we have found no enemies in the South and if we have had foes they have been those supposed to be of our own households." With a little more labor and a small sum of money, she claimed, they could make Cassadaga one of the most attractive places in Florida.⁴⁵

By mid-February 1900 a new season was in full bloom. Mediums on the grounds gave private readings daily. Materialization, slate-writing, and healing represented the diversity of mediumship found inside the Camp. A highlight of the season, moreover, occurred when Spiritualists invited the Reverend Getty, a Christian minister, to speak from the Camp's platform. Making a few choice remarks, Getty claimed that Spiritualism differed very little from his own religion. He could see merit in all faiths and beliefs. While he looked to Christ crucified, he said Spiritualists looked "to the Christ within themselves for being children of God." This speech explains in part why the Association considered the first season of the new century a major success.⁴⁶

Cassadaga continued growing over the next few years. Besides coming out in larger crowds, Spiritualists began arriving at the Camp earlier than in previous seasons. At the same time, lectures and demonstrations by Colby, Huff, Peck, and others drew perhaps more appreciative audiences. The town's visitors also found a wider array of middle-class social activities in which to engage. If tea parties or the bazaar failed to satisfy a person's need to socialize, they had the option of attending the weekly hops, where young and old met for a few hours and danced away the nights.⁴⁷

Such changes, however, did not alter Cassadaga's fundamental objective "to plant progressive ideas in the hearts of humanity." Dr. George N. Hilligoss, a new speaker visiting the Camp in 1902 and

45. *Ibid.*, January 27, February 10, 1900.

46. *Ibid.*, February 17, March 17, 1900.

47. *Ibid.*, February 2, March 30, December 21 and 28, 1901; February 8, 1902; June 6, 1903; February 27, 1904; January 25, February 1, 1902; *DeLand Daily News*, January 22, 1909.



Residents with prominent Spiritualists who visited the Camp in 1904, including J. Clegg Wright sitting center front row. *Photograph courtesy of the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association, Cassadaga.*

future president of the Association, reaffirmed that mission. It is, he preached, “the celestial love or good in man, which prompts all to conquer selfishness and unfold spiritually. When we have reached that state of love, then Spiritualism will no longer be stigmatized by society, [instead] the most learned men will embrace this truth and acknowledge that Spiritualism is the only religion whose followers . . . prove what they teach.”⁴⁸

The Progressive Era, which comprised roughly the first two decades of the twentieth century, encompassed a broad movement calling for myriad reforms at the national, state, and local levels. The progressive agenda included women’s suffrage, prohibition of alcohol, immigration restriction, monetary reform, and government regulation of the market. This wave of change influenced Cassadaga as it did Florida and the rest of the nation. And because Cassadagans relished a traditional American middle-class lifestyle, it is little wonder that they endorsed many progressive issues, in-

48. *Volusia County Record*, December 21, 1901; January 25, 1902.

eluding women's suffrage, temperance, and government intervention in the economy.⁴⁹

A comedy performed by Cassadagans in 1909 hints that, like their antebellum founders and progressive contemporaries, Spiritualists in the new century retained a deep interest in reform politics. The characters in the play, "Mrs. Jarley's Wax Works," represented "'American types.'" A "bloated bondholder" dressed in fine evening attire and holding a gold headed cane thundered: "Money is power!" The show's host, Mrs. Jarley, responded that "if a form without brains could talk that way, what might not a man with brains do?" Taking her cue, a suffragist demanded the ballot for women, while a ponderous William Howard Taft shouted for the GOP. To those comments Mr. Dooley declared: "I told Henny, [that] Bryan would have been elected if the women could have voted." Carry Nation then appeared, waving her hatchet and exclaiming, "The saloon must go!" Jarley then "brought the house down" by remarking: "Mrs. Nation meant well and had been of great help to glass manufactures." The audience roared with laughter. The play's irreverence demonstrated that Spiritualists could laugh at themselves and their causes. Still, Cassadagans took their ideas seriously, but did so in a way that eschewed self-righteousness. In politics as in religion, Spiritualists employed a subtle approach to disarm their critics.⁵⁰

Whatever their politics, the Spiritualists at Cassadaga possessed a profound love of country that became manifest in numerous ways on many occasions. Singing "My Country tis of Thee" for opening day ceremonies and decorating the platform by placing flags of all nations in a pattern in which "Old Glory" stood paramount clearly manifested their national pride. Though less obvious, a news item on a scheduled speaker who had to cancel his engagement for health reasons illuminated Camp patriotism by reporting that "he fought for his country in days that tried men's souls." Another visitor to the village had willingly used "his tongue and pen for human justice" by serving as an honored member of Congress for several terms. Perhaps equally significant as an example of their patrio-

49. *DeLand News*, January 29, 1909. For an overview of the Progressive Era in Florida, see Proctor, "Prelude to the New Florida," 266-86. For the contradictions within progressivism, see Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville, 1983), and William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, 1993).

50. *DeLand News*, March 5, 1909.

tism, the Camp reserved one week in February 1909 to pay tribute to the Civil War. On Wednesday of the week-long celebration, a large crowd gathered in the auditorium to hear old veterans of both the Union and Confederate Armies reminisce about the war. Two days later, Cassadaga closed the celebration by honoring the Lincoln centenary. C. P. Pratt read the Gettysburg Address, followed by J. Clegg Wright, who gave a personal memorial that lauded "the service rendered our nation by the arisen statesmen Abraham Lincoln."⁵¹

All this suggests that Spiritualists accepted and relished the American creed. One could interpret this in several ways. Either the erstwhile radical views that Spiritualists held during the antebellum period had evolved closer to the conventional position, or the mainstream had absorbed many radical ideas by the early twentieth century. Still, it is also possible that both positions shifted to common ground. However it happened, the Spiritualists' regard for patriotism, republicanism, and other American traditions eased their acceptance by local Protestants.

By 1910 the Cassadaga Assembly had become much more than a weeks-long series of tent meetings. The town had blossomed, having many fine cottages. The auditorium, the pavilion, Harmony Hall, and other structures that accommodated the winter season stood as monuments acknowledging the efforts of early Cassadagans to fulfill Colby's dream of establishing a "Spiritualist Mecca" in Florida. Before the decade ended, even the Reverend Blocker, Lake Helen's Baptist preacher, complemented the Spiritualists for their work at Cassadaga.⁵²

In 1915 the Association selected Joseph Slater president. He would hold the office for the next decade. Many Cassadagans claimed Slater's enthusiastic efforts provided the driving force behind the community's development. As one community member put it in 1939: "Perhaps no more beloved figure exists today in the memory of older residents of the Camp." Slater was "very active" in the Methodist Church prior to his conversion to Spiritualism in 1906. In that year he had journeyed to Cassadaga with a friend whom the Association had scheduled to lecture. The community made such an impression on Slater that he built a home on the

51. *Ibid.*, February 5, 12, and 19, 1909; *DeLand Daily News*, January 22, 1909.

52. *DeLand Daily News*, January 22, 1909; *DeLand News*, November 4, December 16, 1910.



Cassadagans in front of the auditorium (c. 1910). Photograph courtesy of the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association, Cassadaga.

grounds before departing for Ohio. In 1912, he retired from business and returned with his family to Cassadaga, where they would permanently settle. The welfare of the village then became the paramount interest of Slater's life. From 1915 to 1925, during his tenure as president, he devoted time, money, and labor to Cassadaga's sundry developments. Many residents recollected the "energetic way in which he helped lay sidewalks, took charge of burning scrub around the grounds, or performed other tasks around the Camp."⁵³

Despite the apparent satisfaction with Slater's leadership, dissent started brewing in 1918 and would eventually disrupt Camp harmony. In early March, police arrested George "Doc Dimmick" on the charge of cursing co-resident Melvin J. Holt. Born in New Hampshire, Dimmick came to Florida as a thirty-year-old master carpenter in 1882. He settled in New Smyrna and worked for years on Flagler's East Coast Railway. While living in New Smyrna during the 1880s, Dimmick had his first spiritual experience through the materializing medium Concannon. At about that time, he befriended George Colby, who would remain his close associate over the following four decades. He eventually moved to Cassadaga

53. *The Cassadagan*, January 27, 1939.

where residents praised “Doc’s” talents as a spiritual healer. At any rate, the criminal court fined Dimmick for his profanity and he cheerfully paid the penalty since he had “gotten his money’s worth.” A few weeks later the dispute escalated. Joined by Joseph F. Snipes and several others, Dimmick hired an attorney to bring ouster proceedings against Slater, Herbert Hollely, William Critchley, and several others, with the intention of removing them from control of the Camp. Dimmick’s group alleged that the defendants had unlawfully usurped the offices of trustees of the Association because the persons who selected the officers had failed to comply with the proper legal formalities.⁵⁴

Judge James W. Perkins heard the case in chambers. As the lawsuit unraveled, Perkins ruled against the defendants and gave them until April to show the court what authorized them to hold the offices of trustees. Evidently, at the Association’s annual meeting earlier that spring, an election had been held to choose trustees for the coming year. Stockholders cast sixty-two ballots in accordance with the bylaws of the Association. Dimmick, Snipes, and the other plaintiffs received forty votes while the defendants carried twenty-two. The defendants had apparently violated the Association’s charter by allowing stockholders to cast one vote for each share of stock they held, instead of one vote for each ballot as stipulated in the bylaws. Because of such impropriety, the defendants claimed victory, winning 329 to 308 votes in the election. Four days prior to the election, moreover, the board of directors had illegally issued to Slater one hundred shares of stock, the plaintiffs charged, “with the . . . express purpose of controlling the . . . election.” The fraudulent issue of stock to Slater enabled his faction to dominate the trustees. Since the plaintiffs legally won the election, they claimed that they rightfully deserved the franchises, offices, privileges, and powers that accompanied the trustees of the Association. Litigation lingered for another twenty months and, as of February 23, 1920, the case remained open.⁵⁵ Still, that Slater remained Camp president until 1925 suggests that his side prevailed in the dispute.

54. *Ibid.*, January 29, 1939; *DeLand Daily News*, March 27, 1918.

55. *State of Florida, ex rel. Charles T. Ford, George A. Dimmick, Joseph F. Snipes, A.B. Gaston, F.W. Mack, Charles Coolidge and T. Babcock v. Joseph Slater, Melvin J. Holt, E.P. Sully, Herbert Hollely, William Critchley, E. E. Hopkins, and A. Cowcroft* (Seventh Judicial Circuit Court of Volusia County, Florida 1918).

In 1919, as internecine politics caused tensions to rise in Cassadaga, residents saw the prices of “articles of comparative necessity” soar to all-time highs. In the midst of inflation induced by World War I, Cassadagans complained of profiteering by certain merchants. The town’s relatively remote location allowed some retailers to charge outrageous prices for food and other consumer goods. Responding to allegations of price gouging, an operator of a general store said that he had to charge a large advance on all his goods, particularly kerosene, since Standard Oil had recently raised its price four times. Yet the town’s leading progressive and self-appointed consumer advocate, Joseph F. Snipes, produced a letter from the president of Standard Oil that refuted the merchant’s claims. While prices over the previous two years had generally increased, according to the letter, the cost of petroleum products had remained unchanged. “Such profiteering, in smaller or larger degree,” Snipes grumbled, “is a subject of public interest, domestic economy, and self-defense.”⁵⁶

Despite the inflated prices of some products, consumers at Cassadaga saw prices decline for certain durable goods like automobiles. Consequently, as automobile ownership became widespread during the 1920s Cassadaga found itself positioned to take full advantage of an emerging tourism market. Because of its location on the northern edge of the citrus belt, according to one booster, Cassadaga’s climate was ideal, “with just enough of occasional tang in the winter air to make it delightful.” In addition to its excellent weather, Cassadaga offered a variety of modern conveniences. The community had facilities for piping pure artesian water “without a particle of sulfur” into every home in the Camp. A municipal plant at Lake Helen provided affordable electricity for Cassadaga. The same plant manufactured ice and brought this highly valued commodity directly to customers in the village. To a considerable extent, the Spiritualist town had entered the modern era. “From humble beginnings, the place had grown into [a] community with all the advantages of a city,” an observer noted, “and every passing season swings the gates wider toward a still more radiant future.”⁵⁷

While Cassadagans awaited a “more radiant future,” an ominous cloud of oppression had settled upon Volusia County. In No-

56. *DeLand News*, March 5, 1919

57. *Ibid.*

vember 1920, the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan made itself known to county residents by parading openly in nearby Daytona. The Klansmen intended their public demonstration to intimidate black voters from casting ballots in the upcoming election. The following spring Klan activities had taken a turn for the worse. During a campaign of terror directed against Catholics and African Americans, Klansmen torched two black theaters and one Catholic church in Daytona. When not resorting to arson, the "Invisible Empire" menaced the county by inflicting savage beatings on innocent people, who often died from the thrashings. Despite mountains of evidence implicating members of the Klan, their crimes frequently went unpunished because the organization had coerced local authorities to inaction.⁵⁸

Granted, the Klan met formidable resistance from the *Daytona Morning Journal*, the American Legion of DeLand, and the politicians of Daytona and DeLand. Yet despite such opposition, in 1922 the Klan's candidates for judicial, municipal, and legislative office swept the June primaries carrying Daytona, DeLand, and Ormond. Internal discord, however, would shorten the Klan's victory celebration. "When the mayor of DeLand refused to heed the wishes of the local Klan leader, the Klan summoned him to a meeting in the woods at which he was tried for mutiny." In spite of (or perhaps due to) such intimidation, the mayor and his friends withdrew from the organization. Their actions prompted many of the county's better citizens to also quit the Klan.⁵⁹

But the exodus of the more respectable community members from the Klan did not mean that its days in central Florida were numbered. In 1923 Orlando hosted a statewide "Klanvocation to mark the inauguration of Florida as a self-governing realm in the Invisible Empire." Eighteen months later a Klan newspaper reported that a unit of the organization had infiltrated the campus of Stetson University and operated under the name of the Fiery Cross Club. In the spring of 1925, moreover, the hooded knights boasted that DeLand Klansmen assisted local authorities in enforcing pro-

58. David Chalmers, "The Ku Klux Klan in the Sunshine State: The 1920's," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 43 (January 1964), 209-15; *Daytona Morning Journal*, June 16, October 2, 4, and 5, 1921, March 4, 1922, June 4, 1922; *New York Times*, June 18, 1922; Leonard R. Lempel, "Race and Politics in Daytona Beach, Florida, 1876-1937," unpublished manuscript (1998), 14-15.

59. Chalmers, "The Ku Klux Klan in the Sunshine State: The 1920's," 211, 212, 214-15.

hibition despite “harassment by corrupt politicians, rum rings and a few unscrupulous Romans.” And as late as 1926 the *Tampa Tribune* reported that floggings by Klansmen continued to occur in Volusia County.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, Cassadaga escaped the Klan’s wrath during the 1920s. In fact, the terrorist group did not do so much as burn a cross in the Spiritualist community. This defies an explanation when considering either the crimes committed by the Klan or the victims who suffered their drubbings. The revived Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s pledged to return the nation to a fantasized past of cultural purity— that is, “one hundred percent Americanism.” Acting on these distorted notions, Klansmen attacked bootleggers and wayward whites, as well as racial, ethnic, moral, and religious “deviants.” One could speculate that because Cassadaga went “dry” before either state or national prohibition became law, and since the Spiritualists manifested a strong sense of patriotism, the Klan looked elsewhere for more appealing targets to terrorize. Perhaps the Spiritualists seemed too ordinary, too typically American, to tempt Klan activities against the Camp. In spite of that, the town’s progressive ideas on race and gender coupled with its unorthodox faith made Cassadaga a “sitting duck” for the Klan in its “fight against ignorance and superstition.” What saved the tiny community from the Klan’s abuse remains a mystery.⁶¹

Spared the terror of the hooded knights, in 1923 Cassadaga’s “more radiant future” began unfolding. In July the Association razed the old auditorium and started constructing a new one. Two months later, anticipating its completion, Camp leaders looked forward to the thirtieth annual convention at Cassadaga.⁶² In January 1924, the Camp dedicated the new auditorium in the season’s inaugural ceremony. By then, guests had booked every room at the Cassadaga Hotel for the season. With demand for lodging far greater than supply, Camp officials made an earnest effort to find accommodations for those visitors who needed a place to stay. Cassadaga

60. *Ibid*; *Washington National Courier*, February 9, 1925; *Fiery Cross*, March 13, 1925; *Tampa Tribune*, September 14, 1926.

61. Chalmers, “The Ku Klux Klan in the Sunshine State: The 1920’s,” 211. For the Klan, see Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York and Oxford, 1994); Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930* (New York and Oxford, 1967).

62. SCSCMA, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Convention Program*, 1923, p. 1, in Owens Collection; *DeLand Daily News*, December 12, 1923.

was then experiencing spillover benefits from the Florida land boom that began in the mid-1910s and came to a halt in 1925. Yet before the soaring Florida real estate market crashed, it generated enormous growth in the state. Since Cassadaga stood directly in the wake of the boom, the tiny community saw its economy rise and fall with the fortunes made and lost in Florida land transactions. But neither the peak nor the trough of business activity in Cassadaga matched the magnitude of cyclical change that marked the Florida land boom of 1915 to 1925.⁶³

On January 4, 1925, as the boom began accelerating toward its peak, the Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp formally opened for the season. The town had no vacancies because northerners had booked all available cottages and rooms. By then everything indicated that 1925 would be the most successful season in the history of the Camp.⁶⁴ Oscar Edgerly and Mable Riffle drew the largest and most enthusiastic crowds of the new season. Since his debut in 1885, Edgerly had earned much acclaim among Spiritualists as a trance speaker. One of the recurring themes that he addressed was “the Civic and Religious Responsibilities of Spiritualists.” By civic, Edgerly meant citizenship, patriotism, and the individual’s relationship to government. Like many ordinary Americans in the 1920s Spiritualists took great pride in the republic and embraced the notion of civic virtue. Edgerly was no exception, for he believed that “the desire for [the nation’s] welfare dwells in our hearts.” Since Americans possessed both liberty and independence, he added, they suffered no influence other than their own conscience. “If you profit by your inspirations, and register them at the ballot box,” Edgerly said, “you are performing your civic duty.” He told his listeners to exercise their sovereignty as voters with discretion. Let no man or party own you and, Edgerly advised, “exercise your franchise for the greatest good of the greatest number.” If Spiritualists followed his counsel, he believed, they would better appreciate their independence, transcend the political and religious chains of the past, and rise to new heights by becoming nobler characters. If this sounds like the mainstays of the republican ethos, it is additional

63. *DeLand Daily News*, December 26, 1923. For the real estate boom, see William Frazer and John J. Guthrie Jr., *The Florida Land Boom: Speculation, Money, and the Banks* (Westport, Conn., 1995).

64. *DeLand Sun News*, January 2 and 7, 1925.

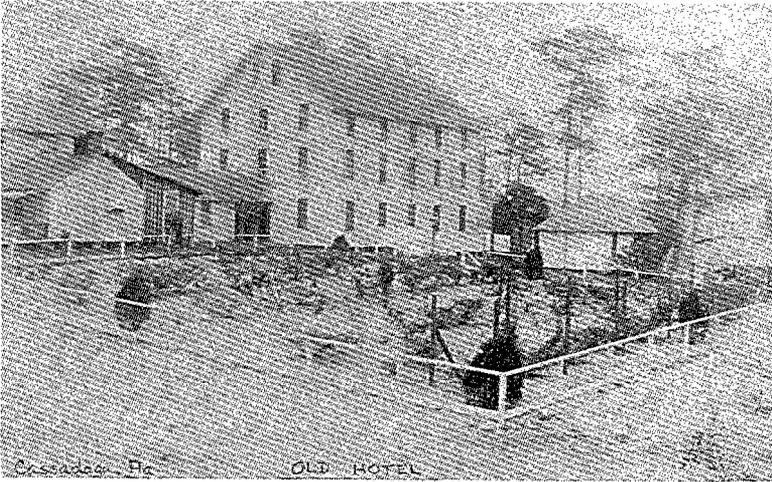
evidence that many Spiritualists professed mainstream traditional values.⁶⁵

Mable Riffle also helped make 1925 a highly prosperous season. Her Sunday evening séances attracted the largest crowds ever recorded at the auditorium. Typically, for forty minutes at a time the “great message bearer” would roll out “name after name, fact after fact, in an endless stream that delighted her audience, confounded critics, and filled investigators with wonder.” Moreover, a voluntary offering at one of her séances surpassed any other in the Camp’s history and the sale of tickets doubled that of the previous season. Given such success, Cassadagans held high expectations for 1926.⁶⁶

By the mid-1920s, the physical isolation of Cassadagans from other groups and the fact that Spiritualists did not actively proselytize helped ease their acceptance by locals. And because residents possessed mainstream white middle-class progressive values ranging from capitalism to republicanism, it perhaps enhanced their esteem in the county. These factors alone, however, do not fully explain why Floridians seemed more receptive to Spiritualism at Cassadaga. Another possible reason for this was that Spiritualists had friends who wielded influence over high public offices. In May of 1926, to illustrate the point, Anna Louise Fletcher, the wife of United States Senator Duncan U. Fletcher of Florida, defended Spiritualism before a House Sub-Committee hearing on legislation to limit the activities of mediums in the District of Columbia. To the subcommittee, Mrs. Fletcher announced that she had personally investigated Spiritualism for over twenty-five years. Declaring that her mother was a natural medium, Fletcher testified that she had never met a dishonest medium. Indeed, some of the most important Spiritualists had gathered in her home to perform séances. At these circles, she said, she had received messages inscribed on slate from her deceased father in his own handwriting. She challenged anyone in the room to deny the authenticity of her communications with her father’s spirit. Proponent of the legislation and renowned magician Harry Houdini had earlier claimed he could and would duplicate what transpired at séances. Undaunted by such claims, Fletcher said she had pledged many years before “to

65. *Jamestown (New York) Evening Journal*, July 20, 1925.

66. *DeLand Sun News*, January 29, February 11 and 18, 1925; *DeLand Daily News*, February 4, 1925.



The old hotel as it appeared at the turn of the century. Fire destroyed the building on Christmas Eve 1926. Photograph courtesy of the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association, Cassadaga.

help the cause of Spiritualism at any time and in any place that I could."⁶⁷

Making good on her promise, Fletcher published *Death Unveiled* before the year had ended. A record of facts gleaned from careful investigation, the book underscored Fletcher's favorable opinion of Spiritualism. According to a Spiritualist newspaper, *The Progressive Thinker* the text deserved "a careful perusal, coming as it does from one who occupies an influential place in Washington, D. C." In the meantime, her husband maintained "careful ties to Jacksonville's First Baptist Church," lest his wife's Unitarian-Universalism cause Senator Fletcher some political embarrassment.⁶⁸

Even though Cassadagans found comfort in Fletcher's work on behalf of Spiritualism, a catastrophe on Christmas night 1926 disrupted the harmony within the Camp. In perhaps the most dra-

67. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 22, 1926; U.S. House Subcommittee on Judiciary of the Committee on the District of Columbia, *Fortune Telling: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Judiciary of the Committee on the District of Columbia*, 69th Cong., 1st sess., February 26, May 18, 20 and 21, 1926, pp. 49-51; *The Progressive Thinker*, December 1926, 3.

68. Wayne Flynt, "Religion at the Polls: A Case Study of Twentieth Century Politics and Religion in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 72 (April 1994), 469-83, 470; Idem, *Duncan Upshaw Fletcher: Dixie's Reluctant Progressive* (Tallahassee, 1977).

matic event to happen in Cassadaga, a fire swept through the hotel and the blaze consumed two adjacent buildings. Only a heroic effort by the fire department prevented the flames from sweeping through the eastern side of the village. Justin and Reid Williams, who lived next door to the hotel, were the first to detect the fire. They acted quickly and roused the guests, many of whom had only enough time to snatch a few clothes in their hurried flight from the burning building. Their hasty departure made a difference— all guests survived the inferno. Yet for many residents the loss in property must have seemed insurmountable, since all that remained of the hotel was a smoldering heap of ash. Without a hotel and with a new season approaching rapidly, the Camp had to improvise. The Association used Brigham and Harmony Halls to provide rooms for visitors, while Spencer House served as a dining hall. Despite the creative ways in which Cassadagans responded to the disaster, their efforts proved little more than a stopgap. The Camp needed a hotel.⁶⁹

“Every great system,” wrote Evangelina P. Bach, the Camp’s corresponding secretary, “has its central figure, its leader, its inspirer, its cause of success.” At Cassadaga, Edward F. Loud occupied this position when fire destroyed the hotel. In 1926, Loud consented to accept the presidency of the Association. Under his leadership over the next two years, the town underwent a profound transformation in terms of growth, development, and beautification. With those changes, merchants, realtors, journalists, and business persons agreed: “Cassadaga is doing things all the time— having a boom after the boom.”⁷⁰

When the Association selected Loud as its president, they chose a person trained in financing “big business.” One of the last of Michigan’s lumber tycoons, Loud had earned a fortune in timber at the turn of the century. He and his father had staked claims in the virgin forests along the Au Sable River. Their timber holdings, in turn, made the H. M. Loud Company one of the richest firms of its kind in Michigan. Although the business suffered considerable losses from the Panic of 1907, Loud’s fortune still afforded him a comfortable retirement. Much to Cassadaga’s benefit, the skills and knowledge he acquired operating his family business followed him to Florida when he retired. After assuming

69. *The Cassadagan*, February 14, 1939.

70. *DeLand Daily News*, December 26, 1928.

office, President Loud immediately set about implementing a plan to make Cassadaga “the greatest Spiritualist Assembly in the world.” Under his administration, the community laid over three thousand linear feet of concrete sidewalks, added more electric street lights, and improved the roads. Residents built twenty-one additional dwellings ranging in price from \$1,000 to \$25,000. With this growth came a new store, a barber shop, a Woman’s Club house, and a beautiful new pavilion on the lake. But the greatest of all the construction projects was the modern hotel. Besides forty rooms equipped with baths, the well-furnished hotel had a dining area that could seat 150 persons, ample parlors, and had the best heating system then available.⁷¹

The new hotel represented Loud’s greatest legacy to the community. In 1926, when the old hotel burned, Cassadagans had little hope of building a new one. It was Loud who then stepped in and inspired many Cassadagans to donate money to the cause. At his urging, residents contributed \$22,135 to a hotel fund. Subsequently, the Assembly authorized a bond issue and the friends of Cassadaga purchased \$29,000 worth of the notes. Because of such charity, the community managed to build a hotel that “would be a credit to [any] large city.” Always active in things that benefited the Camp and Spiritualism, Loud put his passion into the mission of Cassadaga and helped create an atmosphere charged with hospitality and responsiveness.⁷²

At the launch of the 1929 season, great enthusiasm permeated the entire community. The hotel reported a three-fold increase in the number of guests booked on opening day as compared to the previous year. Perhaps even more significant, Cassadaga finally had telephone service provided by the Bell Company. Two years earlier the Association had appointed Lizzie Bears to chair a committee for securing telephone service for the town. After much effort, Bears secured a pledge by over sixty residents from Cassadaga and Lake Helen to subscribe for a telephone. In January 1929, Cassadagans anticipated saying hello to the outside world before the end of the month. Meanwhile, the Association produced an attractive descriptive circular of Cassadaga and mailed it to various chambers of commerce throughout Florida. By distributing these brochures, the Camp hoped to make the public aware that Volusia County had

71. *New York Times*, January 20, 1952; *DeLand Daily News*, December 26, 1928.

72. *DeLand Daily News*, December 26, 1928.

the second most important Spiritualist assembly in the nation and the only one in the South.⁷³ Such developments prompted the venerable philosopher George Colby to capture the essence of the community's spirit on opening day 1929 by saying "there is only one person here today." A reporter who heard these words asked Colby what he meant by this. "By the harmony, interest and earnestness," Colby responded, "this great assemblage are welded into one unit as the drops of water are blended into a pool of water."⁷⁴

Because 1929 marked Cassadaga's thirty-fifth anniversary, the Association invited some well-known Spiritualists from various parts of the United States to participate in its celebration. For speakers they booked Elizabeth Harlow Goetz of Philadelphia and Reverend H. W. B. Myrick of Indianapolis. Many of the faithful considered Goetz the foremost woman in the ranks of Spiritualism. A former president of the Lily Dale Association, she had also served as a trustee of the NSA. Both organizations recognized and praised her abilities. Goetz believed that Spiritualism gave people the liberty to think and to supply knowledge to their lives. What is more, like many Spiritualists Goetz was a rationalist who greatly admired Thomas Paine. In one lecture, she went so far as to suggest that Cassadagans should set aside the last Sunday in January as a memorial for "this great benefactor." Paine, she said, "gave his life, his pen and his pocketbook to establish this [land] as a free nation." In closing, Goetz remarked that when her time to enter the spirit world came, she hoped she would see Paine and "be permitted to worship at his feet." These comments not only reveal the Spiritualists' staunch belief in individualism and independent thinking, but also reflect the close connections that they maintained with republicanism.⁷⁵

Myrick came late to Spiritualism. For thirty-five years he was an evangelist who had preached in a Campbellite church and had baptized hundreds of people. Even after converting to Spiritualism he retained his evangelical fervor. "The preacher who undertakes to propagate Spiritualism," Myrick asserted, "ought to be a man of

73. *Ibid.*, January 23, 1929.

74. *Ibid.*, January 7, 1929.

75. *Ibid.*, January 4 and 16, February 1, 1929; Lily Dale Spiritualist Association, *Official Program*, 1925, p. 18. Since the advent of Spiritualism in antebellum America, its followers have admired Paine. See, for example, Charles Hammond, *The Pilgrimage of Thomas Paine, and Others, to the Seventh Circle in the Spirit World* (Rochester, N.Y., 1852).

good repute.” Still, he realized that in spreading the word a Spiritualist preacher often endured much hostility. From his personal experience riding the circuit, Myrick had learned that Christian audiences needed little or no persuading to join the church. In contrast, spreading Spiritualism proved much more difficult. When Myrick held up the philosophy and phenomena of Spiritualism, skeptics would denounce it as “the work of the devil.” So he had to prove everything. But because Myrick could not prove every proposition of his faith, he had a medium attend his meetings “to give proof to the audience.” Despite dealing with detractors, Myrick maintained a friendly attitude toward all religions. As he put it, “I did not come from a Christian pulpit into Spiritualism to condemn anybody.” Instead, he wanted to retain all the good things in the Bible— the splendor of mercy, the nobility of forgiveness, and the grandeur of self-denial. “Let us adopt a common-sense principle,” he suggested in one speech, “and say everything good is ours, and we are going to practice it to the best of our knowledge and ability.” Such philosophy led Myrick to end a speech in Cassadaga with these words: “The world owes us nothing and we have no right to be here unless we can do some good.”⁷⁶

Perhaps inspired by Myrick’s speech, one Sunday in February 1929, President Loud discussed the goals and objectives that he hoped to implement for the benefit of Cassadaga. “If Cassadaga only had an endowment fund,” he said, “how much easier the work would be for those who have the affairs of the Association to administer and how much more could be done for this cause we are striving to promote.” In his dreams Loud saw an endowment of \$100,000 for the Camp. Although some residents remained skeptical about the figure, Loud said that the Association had acquired a substantial sum of money. Moreover, the endowment’s benefactors made a provision calling for the surrender and retirement of about \$10,000 in the Association’s bonds. Other contributors informed Loud that they would cancel their bonds “when they or their immediate descendants” no longer needed the interest payments to supplement their household income. After revealing these developments to his audience, Loud noted that they had already raised nearly \$25,000 for the foundation. He therefore saw no reason to solicit additional funds. Rather, he asked his listeners to

76. *Jamestown (New York) Evening Journal*, July 1 and 6, 1925; *DeLand Daily News*, January 16, 1929.

think about it. Should they decide to contribute “in this great effort for the up[lifting] of Cassadaga and the advancement of Spiritualism,” he would gladly speak with them in private.⁷⁷

To achieve Loud’s ambition, the Association included a bequest form in its program for 1929. With this they hoped to draw attention to the Camp’s financial needs. Emphasizing the community’s previous contributions for the good of Spiritualism, the program noted that Cassadaga wanted to broaden the scope of its work then in progress. Simply put, the Association hoped that some members would remember Cassadaga’s accomplishments when drafting their wills.⁷⁸

As the 1929 season came to an end, the Camp anticipated an auspicious future. Cassadaga had survived the Florida land boom and bust, and had even grown and flourished in the late 1920s.⁷⁹ Still, like many Americans at the time, Cassadagans—psychic abilities aside—could foresee neither the stock market crash on Wall Street nor the Great Depression that loomed on the economic horizon. Furthermore, when the economic crisis hit Florida, it struck hard. Beginning in 1929 per capita annual income declined precipitously throughout the state. Dropping from \$510 to \$478 in 1930, it fell further in 1931 to \$392.⁸⁰

In short time, the state and national economic downturn put Cassadaga in a financial pinch. Because of this, the Camp failed to “make good” on its obligations to the bondholders who had financed the new hotel. In 1931, for example, the hotel earned \$2,000 in rental income for the Association. But instead of paying the money to the bondholders, the Camp used it for other purposes. Such actions prompted former president Loud to address a meeting of the Association’s stockholders on March 26, 1932. Loud reminded his audience that five years earlier Cassadagans and their friends had joined in a rushing, mighty effort to conceive, finance, build and furnish a new hotel. “It should never be forgotten,” he declared, “that it was bondholders’ money that enabled the project to be completed.” Since the Association told the bondholders that all rental income would service the interest on the notes, according

77. *DeLand Daily News*, February 7, 1929.

78. SCSCMA, *Thirty-Fifth Annual Assembly Program*, 1929, p. 13, in Owens Collection.

79. *DeLand News*, November 21, 1928, January 23, 1929.

80. Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, 1971), 400-01.

to Loud, those who purchased the bonds had first claim on any hotel earnings.⁸¹

Some residents, however, considered the hotel a financial burden to the Camp because the Association paid the taxes and insurance on the building. From their perspective, the Camp lacked the funds necessary to cover expenses along with the interest on the bonds. In response, Loud argued that without a hotel Cassadaga would have received far less revenue from gate receipts, collections, and various other functions. Noting again that the hotel generated two thousand dollars for the Camp in 1931, he added: "It would be a wild flight of the imagination to call [the hotel] a hardship." After painting a gloomy picture of the grave crisis then confronting Cassadaga, he admonished those listening that if the community pulled together under effective leadership, then the Camp could weather the storm. "I plead once more for harmony," Loud concluded, "for I want to see Cassadaga live, grow, and prosper." Despite the strong case made by Loud, the members of the Association who considered the hotel a burden prevailed. In 1933, due to its inability to pay either its taxes or the debt owed to the bondholders, the Association sold the Cassadaga Hotel, which remains privately owned six decades later.⁸²

The same year that the Association sold the hotel, Cassadaga lost its founder and venerable philosopher George P. Colby. In January 1933, after living in New Smyrna for several years, Colby had returned to Cassadaga because of his declining health. The Camp provided Colby with an apartment and many residents accommodated his needs. Nonetheless, by June his health had deteriorated and Colby had become feeble. Following a short stay in a hospital where he had suffered a stroke, the octogenarian died in Cassadaga the morning of July 27, 1933. His death marked the end of an era that had spanned nearly four decades of Cassadaga's history.⁸³

The loss of the hotel and Colby's death notwithstanding, by 1933 the Spiritualists' mission to establish a permanent religious community in Florida had become a reality. The struggle to persist

81. Edward F. Loud, "Address," speech delivered at the annual stockholders meeting at the Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association, Cassadaga, Florida, 26 March 1932, Owens Collection.

82. *Ibid.*; *Daytona Beach News Journal*, April 28, 1957.

83. Henderson, *The Story of Cassadaga*, 16; *DeLand Sun News*, July 27, August 2, 1933.

in this new setting encountered occasional but formidable obstacles. At times the unconventional religion evoked a provincial brand of bigotry that became manifest in letters to the editors of the local papers. These letters either directly accused Cassadagans of fraud or challenged their integrity. Yet neither those nor other barriers prevented the realization of Colby's dream.

For the most part, the local population tolerated its new neighbors and provided the kind of support that assured Cassadaga's initial success. Volusians accepted the Spiritualists at Cassadaga for both economic and cultural reasons. Since the Spiritualists had the time and money to spend the winter months in Florida, some natives viewed the newcomers with an eye on profits. In their minds, Cassadagans represented a class of people whose cumulative expenditures on construction materials, furnishings, food, and other items would stimulate the local economy. The opportunity for financial gain, therefore, probably mitigated any rancor that locals held toward the Cassadagans.

Finally, as Emma Huff noted at the turn of the century, conflicts within the Camp posed a greater danger to Cassadaga's survival than external threats. In fact, locals directed little animus against the community. Because most of the county's white residents came originally from the North, culturally they shared much in common with the Spiritualists.⁸⁴ Reared in white Anglo-Saxon Protestant households that were steeped in capitalism and other American traditions, many Spiritualists had backgrounds and experiences familiar to the locals. Thus the cultural traits that linked the two groups in the material world proved stronger than the religious differences that divided them. Rather than perceiving Spiritualists as radical utopian communitarians who professed to communicate with the dead, locals viewed them as a group of ordinary people who came to the county seeking their version of the American dream. That is, Spiritualists aspired to congregate in sweet harmony with like-minded people in a mild climate. So in the last analysis, the mainstream values that Cassadagans embraced help explain why the community has thrived as a Spiritualist mecca in central Florida for over a century.

84. Audrey Thomas McCluskey, "Ringin' Up a School: Mary McLeod Bethune's Impact on Daytona," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (October 1994), 200-20; T. E. Fitzgerald, *Volusia County, Past and Present* (Daytona Beach, 1937), 99-100.