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**THE ACADEMY OF RELIGION AND PSYCHICAL RESEARCH\*  
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(\* since renamed the Academy of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies, Inc.)

**THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN SURVIVAL:  
STUDY OF PHYSICAL MEDIUMSHIP AND INTENTIONAL ACTIONS  
BY TRANCE PERSONALITIES AS EVIDENCE OF SURVIVAL OF  
PERSONALITY AFTER BODILY DEATH**

**Walter Meyer zu Erpen**

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*Between 1918 and 1935, Winnipeg medical doctor Thomas Glendenning Hamilton (1873-1935), MD, FACS, conducted psychical research experiments related to trance, mediumship, and physical phenomena. A number of medical doctors, lawyers, clergymen, and other community leaders witnessed the table levitations and teleplasms photographed.*

*Two features of particular interest in the research were the group mediumship that evolved and the reported persistence of trance personalities in demonstrating their intentionality through predictions about the phenomena that would be or had been photographed. Ultimately, these intentional actions by trance personalities convinced Dr. Hamilton that the physical phenomena observed were indeed evidence that some part of the human mind, consciousness, or personality survives bodily death.*

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During the 1880s, the first psychical research societies were established out of the desire of groups of professionals to undertake formal investigation of the physical and mental phenomena associated with Spiritualist mediumship. Today, research into the question of post-mortem survival of the human consciousness encompasses study of near-death experiences, deathbed visions, spontaneous apparitions, and spirit communication through mediumship. The considerable interest in these phenomena has given rise to organizations established specifically for the purpose of conducting survival research.

Since the "Margery" Crandon debacle in the 1930s, physical mediumship as a means of obtaining evidence for survival has attracted to its cause very few professionals. Physical mediumship fell into disregard with most psychical researchers and many Spiritualists for three reasons:

- ! the scarcity of reliable physical mediums,
- ! the fraudulence discovered in some darkened seance rooms,
- ! the recognition that physical phenomena do not, in themselves, provide convincing evidence of survival.

Instead, researchers have tended to pursue the more subjective mental mediumship, for example, the current Afterlife Codes project at the University of Arizona Human Energy Systems Laboratory.

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The psychical research experiments of Canadian medical doctor Thomas Glendenning Hamilton (1873-1935), MD, FACS, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, attracted international attention for the care with which they were conducted. Between 1918 and 1935, the group mediumship that evolved produced a wide array of phenomena. These included: mental telepathy; telekinetic movements of the table; non-contact table levitations; deep-trance writing, drawing and speech automatisms; small unorganized teleplasmic manifestations; and ultimately larger purposive teleplasms that bore miniature faces.

This paper focusses on the two most spectacular physical products, the photographed table levitations and teleplasms. The products of the mental mediumship that manifested throughout the research require detailed contextual information too elaborate for the scope of this paper. These cognitive products were, however, as important as the physical in convincing the Hamiltons and their associates of the genuineness of the two intermingled types. Ultimately, it was the ongoing intentional actions of the trance controls that convinced the researchers that the phenomena observed were evidence of continuing human consciousness in an afterlife state.

## **HAMILTON FAMILY AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT:**

Born near Scarborough, Ontario, Glen Hamilton moved with his family to Winnipeg in 1891. He graduated from Manitoba Medical College in 1903 as a doctor of medicine. In 1906, Dr. Hamilton married Lillian May Forrester (1880-1956), a graduate in nursing. Lillian was Dr. Hamilton's closest colleague throughout the experiments.

The Hamiltons were intensely involved in political, social and church affairs in the Elmwood community. In addition to his large medical practice, Dr. Hamilton was a medical lecturer, a member of the Winnipeg school board and Manitoba legislature, and an elder in his church. During the period of the research, the Hamiltons were raising three of their children, Margaret Lillian (1909-1986), Glen Forrester (1911-1988), and James Drummond (1915-1980).

The death of their twin son Arthur Lamont Hamilton (1915-1919) during the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918-19 is often cited as the factor that brought Dr. and Mrs. Hamilton to study of mediumship and survival. While his death no doubt heightened their interest in that ultimate question about the nature of human existence, the Hamiltons' inquiry must be seen in the broader historical context. During World War One, the large number of war deaths resulted in increased interest in life after death and a significant growth in Spiritualism as those who had suffered losses turned to mediums for communication with their deceased loved ones. The publication of books, combined with extensive lecture tours, by such eminent scientific men as Sir Oliver Joseph Lodge (1851-1940) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), in which each stated his conviction about spirit survival and communication, lent respectability to such inquiry.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE HAMILTON RESEARCH:**

Dr. Hamilton's interest in psychical research dates from 1918. Reverend Dr. William Talbot Allison (1875-1941), a professor of English at Wesley College, was instrumental in stimulating the Hamiltons' interest through his stories of personal investigation of the Patience Worth mediumship. As a result, Dr. Hamilton, Reverend Dr. Allison, and Reverend Dr. Daniel Norman (Dan) McLachlan (1875-1943), conducted some simple experiments into thought-transference that convinced the three men "that telepathy was possible and did work" (Hamilton 1977, xvii).

From 1921 until 1927, the Hamiltons turned their attention to study of table-tilting and levitations after Mrs. Hamilton discovered that a neighbour, Mrs. Elizabeth Poole, had telekinetic (psychokinetic) abilities. After the introduction of a new medium in 1928, the focus shifted to study of the teleplasm (ectoplasm)<sup>1</sup> that Mrs. Mary Ann Marshall was apparently able to manifest.<sup>2</sup> Between 1928 and 1934, 72 separate teleplasms were photographed in 50 photographic experiments involving 60 flashlight exposures. Some 300 photographic images exist, taken from different angles.

From 1926, Dr. Hamilton published and lectured widely about his experiments and gained an international reputation for his research. He never charged for his time, though eventually became more stringent about recovering travel and out-of-pocket expenses. Time spent lecturing in Eastern Canada, the United States, and Great Britain between 1929 and 1932 caused his medical practice to suffer.

Although the Hamiltons were not Spiritualists, they had contact with individuals active within Spiritualism, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Lady Jean Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge, Dr. and Mrs. Le Roi Goddard Crandon, and Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King.

The connection of the Hamiltons with the Ontario-born Stinson / Crandon siblings is significant in light of the "Walter" personality that manifested in the Hamilton group from 1928. The mediumship of Mrs. Mina Marguerite (Stinson) Crandon (1889-1941), known as "Margery," began in June 1923. Her husband, Boston physician Dr. Le Roi Goddard Crandon (1873-1939), MD, FACS, a Professor of Surgery at Harvard Medical School and author of a textbook on surgical after-treatment, was the primary investigator. In 1925, Dr. Hamilton visited the Crandons in Boston; the Crandons visited Winnipeg the following year. Notwithstanding the controversy that later raged around the "Margery" mediumship, Glen Hamilton maintained that the phenomena he had observed with her were genuine. Mina Crandon's brother Walter Stuart Stinson (1884-1911), who died in a railway accident, was her main trance control.

First published in 1942, T. Glen Hamilton's *Intention and Survival: Psychical Research Studies and the Bearing of Intentional Actions by Trance Personalities on the Problem of Human Survival* recorded posthumously the results of his

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investigations. In 1969, Margaret Hamilton Bach published a sequel entitled *Is Survival A Fact?: Studies of Deep-Trance Automatic Scripts and the Bearing of Intentional Actions by Trance Personalities on the Question of Human Survival*. It documented the continuation of the group's research after her father's death, including phenomena accepted as conclusive evidence that Glen Hamilton had survived death.

## **STUDY OF PHYSICAL MEDIUMSHIP AND INTENTIONAL ACTIONS BY TRANCE PERSONALITIES:**

Three mediums were primarily responsible for the production of the table levitations and teleplasms observed. Dr. Hamilton believed ultimately that the best phenomena manifested when the regular participants, including a number of auxiliary mediums, were present and contributing to the energy of the evolving group mediumship. All of the Hamilton mediums were non-professionals, and none received any financial remuneration.

The Hamiltons' first medium was their children's nanny Mrs. Elizabeth MacDonald (Wilson) Poole (1870-1935). Mrs. Poole was largely responsible for the telekinetic movement and levitation of the table that was repeatedly photographed. In July 1923, Mrs. Poole's ability to levitate the seance table was witnessed and attested to by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

In March 1926, James Malcolm Bird (1886-19\_\_) visited Winnipeg to scrutinize the Poole phenomena in his capacity as Research Officer for the American Society for Psychical Research. Good photographs were obtained of the table suspended in the air,<sup>3</sup> and Mr. Bird later "voiced his approval of the control conditions and the validity of the experiments" (Hamilton 1977, xx).

Two months later, Winnipeg medical doctors Rosslyn Brough (Ross) Mitchell (1880-1972) and his brother-in-law Dr. John Ralston (Ralston) Davidson (1870-1948) were photographed observing the levitations.<sup>4</sup>

In some photographs, the table is suspended, motionless, in the cabinet, with the surprised observers watching. In the October 1927 photograph in which Dr. Stanley Gordon (Gordon) Chown (1888-1949)<sup>5</sup> is seen observing the table, there is no bodily contact with or near the suspended table.

Other tests of Mrs. Poole's telekinetic ability proved that forces were at work similar to those that William Jackson Crawford (1880-1920), DSc, had studied with the Goligher circle in Belfast, Ireland. At times, when Dr. Hamilton or an associate attempted to force the tilted table to the floor, a powerful resisting force was exerted from beneath it. In another experiment, the weight of the table increased when Mrs. Poole touched it--as though bound to the floor by a spring.

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And, on a dozen occasions, intelligent non-contact raps during the calling of the alphabet suggested that surviving personalities were behind some of the phenomena. The communicators included a group of prominent psychical researchers desiring to prove the reality of spirit survival and communication. They included: Frederic W.H. Myers (1843-1901), William T. Stead (1849-1912), W.J. Crawford, and Sir Oliver Lodge's son Raymond Lodge (1889-1915). One message in particular caught Dr. Hamilton's attention for its thought-content, literary flavour, and altruism. In August 1921, through non-contact raps, the group received "Myers helping efforts in interest of humanity. Wonderful land here. Never fear. Circle in circle of radiant . . . F.W." At the next session, the message was completed by "est light" and the name "Myers". Though not at first recognized, the last sentence of the previous session was meant to read "circle in circle of radiantest light" (Hamilton 1931, 385). There were also conversational raps with Glen Hamilton's departed siblings Robert A. Hamilton (1860-1923), William Oliver Hamilton (1875-1924), and Margaret Hamilton (1862-1886). Frequent communicators through Mrs. Poole by way of automatic writing, clairvoyance or clairaudience were author Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) and missionary explorer David Livingstone (1813-1873).

The two other principal mediums were Mrs. Mary Ann Marshall (1880-1963), known as "Dawn", and to lesser extent her sister-in-law Mrs. Susan (McLements) Marshall (1888-1942), known as "Mercedes." The Marshall mediums were essential to the production of the 72 separate teleplasms that were photographed, many of which contained miniature faces of the known dead. For instance, the five-faces teleplasm photographed on 25 November 1928 included the likenesses of Robert Louis Stevenson and David Livingstone.<sup>6</sup> For a number of years, medical doctors Glen Hamilton, James Archibald (Jim) Hamilton (1870-1934), Henry Bruce (Bruce) Chown (1893-1986), William Creighton (1885-1972), and lawyers Henry Archibald Vaughan (Harry) Green (1888-1979), KC, and Isaac Pitblado (1867-1964), KC, studied the teleplasms photographed when the Marshall mediums were present. The association of those professionals' names with the research, in some cases decades after it ended, attests to the fact that they were unable to discover how the teleplasms might have been fraudulently produced.

The main trance control in charge of the Hamilton teleplasmic experiments was the personality claiming to be Mina Crandon's brother Walter. He first appeared in 1928 after Mary Marshall joined the Hamilton group as a regular sitter. Though widely believed to be Mrs. Crandon's brother, Dr. Hamilton wrote as late as 1934 that "neither in the Boston nor Winnipeg experiments has there been forthcoming any formal or conclusive proof" supporting the identity he claimed (Hamilton 1934, 123). Walter remained the main control until Mrs. Hamilton brought the experiments to a close in 1944. Thereafter, he communicated through Mary Marshall in the home circle of Mrs. Sylvia Barber (1892-1979) from 1947 until 1958.

The elaborate preparations necessary for a teleplasmic product to be photographed demonstrate intentional activity by the trance personalities. Often the controls would state the number of "negative" sittings required before photographic results could be obtained. When the sitting was reached at which

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photographs would be taken, extra precautions were implemented, the cameras were prepared, and then one of the trance controls indicated by speech or other motor automatism the moment at which Dr. Hamilton was to explode the flashlight. Over time, auxiliary mediums "Ewan," "Victor," "Anna," and "Norman," developed unintentionally as part of the group mediumship process, would give the signal for the flash or other predictive information. In 1933, Dr. Hamilton wrote that "two signals only in the whole of our five years experience has led to negative results" demonstrating "how successfully in each instance the control-signals synchronized with the teleplasm's brief visible state" (Hamilton 1934, 123). Shortly after the flash was fired, the trance directors through the auxiliary mediums would often describe "what would be discovered on the plates when they were developed, their descriptions very often indicating not only the general nature of the phenomena registered but their inner and minute details impossible for anyone to see normally in the brief duration of the blinding flash" (Hamilton 1934, 123).

### **OTHER REGULAR PARTICIPANTS AND GROUP MEDIUMSHIP:**

Three members of Dr. Hamilton's family played a significant role in the research. Lillian Hamilton was instrumental in getting her husband to investigate the psychic phenomena she had witnessed with Mrs. Poole. Prior to her marriage, daughter Margaret Hamilton Bach attended sittings and sometimes acted as note-taker. A professional musician in piano and voice, Margaret continued to publicize and promote her parents' psychical research until her death. Glen Hamilton's brother Dr. Jim Hamilton was medical observer and chief controller of Mary Marshall's right hand throughout the teleplasmic experiments. The group's regular participants also included a corporate lawyer, a businessman, a school teacher, an electrical engineer, a civil engineer, and several young men who were Margaret's peers.

Regarding the group mediumship that evolved, Dr. Hamilton wrote that of the thirty persons who took part in the teleplasmic experiments "as regular sitters, nearly half sooner or later came to reveal mediumistic tendencies of some kind, these being especially noticeable when a phenomenon was imminent." There was "excellent reason for believing that many of our regular sitters . . . were also contributing factors in the upbuilding of these strange quasi-material products." Although one or two regular members could be absent, "the majority had to be in attendance or nothing of a visible nature was forthcoming." Dr. Hamilton believed that the teleplasms were "the outcome of unknown energy-accumulation and energy-storing processes going on over a considerable period of experimental time with the psycho-dynamic energies thus acquired being drawn from every mediumistic source available throughout each series of consecutive sittings" (Hamilton 1934, 120). The larger the teleplasmic product attempted by the trance directors the more seances required before its appearance, numbering at times twenty or more sittings.

## **DR. HAMILTON'S MEDICAL COLLEAGUES:**

On the whole, the Winnipeg medical community was supportive of Glen Hamilton's research. This support from colleagues encouraged him to "go public" with the results of his experiments. He presented his first public lecture on the subject of "telekinesis" before 125 members of the Winnipeg Medical Society in May 1926. Paediatrician Bruce Chown<sup>7</sup> later described the effect Glen Hamilton had had on his audience:

. . . The crowd before the meeting were derisive. "Come on Glen! Bring on your ghosts!" He smiled at them and, unruffled, spoke. He mentioned no ghost, nor spirit, nor personality, but he talked about a table, a table that moved at request, that rushed across the room, that leapt in the air, that defied the efforts of strong men to hold it. And as he talked he showed photographs of these actions. . . . He offered neither explanation nor theory, simply facts; . . . That night he had many converts (Chown 1935, 710-11).

In 1930, Dr. Robert Rennie (Rennie) Swan (1876-1952), President of the Winnipeg Medical Society, chose *Immortality: An Adventure in Faith* as the topic for his presidential address. While dealing primarily with the historical, scientific, and ethical aspects of immortality and the role of faith, he mentioned the evidence for survival after death provided through psychical research. He paid tribute to Dr. Hamilton:

for the efforts he has made and is making along this line of thought and discovery. Whatever criticism may be made of his work, no one can even attempt to deny the truth of the wonderful phenomena which have come under his observation. We know our man, and we know that he is in this work as a student and investigator, and we can have nothing but admiration and praise for him (Swan 1930, 8).

As a member of the executive of the Canadian Medical Association, Dr. Hamilton played a key role in bringing the convention of the prestigious British Medical Association to Winnipeg in 1930. The Convention Programme Committee subsequently convinced him to set up a display of his photographs and to address a luncheon meeting of more than 500 delegates on the topic of psychical research (Hamilton 1977, xxiv).<sup>8</sup>

The independent observations of two medical colleagues, Dr. Alexander Murray Campbell (1876-1965) and Dr. Rennie Swan, attest to the fact that authentic telekinetic activity was observed in Winnipeg. Dr. Campbell attended at least eight seances in the Hamilton home during 1932 and 1933.<sup>9</sup> About that time, he also held sittings in his own home. The Campbell children confirmed that their father was convinced of the authenticity of the table levitations and trumpet movements witnessed.<sup>10</sup> At one seance above the Campbell garage, Reverend John Sutherland Bonnell (1893-1992), later a prominent New York preacher and theologian, tried with Dr. Swan to pull down from the ceiling the table that had levitated with its legs pointing downward.<sup>11</sup>

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## **PRIME MINISTER MACKENZIE KING:**

Though William Lyon Mackenzie King (1874-1950), Prime Minister of Canada from 1921-30 and 1935-48, did not observe the phenomena of the Hamilton seance room, he did in August 1933, while leader of the official opposition, visit the Hamiltons. Later, he recorded in his diary that the experiments are "amazing beyond all words":

The afternoon was quite the most remarkable one . . . I have had in my life . . . I believe absolutely in all that Hamilton and his wife and daughter have told me . . . their children will go on, beginning with this knowledge, and in this way, what is in doubt now will become accepted belief soon. The scriptures will take on new and literal and clearer meaning; the world itself will evolve to a higher plane. One can see a new significance in the second coming and its nearness . . .<sup>12</sup>

## **PRECAUTIONS TO PRECLUDE FRAUD:**

From the start of their investigations, the Hamiltons took measures to preclude the possibility of fraud. At seances at which the trance directors predicted that a teleplasm would be photographed, additional precautions were taken. The seance room was locked and sealed at the end of the previous sitting and the keys given to sitters who did not reside in the Hamilton home. The medium was examined prior to the sitting, and all sitters and the medium held hands so that allegedly no person had free use of his or her hands to fraudulently produce the effects that were photographed. The sitting was held in total darkness. One or more note-takers recorded the verbal proceedings by shorthand and/or longhand, and photographs were taken. A special scrutineer was invited to observe the proceedings, and guards were stationed outside the seance room.

Occasionally, Dr. Hamilton requested that lawyer Isaac Pitblado, KC, act as scrutineer at special experiments. In 1926, Isaac and his wife May Edith Pitblado (1869-1950) had witnessed the "Margery" mediumship, both in their home and at the Hamiltons. The most remarkable experiment observed by Pitblado was the "Lucy" teleplasm photographed on 10 March 1930.<sup>13</sup> "Lucy" was about the size of a young girl, much larger than the majority of the teleplasms. Two days later, Pitblado wrote and signed an eleven-page handwritten statement about the precautionary procedures taken to preclude the possibility of fraud, including the search of the seance room, mediums, and male sitters, and the examination and development of the photographic films and plates. Pitblado concluded:

5. I am convinced that the phenomenon of the figure seated on the chair to the left of the medium was genuinely produced without the aid of any known physical or material means, process or apparatus, and that there was no possibility of any 'fake' or trickery.<sup>14</sup>

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## **AUTHENTICITY OF THE HAMILTON COLLECTION:**

Margaret Hamilton Bach helped organize and in 1980 deposited the records of her parents' research with the Department of Archives and Special Collections of the University of Manitoba Libraries. Included are seance and research notes, attendance registers, photographs, lantern slides, glass plate negatives, affidavits, and correspondence (MSS 14). Margaret was also instrumental in establishing, with financial assistance from family and friends, the T.G. Hamilton Research Grant Program, to promote study of the Hamilton research and to provide for preservation of the collection.

The collection's organization and complexity, the many cross-references, even the signs of the Hamiltons' heavy use of the records to compile and publish two books and many articles, demonstrate its authenticity.

## **NO PHOTOGRAPHIC FRAUD OR TRICKERY:**

Careful examination has not revealed any photographic fraud with respect to the research. The photographic equipment was installed at one end of the seance room. It included eleven cameras and three flash light devices that Dr. Hamilton was able to explode remotely with a push button apparatus.<sup>15</sup>

Photographs of teleplasms were often taken, almost simultaneously, from more than one angle. The sitting held on 27 June 1932 resulted in photographs of the second "Arthur Conan Doyle" teleplasm taken from two different angles.<sup>16</sup> The "Lucy" teleplasm also illustrates this point.<sup>17</sup>

Some photographs show that the teleplasms cast a shadow within the room. Other photographs in timed, sequential series show the teleplasm being retracted into the body of the medium. Except in the earliest years of the research, the photographs were, in the case of seances at which special phenomena were to be photographed, developed in Glen Hamilton's dark room immediately after the seance. Dr. Hamilton took with him into the darkroom one or more of the scrutineers or other researchers (usually a medical colleague) to demonstrate that the photographic plates were not switched or otherwise altered. Finally, guests who attended the seances were encouraged to bring their own photographic equipment, and several of these independent photographs survive. For example, on 18 August 1929, Mrs. William Cannon, wife of Judge Cannon, of New York used a movie camera to photograph a teleplasm as it emerged from Mary Marshall's mouth.<sup>18</sup>

There can be no doubt that the table levitations did physically occur and that the teleplasms did temporarily exist within the three-dimensional reality of the seance room, to be photographed in relation to the sitters and seance room background.

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## **INTEGRITY OF THE HAMILTON FAMILY AND OTHER RESEARCHERS:**

The personal and professional integrity of the Hamilton family is beyond reproach. Having spoken with many individuals who knew Glen Hamilton personally or knew of him through their parents, the impression formed is that he was a saint in the Winnipeg community in which he lived, practiced medicine, and carried out his psychic investigations. He was considered a true Christian, one with a big heart, unable at times to send out the invoices for the operations he had performed. Many individuals whom Dr. Hamilton brought into this world have attested to the fine medical care their families received and the house calls he made to stitch up a cut lip, to mend a broken arm, or to attend a dying father. Without exception, everyone has attested to his honesty and integrity.

No one has suggested that the Hamiltons were a party to any fraud that might have occurred in their experimental room. After Dr. Hamilton's death in April 1935, Dr. Bruce Chown wrote as part of his appreciation published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*:

What shall I say of this man, this elder, this excellent physician, this soul honest and unaffected, and friendly, enduring and courageous? . . . From table rappings (sic) he passed to observations on the apparent animation of dead things, to trance speech and writing, to the photography of masses extruded from the bodies of mediums, masses at first amorphous, later moulded into the likeness of known dead. These phenomena were all genuine (Chown 1935, 710-11).

Also beyond reproach is the integrity of the other researchers who attended the sittings. For example, Bruce Chown was Glen Hamilton's primary co-experimenter from 1931 until 1935. With his wife Gladys Chown, Dr. Chown participated in at least 114 seances,<sup>19</sup> including the 6 March 1932 sitting while Dr. Hamilton was away on business. After Glen Hamilton's death, Bruce Chown took over as head of the group for 41 seances in two series held during 1935 and 1936, and Gladys Chown acted as the note-taker at the 39 seances she attended. Shortly after his association with the experiments, Bruce Chown was embarked on a career in medical research that brought him international recognition. For his scientific research into the nature of blood group incompatibilities, especially his role in the fight to control the Rh condition, Dr. Chown received many honorary degrees and awards, among which appointment as an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1967. In a posthumous tribute, Jon Gerrard wrote that Bruce Chown was a "superb diagnostician" who "became known locally as the professor of 'rareology' because of his ability to identify unusual conditions" (Gerrard 1989, 345). There can be no doubt that in his study of psychical research the teleplasms presented "unusual conditions."

## **RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHERS:**

The majority of the individuals connected with the Hamilton research were either born in Scotland or were the children of Scottish parents. With the exception of Bruce Chown who was agnostic in his later life, the Hamiltons, their co-experimenters, the mediums, and the other witnesses were devout adherents of the Protestant religion. They were dedicated to the life of the parishes in which

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they communed.

The majority believed, almost certainly, in the existence of a beneficent Creator and an eternal afterlife. Interestingly, by 1933 Dr. Hamilton had rejected the idea of an anthropomorphic God.<sup>20</sup>

## **PSYCHIC RESEARCH AND BELIEF IN PERSONAL IMMORTALITY:**

Canadian Pacific Railway lawyer H.A.V. Green was the first member of the group to publicly state his belief in the survival hypothesis. In November 1928, in a letter published in the *Manitoba Free Press*, Green wrote that:

the energy which produces and animates the ectoplasm of the physicist, is directed by the continuing personalities of those whom the materialist is accustomed to think of as dead. The only connection of ectoplasm with the soul is in the belief of spiritists that souls, i.e., immortal personalities, no longer clothed in earthly bodies, can manipulate a form of matter, i.e., ectoplasm, so as to give proof of the continuity of the existence of those souls after bodily death.<sup>21</sup>

After Mr. Green died, Margaret Hamilton Bach wrote that he "was a fearless champion of the truths discovered by psychical research."<sup>22</sup>

As the son of a Presbyterian minister, Isaac Pitblado was raised to believe in personal immortality and considered the psychical phenomena he witnessed to be evidence of life after death. After the death of his wife, Isaac wrote, in his card to Lillian Hamilton acknowledging her expression of sympathy, that "It is a great comfort to believe in personal immortality as you & I do."<sup>23</sup>

## **PHYSICAL PHENOMENA AS EVIDENCE OF LIFE AFTER DEATH:**

While most of the individuals associated with the research were convinced that the physical phenomena provided conclusive evidence of a continued existence in an afterlife state, others maintained that the human mind and body possessed capabilities that, though not yet understood, were able to produce these strange phenomena. Indeed, Dr. Hamilton was slow to reach and make public his conclusion that the survival hypothesis was the only theory capable of explaining all of the phenomena witnessed. Margaret Hamilton Bach dates her father's public statement of his conclusion to his final public lecture, early in November 1934,<sup>24</sup> to a packed house in Winnipeg's Dominion Theatre:

That night he finally stated that on the basis of the phenomena witnessed and recorded, plus the "group" mediumship, and the intentional activities set in motion by the post-mortem group - the only hypothesis that could account for all these interlocked manifestations was the spiritistic hypothesis (Rodin, Kerr, and Key 1990, 124).

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Dr. Hamilton was finally convinced, not by the table levitations and teleplasms themselves, rather by the ongoing intentional activities of the discarnate trance personalities that manifested in a consistent and corroborating manner over a period of almost fifteen years.

After the passing of Glen Hamilton, Professor W.T. Allison wrote that those ectoplasmic portraits are

regarded by some students of this subject as the best scientific evidence we have for the survival of the soul after death. . . . And the very fact that they have been accepted as genuine is in itself the finest testimonial to Dr. Hamilton's reputation for absolute integrity. . . Dr. Hamilton was . . . a loyal member of the Christian church and aimed to build one more buttress for the faith in God and immortality.<sup>25</sup>

Regardless of whether an individual witness believed that the group was observing some form of abnormal psychology or was in contact with personalities who had survived death, no one who attended the seances or knew the individuals involved has dared to impugn their personal integrity by suggesting that they were a party to fraud. Indeed, no factual allegation of fraud regarding these phenomena was ever made.

## **SO WHAT ARE MY CONCLUSIONS?:**

After more than fifteen years of studying the Hamilton research, what are my conclusions?

To begin, there is strong evidence that the table movements witnessed and the full levitations photographed between 1921 and 1927 are genuine examples of physical psychic phenomena. That psychokinesis is possible is supported by the conclusion of Renée Haynes, editor from 1970 to 1981 for the Society for Psychical Research, who wrote in her centenary history of that organization: "For myself--I can speak for no others--the occurrence of psychokinesis has been established, both by the careful observation and recording of spontaneous cases when they erupt, and by experimental work" (Haynes 1982, 168).

Dr. Hamilton died in 1935. At this date, it is impossible to know with certainty whether the teleplasms photographed in his seance room were produced through genuine or fraudulent means. Though it would be most expedient, and certainly most popular among the scientific establishment, to dismiss these phenomena as having been fraudulently produced, I cannot do so. Notwithstanding the significant criticism that the experiments were conducted under the cloak of darkness, making careful control and observation difficult, I find it difficult to believe that the teleplasms could have been faked and the researchers duped in more than 50 experiments.

The Hamiltons and their co-experimenters were well-educated and highly respected professionals. There is no indication of malice on the part of any of them, nor do I believe that there was any intent to purposely mislead. And contrary to popular perception about those who study Spiritualism and psychical research, the Hamiltons and their associates were not a bunch of sentimental old

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fools. Nor were they mothers and widows so overwhelmed by grief and longing for contact with their dearly departed that they would accept any and all evidence. In fact, some of the early teleplasmic evidence is so coarse, even grotesque, as to give every reason for the participants to walk away from study of it.

The researchers consistently maintained that their experiments were conducted in such a manner as to preclude the possibility of fraud. The records reveal the measures and precautions taken in this regard. Long after Dr. Hamilton's death, his family, and Dr. Chown and others, maintained that all of the psychic phenomena produced were genuine. Indeed, there is no factual evidence to suggest that the teleplasms were fraudulent.

The main problem in accepting the phenomena as genuine is that the predominant attitude among parapsychologists does not support the possibility that a medium's body is capable of producing ectoplasm except through fraudulent means. Whereas there is general consensus about the possibility of mental telepathy and psychokinesis (Berger and Berger 1991, 341), the attitude towards ectoplasm is that it is not worthy of study: too many well-known mediums, once thought to have been genuine, have been exposed while producing ectoplasm through fraudulent means, such as regurgitation or concealing the required materials about their body.

To conclude that the Hamilton teleplasms must be fraudulent on the *a priori* ground that the human body is incapable of producing such extrusions would be foolish. Such a conclusion would go against the testimony of the well-educated and highly respected men and women, including medical doctors, scientists, engineers, lawyers, and clergymen, who witnessed the phenomena and attested to their authenticity.

And if indeed the phenomena were faked, obviously we need not expect an easy answer as to how the trickery was achieved, given that Glen Hamilton, Bruce and Gladys Chown, Isaac Pitblado, and the other witnesses were not able to detect and report it.

Clearly, the fakery need not, and indeed could not, have been achieved through a single means with respect to all 72 ectoplasms. Careful study of the photographic evidence proves that regurgitation alone could not have accounted for the ectoplasms photographed at a distance from the medium's body, nor for those that bore images resembling the faces of the known dead. The experiments in which the medium's body was bathed and reclothed before commencing prove that it was not simply a matter of the medium concealing the required materials in her clothing or on her person.

To sustain the level of fraud required to produce 72 ectoplasms, including several fairly large ones, over six years would have involved collusion between one of the mediums and at least one of the regular sitters or researchers. So which of the participants would have risked personal reputation and that of the group to perpetrate such a fraud?

In order to expedite the whole affair, some skeptics have even suggested that the research was an elaborate hoax that included all of the participants and indeed a large number of well-known and prominent witnesses. This theory argues that

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the photographs were all staged. The idea of such a plot that would have put at risk the careers of those involved is completely absurd. All of the researchers went to their graves convinced, it would seem, of the genuineness of the phenomena. Many believed that the phenomena provided conclusive evidence that an afterlife existence awaited them. The interrelationships between the records in the Hamilton collection and the long period of years over which they were created and used demonstrates the sincerity and interest of the researchers and their belief in the importance of the research.

So, what is my conclusion with respect to the teleplasms photographed by Dr. Hamilton?

To quote American psychologist and psychical researcher William James (1842-1910), "If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, you must not seek to show that no crows are, it is enough if you prove the single crow to be white" (Haynes 1982, 83). James believed that he had found his white crow in the mediumship of Mrs. Leonora E. Piper (1857-1950).

As a researcher, the question I must ask is whether it is possible that the Marshall mediumship and the teleplasms produced were genuine. Though I cannot prove it, I have with great difficulty come to the conclusion that the Marshall teleplasms may well have been genuine, the real McCoy. In fact, I will go so far as to state that if the ectoplasmic phenomena photographed under the scrutiny of Glen Hamilton and associates were not genuine, then I do not believe that there exists such a thing as ectoplasm.

And, if the teleplasms photographed were genuine, then I concur with the Hamiltons' conclusion that when considered together the physical phenomena and intentional actions by trance personalities provide strong evidence for survival of human consciousness.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL DATA AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

Walter Meyer zu Erpen, BA, MAS, trained as an archivist, worked as a manager in the British Columbia Archives for many years, and is now an archives and records management consultant. In 1991, he founded the Survival Research Institute of Canada, of which organization he is currently President. In May 2000, the Institute was incorporated by federal letters patent. It is a charitable organization for the advancement of education with respect to survival of human consciousness after death.

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## **MAIN ARCHIVAL SOURCES:**

Archival collections in the University of Manitoba Libraries Department of Archives and Special Collections: MSS 14 (Hamilton), MSS 17 (Chown), MSS 48 (Pitblado).

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## ENDNOTES:

1. From Hamilton 1977, 214: "A subtle living matter present in the body of a medium, and which is capable of assuming various semi-solid or solid states for a brief time, which can be, and have been felt, and photographed."
2. The words "apparently", "allegedly," and similar qualifiers that denote uncertainty about the possibility of genuine physical phenomena or spirit communication, or the identity of a specific communicator, are hereafter omitted from this paper.
3. For example, MSS 14, PC 12, box 1, slide 20.
4. MSS 14, PC 12, box 1, slides 24 and 25.
5. MSS 14, PC 12, box 1, slide 26.
6. MSS 14, PC 12, box 1, slides 9a, 8b and 9b.
7. Among his many achievements, Bruce Chown, BA, MD, Hon. DSc, Hon. LLD, MC, OC, was Superintendent of the Winnipeg Children's Hospital and Chairman of the Department of Paediatrics in the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Medicine.
8. "Hobbies Exhibit," *Manitoba Medical Bulletin*, no. 104 (April 1930): 59.
9. MSS 14, box 8, folder 3.
10. Telephone conversations during 1991 with Mrs. Joan Isabel Mackie and with provincial Medical Health Officer Dr. Alexander Arthur Campbell.
11. Telephone conversation with David Rennie Swan, 29 May 1991.
12. MSS 14, box 5, folder 15.
13. MSS 14, PC 12, box 1, slides 28b and 28d.
14. MSS 14, box 16, folder 2.
15. MSS 14, PC 12, box 1, slide 5.
16. MSS 14, PC 12, box 1, slides 48a and 48b.
17. MSS 14, PC 12, box 1, slides 28b and 28d.
18. MSS 14, PC 12, box 1, slide 20g.
19. See attendance registers in MSS 14, box 8, folders 3 and 4, for 2 October 1930 through 13 February 1935.
20. MSS 14, box 5, folder 1, Dr. T. Glen Hamilton to Mrs. J.A. Fisher, 7 April 1933.
21. HAVG, *Manitoba Free Press*, 5 December 1928, p. 15. The first Hamilton teleplasm had been photographed on 5 August 1928.
22. MSS 14, box 6, folder 15, letter from Margaret Hamilton Bach to Maurice Barbanell, 12 June 1979.
23. MSS 14, box 5, folder 8, Isaac Pitblado to Mrs. Lillian M. Hamilton, postmarked 25 November 1950.
24. "Aims and Methods of Psychic Research: Dr. T. Glen Hamilton Makes Plea for Sympathetic Treatment of Psychic Study in Illustrated Address," *The Elmwood Herald*, 8 November 1934, p. 1.
25. William Talbot Allison, "Dr. Glen Hamilton, Psychic Researcher," *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 16 April 1935, p. 13.