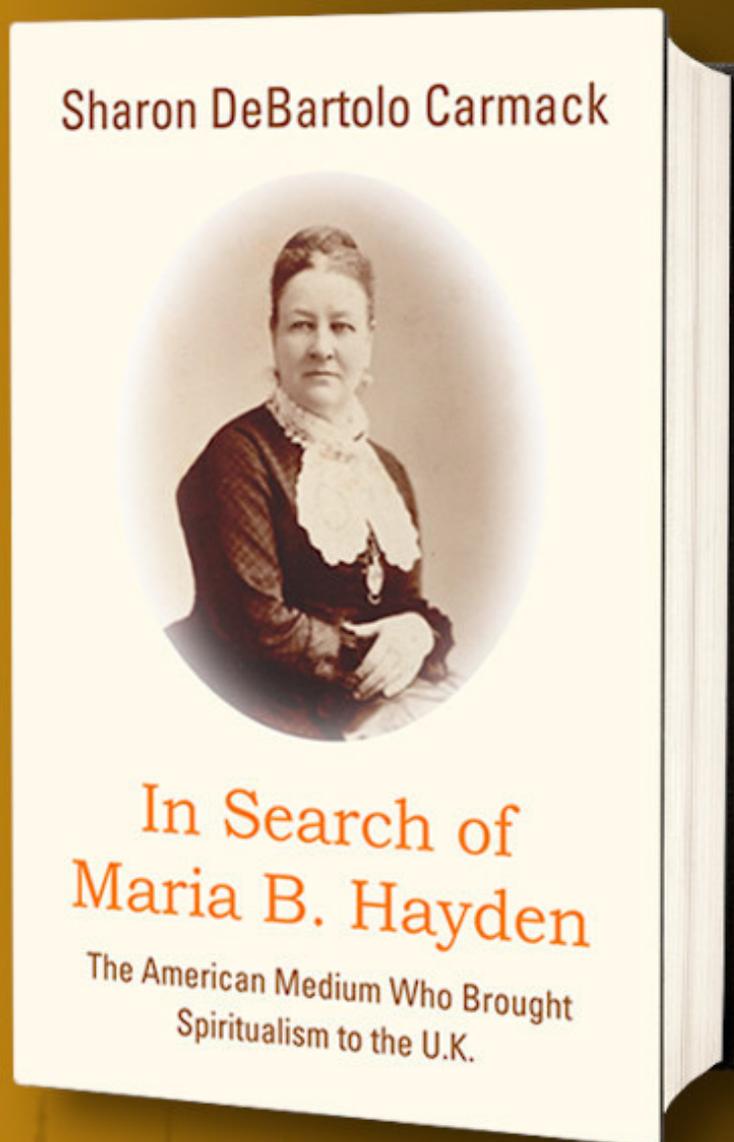


A Conversation with
Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, DSNU
"Spirit Biographer" and author of
*In Search of Maria B. Hayden:
The American Medium Who Brought
Spiritualism to the U.K.*



Spirit Medium
Healing Medium
Medical Doctor



A biography of
Maria B. Hayden
and her pioneering careers in
Spiritualism and medicine.

1) HOW DID YOU COME TO THE DECISION TO WRITE A BOOK ON MARIA B. HAYDEN?

It was all due to a short, hardly nothing of a paragraph in the SD1 course about the Spiritualist pioneers. Maria's small bio didn't include a photograph or even her birth or death years. Even in the new TPS1 course, she gets little attention for what is a significant contribution to Spiritualism. And I'm afraid I have to take exception to this statement: "The press and clergy were very antagonistic towards her but in spite of this she succeeded in demonstrating spirit return." That's not entirely true. Equally as many of the press and clergy were approving and supportive of her, which gave her the strength to continue with her mission and succeed in demonstrating spirit return.

But the genealogist in me couldn't understand why so little was known about her. So I started researching her. What I found online merely regurgitated a few paragraphs about her year in England. I turned to original, historical sources, such as vital records, censuses, and newspapers, and then her life began to unfold for me.

I eventually wrote a 12,000-word thesis on Maria for my DSNU award, but even then, I knew there was more. While the book is admittedly a hefty 600 pages, it's heavily illustrated and heavily documented. I found accounts of at least thirty of Maria's séances, plus I reproduced her medical articles, and included genealogies of her family and her husband, William's. And then there's the love story between Maria and William.

2) WHAT IMPORTANCE DOES HISTORY HAVE FOR US AS SPIRITUALISTS?

There is a quote I used in one of my family history books many years ago that I think is relevant here. Unfortunately, the author is unknown:

To come of fine lineage is not a matter for personal pride or boastfulness, since the inheritor has had nothing to do with the value of that inheritance. But to live up to that lineage, to its traditions, its standards, its ideals; to hand it down to others, unlowered and unmarred—that is something on which worthy descendants of worthy ancestors may well congratulate themselves.

We may not be related by blood to our Spiritualist antecedents, but we are in fact their descendants. We do have a fine Spiritualist lineage, and it's up to us to study it, so we can "live up to that lineage, to its traditions, its standards, [and] its ideals," and "hand it down to others, unlowered and unmarred."

3) HOW HAS YOUR OWN MEDIUMSHIP DEVELOPMENT IMPACTED THE WRITING OF MARIA'S STORY?

As I say in the introduction to *In Search of Maria B. Hayden*, I think it's because I'm a Spiritualist medium that I was able to approach her story with understanding and empathy, as well as with objectivity. I was also able to analyze her séances and explain why some didn't go so well. I wasn't trying to make excuses for her, but Spiritualists today have a greater understanding of spirit communication than she and her contemporaries had in their day. Spirit communication was all new to them. They had no idea how it worked, that no medium is 100 percent accurate, or why things might go wrong.

For example, one of the first séances Maria held when she went to England was a total bust. Her evidence was almost completely off. But no one took into account that she had recently miscarried and was close to death after a month-long voyage of unrelenting seasickness. Today, a medium would never dream of doing a sitting or public demonstration right after something like that. Small wonder that this séance was a failure.

4) DO YOU FEEL THAT COMPILING MARIA'S STORY HAS HAD AN IMPACT ON YOUR CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT AS A MEDIUM?

To a great degree, I believe my development was in large part about writing Maria's story. I actually feel my traditional mediumship journey was completed—if such a thing is possible—with that book. My development as a medium has changed and is now focused as a biographer with mediumistic abilities. One person typed in the chat when I was a guest on "[Audience with the President](#)" recently that *I* was a pioneer. That surprised me, but who knows? I am taking my mediumship development in an entirely different and new direction. I'm moving into an uncharted and innovative category of mediumship I call "spirit biography." Like in spirit art, a spirit artist connects mediumistically with a spirit communicator to draw that person's likeness. I'm a spirit biographer who connects mediumistically with people in spirit to research and write their biographies. Certainly while researching and writing Maria's book, I was aware of the guidance she and her husband William gave me, and I continually asked them for guidance.

5) DO YOU SEE WRITING AND RESEARCHING AS AN ASPECT OF MEDIUMSHIP?

Absolutely! What I've come to understand is that there are many ways to serve spirit. When I first started development, I thought the only ways to serve spirit were to do private sittings, demonstrations, and/or healing. In researching and writing Maria's story, I realized I was serving spirit in another way by sharing her life story.

So I feel now as if I've come full circle. In my 30-plus-year career as a Certified Genealogist, I've specialized in writing ancestors' stories, putting their lives into historical perspective, and preserving their lives in print. But it wasn't until my journey into developing mediumship that I understood my calling more clearly and on a deeper level, as well as how actively the spirit world can work through me in my biographical research and writing. For me, healing mediumship also comes from telling and preserving their life stories, from "spirit biography."

There's a wonderful article by Judith Rich titled "[Healing the Wounds of Your Ancestors](#)." She writes

As you step to the front of the line in your ancestry, the energy they embodied has been passed on and is now expressing as you and those of your current generation in the lineage. As you transform, the energy of the entire lineage preceding you is transformed, for it is all happening now through you, as you. You are the one who can heal old wounds for your entire lineage, forgive old enemies, shift conditioning and beliefs, release pain that has held preceding generations captive for centuries.

This is the gift you bring them, for as they departed, they left behind the residue of their unfinished business, passed down through the ages, held in place by the unspoken family agreement to perpetuate it—that is, up until now. And now it's your turn. Bringing completion to prior generations and setting up what happens for future generations now depends on you.

In my opinion, healing mediumship extends far beyond the traditional way we've viewed it. Writing the life stories of those who have gone before us and being their voice is, in a strong sense, another aspect of healing mediumship.

6) WHAT IMPACT DO YOU HOPE TO LEAVE TO OTHERS BY CREATING THIS BOOK?

I hope Maria's story and legacy will be an inspiration for others as it has been for me. I wanted to write her definitive biography, and I believe I accomplished that. And I hope that in the process of leaving her story, I have filled a gap and left a mark on Spiritualist history.



Sharon DeBartolo Carmack is a 30-plus-year veteran Certified Genealogist with a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Nonfiction Writing, a Certificate from the SNUi in Speaking and Demonstrating, and an Advanced Academic Diploma from the SNU. She is the author of twenty-four books, including her newest one, *In Search of Maria B. Hayden: The American Medium Who Brought Spiritualism to the U.K.*, which is available on all Amazon marketplaces. Sharon lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, and she is the SNUi's USA National Representative. She can be reached at sdcarmack@gmail.com and through her website MariaBHayden.net.