

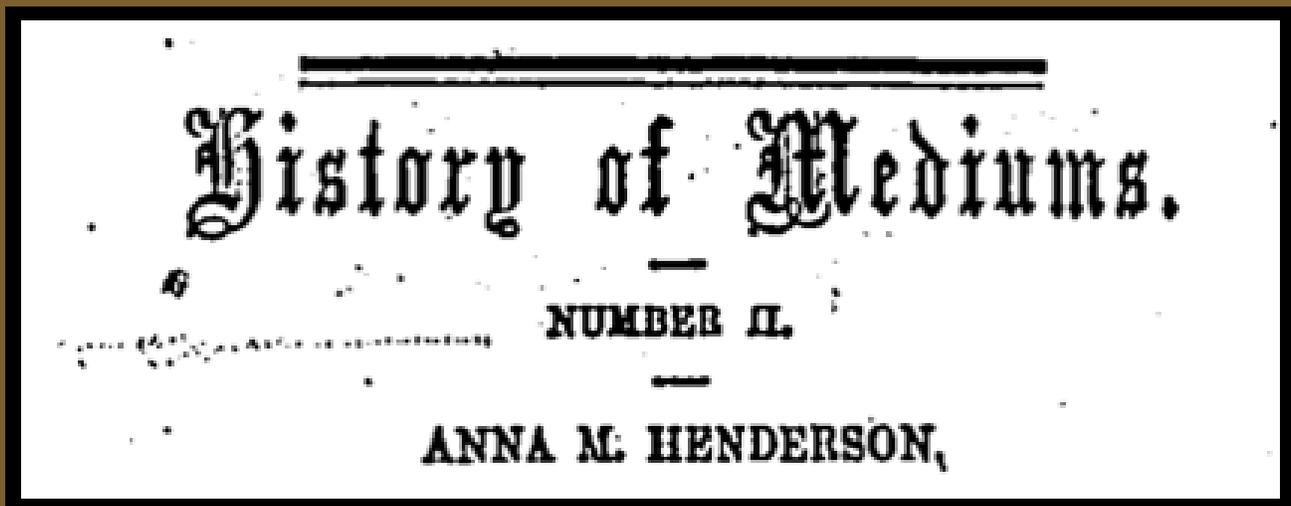
Pioneer of the Month

Anna M. Henderson



Once again, we bring you another little-known pioneer I discovered while researching the biography of Maria B. Hayden, M.D. This profile on Anna M. Henderson comes from the 5 June 1858 issue of Banner of Light, page 7, and was written by Dr. Asaph Bemis Child. What's interesting about her profile is she wrote a letter to the editors in the next issue to correct a misstatement that she did not collect a fee. Her justification for charging for her services is one all mediums can relate to. I have annotated the text with additional information from my research.

—Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, MFA, DSNU



Mrs. Henderson[1] was born in Newton, Ct. [Connecticut], in 1830; brought up in the enjoyment of country life, with the many advantages it affords for the free unfolding and growth of the soul. From her earliest recollections, [she] has been actively industrious, and subjected to the restraints of strict family discipline. Her parents were not rich in the things of this world, but gained an honest living by honest labor. She was educated in the faith of popular religious creeds, but has ever had intuitive persuasions *not* in accordance with them. During the period of her childhood [she] has experienced severe mental afflictions. At the age of fourteen, [she] had distinct perception of spirit forms. On one occasion, after she had retired alone to rest in her chamber, in the stillness and darkness of the night, in a perfect wakeful state, she saw distinctly before her the spirit of a departed friend, dressed in white garments.

[1] Women were sometimes addressed as "Mrs." as a honorific title, even though they were single. If Anna was married or widowed, her name would appear as "Mrs." followed by the husband's name. "Mrs." was rarely used before a woman's name. Unfortunately, I could not find any additional information about Anna M. Henderson.

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And ever after this vision, she had a sure conviction that the spirits of departed friends were constantly around and watching over her. [She] was susceptible to the influence of magnetism, and has many times been rendered perfectly unconscious by this influence.

At the age of twenty-one, seven years since, she attended the first circle for spiritual manifestations, when she received the following communication, by raps:—"You are a medium. Be submissive to the will of God; a great work is before you for you to do." She felt a thrill of happiness, such as she never felt before; felt a deep and earnest interest in the subject, that she could not describe or resist. She felt drawn by an unseen power to devote her time, her thoughts, and her whole soul, to this new and seemingly strange influence. Thus, for a few months, she continued constantly to think, talk, and attend meetings upon the subject, until she became developed, a trance medium.

After a few trances, [she] was enabled to speak, and became clairvoyant. About one year subsequent to this, [she] was developed a powerful tipping medium,[2] which power lasted but a few months, and then ceased. Then lights and spirit forms through her medium powers were seen distinctly in darkened rooms. Soon after this, [she] was developed a writing and impressional medium; many of the communications through her under this development were published in the *Christian Spiritualist*, in 1853. Immediately following this development came the psychometrical, which, with impressional, trance, writing and clairvoyance, have continued with increasing power to the present time.

In the fall of 1855, Mrs. H. received imperative spirit directions to appear before the public as a trance lecturer. These directions she obeyed at first with great hesitancy and reluctance. Since her first public lecture, she had devoted her whole time and effort to spirit direction, and had given many hundred public lectures in a trance state. The subject of her lectures has always, when the audience have wished to do so, been chosen by a committee appointed for that purpose, on the occasion. And for the last year she has not failed to answer any question propounded by any person in the audience. On one occasion, by her own earnest request, she was permitted to speak in a prison in Connecticut, from the words, "Neither do I condemn thee." After this lecture, which deeply affected the poor prisoners, she went in amongst them, and they flocked and huddled like thirsty souls gasping for the living waters, around her. She shook hands with them all, and carried water to them in the name of Jesus. Most of them wept at the words of true affection spoken to them. As she parted with them, with her heartfelt words of love left in their hearts, she felt their heart expression of silent utterance: "*Come, come to us again.*"

[2] Table tipping.

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I believe I speak the truth, in saying that Mrs. Henderson would rather speak to a congregation of prisoners, than to any congregation on earth.

Mrs. Henderson demands for her lectures neither money or price, though compensation is generally given her. She wants bread to eat, and simple plain garments to wear; this is all that she will take.... [One of her poems and lectures is then published in her profile.]

As a public trance speaker, Mrs. Henderson possess superior abilities. Her manner is pleasing, her voice is distinct and agreeable, her language is plain but significant. Her affectional nature predominates; she appeals to the heart more than the head. There is a peculiar expression of clearness in her lectures, which makes them adapted to the perfect understanding of all. The power she possesses of answering any question, in a satisfactory manner, before a public audience, is very extraordinary and wonderful. Mrs. H. is deservedly a popular trance lecturer. Large congregations have assembled on all occasions when she has spoken, and have listened with deep interest to the words of affection and love spoken through her lips.



In the following issue of the *Banner of Light* on 12 June 1858, pages 4 and 5, Anna M. Henderson sent a letter to the editor correcting some items in her profile:

Boston, June 3, 1858

To the Editors of the Banner:—

Sirs—Seeing a statement in the history of my mediumship, published in the last issue of the *Banner*, that might give a wrong impression to its numerous readers, with your permission I will improve the earliest opportunity to correct it.

The statement is this: — “Mrs. Henderson demands for her lectures neither money or price, though compensation is generally given her.” It is true, during the first year of my labors, when I was engaged in lecturing mostly in country villages, I made no demand—that is, I had no set price—and many times left my home with barely enough of the needful to bear me to my place of destination, leaving it altogether to my guardians, and the good friends that I visited, to furnish means of my return home. My experience has taught me that it costs a medium just as much to ride in a railroad car as it does any other person, and while I was *giving* my labors, the word ever came from the invisibles, “Be of good cheer, for in due time you shall reap, if you faint not.”

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I can state many instances where I have gone to different places, and that, too, in answer to urgent invitations from friends residing in these places, and in return sometimes I would receive a dollar^[3]—many a time not as much—and if it was my good fortune to receive four or five dollars, I felt greatly encouraged.

Sometimes I have had calls after this form: “Come and speak to us; we are poor and cannot promise you remuneration, but will give you board while with us.”

Others would say, “We do not believe in paying mediums; this is a free gospel, and we must not turn it into merchandise.” And so I went, from time to time; but I found this would not feed and clothe me and mine, or pay for the wear and tear of body and soul; and I find mediums, as well as others, are generally too tangible and material to live on faith, or by absorption. And now I [unreadable] that if my organism can be used by those who have [unreadable] to a higher condition, to give spiritual food to my fellow men, and my time is occupied, and my nervous system taxed, then every reasonable person will justify me in demanding an equivalent. I would not rob others, but I am giving my life and strength to this work, and I only ask the necessaries of life in return; and these I do ask, for I cannot live without them....

And now, having corrected the mistake, and stated my motives for demanding compensation for my labors, I trust I shall be understood, at least by the friends of Spiritualism.

With a heart warm and willing to aid in this great work, in my humble way, for the good of humanity,

I am, very cordially yours,

ANNA M. HENDERSON.

[3] A U.S. dollar in 1858 equals about \$30 U.S. dollars today.