

The Fox Sisters

March 31 is celebrated by many Spiritualists around the world to mark the anniversary of the beginning of modern Spiritualism.

Two young girls Kate and Maggie Fox, aged 12 and 13, living in Hydesville, New York were the catalyst needed to start a movement that came to be called 'a Religion', 'a Philosophy', and for many 'a Way of Life'.

One March evening in 1848 after the Fox family retired for the evening, strange noises woke them up. There were sounds of furniture moving followed by "Raps, Booms, and Cracking" so bad it was reported that the cottage actually shook.

When the family got up and searched for the source of the noise, they couldn't find anything. The next night the noises returned and they kept returning for over a week. By the time they went to bed on March 31, 1848 the family was exhausted. The two girls had moved their bed into their parent's bedroom and it wasn't long before the rapping started again. This time more insistent than before. Young Kate fearlessly confronted the noise. She snapped her fingers and asked the noise to answer. To her parents amazement, Kate received an answer. After Mrs Fox gained some control she asked the noise to rap 10 times...it did. She then asked it to tap out the ages, in succession, of her six children... again it did.

For Mrs Fox, the communication was a miracle. She rushed out that very night to tell her neighbours about the miracle. The following statement is the account Mrs Fox gave of what happened that night:

"It was very early when we went to bed on this night – hardly dark. I had been so broken of rest I was almost sick – I had just lain down when it commenced as usual – the children, who slept in the other bed in the room, heard the rapping, and tried to make similar sounds by snapping their fingers.

My youngest child, Cathie, said: 'Mr Splitfoot, do as I do', clapping her hands. The sound instantly followed her with the same number of raps. When she stopped, the sound ceased for a short time.

The Margaretta said in sport: "Now do just as I do. Count one, two, three, four, striking one hand against the other at the same time" – and the raps came as before. She was afraid to repeat them.

I then thought I could put a test that no one in my place could answer. I asked the 'noise' to rap my different children's ages in succession.

Instantly, each one of my children's ages was given correctly, passing between them sufficiently long enough to individualise them until the seventh – at which a longer pause was made, and then three more emphatic raps were given, corresponding to the age of the little one that died, which was my youngest child.

I then asked: "Is this a human being that answers my questions correctly?" There was no rap. I asked: "Is it a Spirit? If it is, make two raps." Two sounds were given as soon as the request was made."

That ends Mrs Fox's account of what happened that night. Following the Fox Sisters, Spiritualism spread very quickly. By 1853, there was no less than 30,000 mediums, both professional and amateur in the United States. By the end of the 1850s, millions of people had accepted Spiritualism's central belief – "That the human spirit survives death and can communicate with the living"...