

American Society for Psychical Research

The American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) is the oldest parapsychological organization in the United States. Organized in 1884, it has been through a number of changes and was particularly active in the 1960s under the leadership of psychologist Gardner Murphy. For some years it has been practically defunct and its assets are being run down.

Overview

The American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) often is assumed to be not only a sister organization of the [Society for Psychical Research](#) (SPR) but its American equivalent. As historian Andreas Sommer has observed,¹ this is misleading, because from the start the ASPR has followed its own course. At first hyper-critical, at a later stage it became what some members regarded as overly credulous of psychic phenomena. For much of its history, the ASPR has been dominated by one or two individuals, unlike the SPR, which from the beginning was decentralized and held no corporate views. Nor, despite tracing its origins to 1884, has the ASPR been in continuous existence since that date. Rather, it has functioned as a series of discrete entities, at first independent, then a section of the SPR, then part of another organization. After becoming independent once again, it divided along ideological lines, before a 'palace revolution' allowed for reunification.

Over the years, ASPR personnel have been involved in many significant investigations, but in recent decades, the Society has been in decline and is now effectively defunct. Its journal has not been issued since 2004. Its extensive library and archives reportedly were moved into storage and in 2019, the New York City townhouse from which it has operated since 1966 was put up for sale.² The ASPR was forced to sell the building at auction to repay delinquent mortgage loans. The Society claims still to be in operation, but lists only a postal address ³

First ASPR (1884–1889)

Personnel and Main Events

The ASPR traces its origin to a visit by the physicist [Sir William Barrett](#) to Boston, Massachusetts, in 1884. Barrett had been influential in organizing the SPR in Britain⁴ and he hoped to repeat his success in the United States. He went to Boston because psychologist and philosopher [William James](#) of Harvard had shown an interest in psychic phenomena. The first organizing meeting for the ASPR was held in September 1884. A committee of nine persons, including James, met throughout October and November, with the first meeting of the new society held in December 1884, concluding in January, 1885. Astronomer [Simon Newcomb](#) was

elected president. Five vice-presidents, including psychologist [G Stanley Hall](#), were installed as well.⁵

William James did not accept a governing position with the Society, a decision he came to regret, as it became increasingly dominated by persons hostile to psychical research. In his presidential address, Newcomb announced that he had accepted the presidency under the impression that telepathy had been proven, but had come to doubt that it had.⁶ Prominent members like Hall and [Joseph Jastrow](#) ‘successfully policed the boundaries of the fledgling psychological profession from within the ASPR by polemically undermining the work of James and the SPR, whose studies in telepathy and automatism were then internationally negotiated as legitimate fields of scientific psychology’.⁷

Research and Other Activities

The new ASPR created committees to look into experimental psychology, hypnotism, thought transference, mediumistic phenomena, and apparitions and haunted houses, subjects that the SPR also pursued in its early years. Preliminary reports from each of these committees were reported in the Society’s *Proceedings*, but the conclusions were mostly negative.⁸ [Charles Sanders Peirce](#) critiqued *Phantasms of the Living*, a major study of apparitions carried out by [Edmund Gurney](#), [FWH Myers](#), and [Frank Podmore](#) for the SPR.⁹ William James, chair of committee on mediumistic phenomena, however, began to sit with the medium [Leonora Piper](#), whom he judged to be ‘in possession of a power not yet explained’.¹⁰

Branch of the SPR (1890–1906)

Personnel and Main Events

James and other principal figures of the first ASPR held professional positions that prevented them from devoting full time to psychical research and as a consequence the Society’s output languished. There may have been a reason beyond conflicting duties and the absence of a driving interest in psychic phenomena for the lack of engagement with the field, however. One observer, a Dr Weston D Bailey, opined that the Society died ‘partly of fright when some of its illustrious members began to realize that there might after all be some real spooks in Spiritualism’.¹¹ General membership fell, and with it the Society’s finances.

With the ASPR on the verge of ruin, [Robert Pearsall Smith](#), who had joined the governing council in 1887, reached out to [Richard Hodgson](#), who had made a name for himself with [his investigation of Theosophist Helena Blavatsky](#) in India. At first Hodgson declined to accept the position of ASPR Secretary, but under the urging of the SPR’s [Henry Sidgwick](#), he accepted, initially for one year only.¹² In December 1889, with Hodgson in Boston, the ASPR officially asked to be converted to a branch of the SPR.¹³

Hodgson continued on as Secretary and principal investigator, having been impressed by Mrs Piper. In 1899, he was joined by [James Hervey Hyslop](#). Hyslop had obtained his PhD under G Stanley Hall at Johns Hopkins University and taught

philosophy for several years at Columbia University before medical problems forced his retirement from academia.¹⁴ The American branch was brought to an abrupt end with Hodgson's death of a heart attack on a handball court in December 1905.¹⁵

Research and Other Activities

In November 1889 Mrs Piper was taken to England for several months' study by SPR members there.¹⁶ Upon her return to America, she continued to be studied by James and Hodgson and later by Hyslop. Both Hodgson and Hyslop came to believe that the spirit hypothesis was the only satisfactory way of explaining what she knew and how she knew it. James, Hodgson, and Hyslop published lengthy accounts of their investigations with Mrs Piper in the SPR's *Proceedings*,¹⁷ the ASPR's having been allowed to lapse.

In addition to Mrs Piper, Hyslop studied another mental medium (Mrs Willis M Cleaveland), whom he called 'Mrs Smead', but the SPR refused to publish his report in its *Proceedings*, deeming it of insufficient interest because Hyslop emphasized the psychology of the mediumship and not simply its veridicality.¹⁸

New York Revival (1907–1920)

Personnel and Main Events

As early as 1900, Hyslop was thinking about recreating the ASPR on American soil. He conceived of an American Institute for Scientific Research, which would have two sections, whose concerns he saw as interrelated. Section A would be dedicated to psychopathology and Section B to 'supernormal psychology' or psychical research. With the encouragement of James and Hodgson, Hyslop embarked on a lecture tour to raise money for his Institute, which he incorporated in New York in 1903. By Hodgson's death two years later, he had \$1,000 available for it.¹⁹ With no obvious British successor to Hodgson as Secretary of the American branch, the SPR agreed to dissolve the branch and transfer ASPR activities to Hyslop's institute.

The American Institute for Scientific Research opened in New York in 1907. Hyslop revived the ASPR *Proceedings*, which he issued tri-annually for a few years, and initiated a new monthly *Journal*. The *Proceedings* carried research reports; the journal, shorter articles, book reviews, and correspondence. Hyslop himself authored much of the content but he published contributions from others, including William James. [Hereward Carrington](#), whom Hyslop brought on as his assistant, wrote book reviews, and in 1908 began undertaking his own research. In 1917, Hyslop appointed [Walter Franklin Prince](#) as the Section B Research Officer. Prince was an ordained Episcopal clergyman with a doctorate from Yale University who had given up the ministry and taken up the study of abnormal psychology and psychic phenomena.²⁰

An important part of Hyslop's legacy was the establishment of an endowment fund for the ASPR. By 1920, he had raised \$10,000 for this fund, largely through lectures, books and articles. He also managed to increase membership significantly. In June 1906 his institute had 170 members, but by the end of November 1907 the

number had grown to 677. Still, the income from the endowment and from membership dues was sufficient only for operating expenses and publications, leaving little for research. Hyslop himself lived frugally and did not draw a salary for several years. A widower with three children, he died on 17 June 1920, at the age of 65.^{[21](#)}

Research and Other Activities

Despite having little money for research, Hyslop, Prince and others managed to study a variety of psychic phenomena and contributed several important papers to the psychical research literature. Among these were Hyslop's report of his work with Mrs Smead^{[22](#)} and on what has come to be called the [Thompson-Gifford case](#), in which a minor painter, Frederic L Thompson, came under the influence of the much more accomplished but deceased Robert Swain Gifford and began painting in his style.^{[23](#)} Hyslop and Prince also contributed a multi-volume report of the [Doris Fischer case](#) of multiple personality.^{[24](#)} A full list of the ASPR publications during this period was printed in the *ASPR Journal* at its centennial in 1985.^{[25](#)}

Controversy and Division (1921–1940)

Personnel and Main Events

Upon Hyslop's death, the American Institute for Scientific Research ceased to exist and the name of its Section B was changed to the American Society for Psychical Research. [William McDougall](#) was president of the SPR in 1920, when he was hired by Harvard University to occupy the Chair in psychology that had formerly been held by William James, and when he arrived in the United States the ASPR Board of Trustees elected him President of that society as well. WF Prince was kept on as research officer and editor of the *Proceedings* and *Journal*. McDougall set up an Advisory Scientific Council and he and Prince sought to reach out to psychical research organizations in other countries and to raise funds for research that would have an academic interest.^{[26](#)}

However, some ASPR members were not happy with this direction. They believed that the survival question had been resolved and wished to see a more survivalist, if not spiritualistic, orientation. They wanted the *Journal* to have a broader public appeal. At an unannounced April 1923 Board meeting, McDougall was ousted as President and replaced with Frederick Edwards, a Spiritualist. Edwards immediately disbanded the Advisory Scientific Council, assumed the editorship of the *Journal* and *Proceedings*, and affiliated the ASPR with the [British College of Psychic Science](#), which was devoted to the promotion of mediumship rather than scientific studies of it. The ASPR lost 108 of its more academically-inclined members in 1923.^{[27](#)}

James Hyslop's son George remained on the ASPR Board, trying to preserve something of his father's academic spirit and to protect the endowment fund he had set up. Prince stayed on the staff, also hoping for a reversal. But the situation went from bad to worse. James Hyslop had doubted the reality of mediumistic physical phenomena, which had been reported from Britain and Europe by [WJ Crawford](#) with the [Goligher Circle](#) and Carrington and others with [Eusapia Palladino](#), and had held off looking at similar reports in America. The more populist

members of the ASPR chafed at this policy and wanted the Society to study the medium [Mina Stinson Crandon](#) (better known by her séance name, Margery), who had emerged in Boston.²⁸

The Margery mediumship was the subject of several studies between 1923 and 1925, two by Harvard students and instructors, including McDougall, and one by [Eric J Dingwall](#) of the SPR. Margery came under scrutiny also by a prize committee sponsored by *Scientific American* magazine. This competition was the brainchild of [Malcom Bird](#), one of the magazine's editors. The committee included McDougall, Prince, Carrington, and physicist [Daniel Frost Comstock](#), along with illusionist [Harry Houdini](#). All the investigations had questions about the genuineness of the phenomena involved, although they were unable to prove fraud. Bird, who later admitted that he had been aware of trickery from the start, was at this stage a strong proponent of the mediumship. When he was brought onto the ASPR research staff and made responsible for the study of physical phenomena, restricting Prince's charge to the mental domain, Prince had finally had enough. He resigned from the ASPR in January, 1925, and moved to Boston, where he established the Boston Society for Psychic Research. The ASPR began its study of Margery in 1926 and pursued it for several years.²⁹

[Guy Lyon Playfair](#) wrote that the Boston Society was 'in effect the ASPR in exile',³⁰ and this is true insofar as it embodied the ASPR's original principles. McDougall took an interest in it, and it attracted a young [Gardner Murphy](#), then a graduate student at Harvard. The Boston Society was well underway in 1926, when [JB Rhine](#) visited Boston to meet McDougall. He with his wife and fellow researcher [Louisa Rhine](#) had been reading Bird's reports about Margery in ASPR publications and they hoped to study her mediumship themselves. As it turned out, they had a single sitting with her, but that one sitting was crucial not only in the history of the ASPR, but for psychical research as a discipline. JB Rhine detected what he believed was legerdemain and wrote about it in a paper he published in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, despite clear signals that it would be accepted by the ASPR's *Journal*. Rhine's actions with his report undercut the efforts of George Hyslop to redirect the ASPR away from Margery and ended the prospect of a quick reconciliation between the ASPR and the Boston Society. Hyslop left the ASPR and joined Prince at the Boston Society in 1933, the year before Prince died. The societies were not reunited until the Spring of 1941, after the death of LeRoi Crandon, Mina's husband (in 1939), and shortly before that of Mina herself (in November 1941), by which time McDougall and Rhine had gone to Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, and set up an [experimental parapsychology laboratory](#) there.³¹

Research and Other Activities

The ASPR under Edwards and his successors JID Bristol and William H Button gave little attention to serious research but organized séances and published short essays and anecdotes on mediumship and other topics in the *Journal*, which they continued to issue monthly. The *Proceedings* between 1928 and 1933 concentrated on the Margery mediumship.³² Boston Society publications during this period were strikingly different, both in an irregular series of bulletins and book-length

proceedings. The latter included Prince's *The Case of [Patience Worth](#)* in 1927, Rhine's *Extra-Sensory Perception* in 1934, and [René Warcollier's](#) *Experimental Telepathy* in 1938.

Years of Renewal (1941–1989)

Personnel and Main Events

Mina Crandon descended into alcoholism following her husband's death and the hold her mediumship had on the ASPR lessened to the point that in January 1941 George Hyslop was returned to the Board and was re-elected President. Gardner Murphy, who also won a seat on the Board, was made chairman of the research committee. These events and those that followed became known as the 'palace revolt'. The Margery investigation was concluded and the Boston Society, which had been largely inactive since Prince's death, was officially absorbed into the ASPR. The Society's bylaws were revised, providing for a Voting Members Committee, whose members were appointed by the Board, to elect members of the Board, an innovation designed to help prevent the Society from falling under the popular will again. The Society's monthly journal was turned into a quarterly and gradually regained its academic respectability. Membership climbed from 448 in 1940 to 600 in 1947, then stabilized at around 800 from 1953 to 1962, before rising again. In 1965, there were over 1,200 members, and by 1968, there were over 2,400.^{[33](#)} At its peak, in 1972, membership stood at 2,554.^{[34](#)}

[Karlis Osis](#), who joined the ASPR as director of research in 1962, attributed the Society's success during this period to Murphy's leadership. Murphy served as president of the American Psychological Association in 1943–44 as well as being involved in the ASPR. He had a broadly holistic view of psychology and, like William James and James Hyslop, aspired to integrate psychical research with psychology and philosophy.^{[35](#)} Psychical research was at a different place in the 1940s than it had been in the 1920s, thanks to the Rhine's experimental paradigm at Duke, which was gaining ascendancy on both sides of the Atlantic,^{[36](#)} and the ASPR's wider appreciation of psychic phenomena made it a mecca for those with an interest in spontaneous cases and survival issues. The Society's growth spurt in the 1960s was also fueled by the resurgence of popular interest in psychic phenomena in that decade. Attendance at the ASPR's monthly lectures more than tripled by 1965, each lecture drawing in excess of two hundred persons. An *ASPR Newsletter* was launched in 1968 for the benefit of the less academic members.^{[37](#)}

The increase in membership brought new revenue but also resulted in greater financial demands. As was the case from the first days of the ASPR, research was hobbled by limited resources, made more difficult by George Hyslop's desire to preserve the endowment fund his father had created.^{[38](#)} A great boon to the ASPR came from [Chester Carlson](#), the inventor of the Xerox process, who provided money for research throughout the 1960s and in 1966 made it possible for the Society to purchase a townhouse on Manhattan's Upper West Side, a block off Central Park. When Carlson died in 1968, he bequeathed over million in stock to the ASPR's endowment fund.^{[39](#)}

Illness incapacitated Murphy in the mid-1970s and he became less active with the ASPR. The Society suffered for his absence. With less research being conducted in house, membership began to decline. This trend was exacerbated by Osis' retirement in 1983, with no successor appointed. It was affected also by the conservative, anti-survival wing of parapsychology, which gained hold at the ASPR in the late 1970s and 1980s. More 'liberal-minded' investigators and topics were shut out of the *Journal*. Osis thought that this might be one reason that 'student interest, which reached enormous proportions in the 1960s and 1970s, did not take root, develop, and blossom into professional careers', because there was no outlet for that sort of work.⁴⁰ The *ASPR Newsletter* continued to be published and monthly lectures held, but attendance was down to an average of sixty by 1985.⁴¹ The *Journal* circulation was down to 1,433 by July 1989.⁴²

Research and Other Activities

The two and a half decades of Murphy's involvement with the ASPR, from 1941 to 1975, may be regarded as the Society's heyday. In his overview of this period, Osis broke it down into three phases. In the first phase, which Osis called 'Rejuvenation', Murphy, then living in New York, would go in to his office five or six mornings a week. In addition to his own writings, he involved others, including [Gertrude Schmeidler](#) and [Joseph L Woodruff](#). Scheidler and Woodruff were parapsychologically-trained psychologists who conducted experiments under the auspices of the ASPR as well as New York's City College, where they taught. In 1948, a group of psychiatrists who were developing a clinical parapsychology came together to form a Medical Section.⁴³

The 1950s were a period of 'reorientation'. The early part of the decade was marked by experimental studies, including work by Harvard students [S David Kahn](#) and [Ulric Neisser](#). In the middle of the decade, Murphy turned attention to spontaneous cases, which he hoped would furnish a richer understanding of psi operations than was being gleaned from experimental studies. Several projects were completed at the ASPR, some run by [Laura A Dale](#), who was also editing the *Journal* and *Proceedings*.⁴⁴

Much of this work came to fruition in the 1960s, when Murphy became president of the Board of Trustees. He received a grant from the [Ittleson Family Foundation](#) to explore connections between creativity and ESP, which led to an appreciation of altered states of consciousness in psi functioning. He and Osis explored the relationship between distance and ESP and discovered that the moods and attention states of senders had as much to with outcomes as did the circumstances of the percipients. Another major project during this period was Osis's investigation of the deathbed observations reported by physicians and nurses, which he carried out first in New York while at with the [Parapsychology Foundation](#) and continued in India in association with [Erlendur Haraldsson](#).⁴⁵

Murphy's terminal illness in the mid-1970s, following the death of Chester Carlson in 1968, profoundly influenced the ASPR's activities. If the conservative turn took did not affect Osis's studies of the out-of-body experiences in the 1970s and 1980s, it made it difficult to report their results, which he presented at professional meetings and in privately circulated papers instead of in the *Journal*.⁴⁶ [Rhea A](#)

[White](#) had taken over the editorship of ASPR publications from Laura Dale, but it was some time before she was able to impose her own stamp and bring them back into balance.

ASPR in Decline (1990–2019)

Personnel and Main Events

The ASPR spent more than it brought in throughout the 1980s, an unsustainable situation aggravated by the election of Scott Jones to the Presidency of the Board for a two-year term in 1990. Jones was a career naval intelligence officer and political operative. He had a lay interest in parapsychology, which had landed him a seat on the ASPR Board in 1986, but he had no training or expertise in the field. More conservative members, such as physicist [RA McConnell](#), considered him to have New Age tendencies that made him unsuitable to the role.[47](#)

One of Jones' first actions as president was to push through a revision of the ASPR's bylaws that reduced the number of Board members from twelve to ten and restricted to three the number who could have professional ties to parapsychology. The new bylaws also placed many governing decisions in the hands of the president.[48](#) Despite protests from more responsible members of the Board and Voting Members Committee, the revised bylaws were adopted. Professional parapsychologists were pushed out of the Voting Members Committee when their terms expired, giving them even less of a voice in the Society's governance.

In 1992, Jones made Patrice Keane Executive Director with a contract that many regarded as sweetheart deal for someone similarly unqualified for the job. Keane had served two years as acting executive director and before that had been the Society's director of public information and education, despite the fact that she had 'not earned a bachelor's degree, shows no record of having studied science at the college level, and has had no scientific experience beyond that gained in several parapsychological experiments as a student investigator at New York City's Maimonides Hospital 14 years ago'.[49](#)

Jones was replaced as president by a lawyer, JD Fruhstorfer, in 1992, who in turn was succeeded by Nancy Sondow in 1993. Sondow, a parapsychologist friend of Keane's, has continued in the position since then, the longest-running Board president in ASPR history. Keane has been executive director for 32 years as of 2025, a record for tenure in that office as well. Sondow and Keane have overseen a steadily worsening financial situation, as revealed by the Society's income tax filings. In 1991, the ASPR had a net worth of about million, million of which derived from the value of its building. The ASPR had an operating deficit of 5,000 in 1989 and 2,000 in 1990.[50](#) In 1992, the deficit was 8,000, the endowment worth about .51 million. According to the 1998 tax filing, the Society's assets totaled 7,428, but by 2010 they had fallen to \$-1,693,720.[51](#) Total assets were reported as \$-6,137,140 for 2014 and \$-7,531,564 for 2015.[52](#)

Part of the reason for the downslide was the loss of revenue from a collapsing membership base. In July 1989 the *Journal's* paid circulation was 1,433, according to the 'Statement of Ownership Management and Circulation' that appeared on the

last page of the issue. This statement, which is required by law, does not appear in the *Journal* in subsequent years, but membership was said to be around 1,100 in 1991.⁵³ The *Journal* began appearing intermittently after 1997, causing membership to drop further. George Hansen estimated from tax returns and membership fees that membership stood at 591 in 1998 and 23 in 2005.⁵⁴ The *Journal* was issued biannually after 2000, with a single number only in 2001. The issue dated January-April, 2004, was not mailed out until July, 2007.⁵⁵ It was followed by the final issue, dated July-October, 2004. The *ASPR Newsletter* ceased publication in 1996.⁵⁶

A major contributing cause of the ASPR's financial predicament is Keane's salary and overall compensation, which have attracted a good deal of attention. Her initial three-year contract called for ,000 the first year, increasing by ,000 each year, plus fringe benefits, bringing the total cost to the ASPR to about ,250 for the first year, ,000 for the second year, and ,750 for the third year. In addition, Keane was granted six weeks of paid vacation each year, along with 'a reasonable number of personal and sick days'.⁵⁷ By 2001 Keane's base salary had risen to ,104. In 2005, it was 0,783. From 2007, it appears to have been fixed at 9,955.⁵⁸

According to New York City official property records, between 26 September 2002 and 30 July 2019, Sondow, acting on behalf of the organisation, signed five mortgages (property equity loans) and four mortgage consolidation agreements, using the wholly-owned ASPR building and lot as collateral. The fifth mortgage, on 30 July 2019 for ,750,000, was concurrent with the individual loans being combined into the final mortgage consolidation agreement, by which time the unpaid principal balance owed by the ASPR was ,750,000. The five mortgages obtained between 2002 and 2019, combined, totaled a staggering ,001,784.35.⁵⁹

With this amount of debt, it is not surprising that the ASPR was forced to put its building on the market. The SPR's Tom Ruffles drew attention to the listing of the ASPR's building on Sotheby's International Realty for .9 million in 2019.⁶⁰ *Mansion Global*, which ran the listing, tried to call the Society for more information, but their calls went unanswered. A Sotheby's agent told the enquirer that the building was being sold because 'they don't need so much space anymore'. Ruffles expressed his worries over this news:

First, saying they do not need as much space as before suggests they do not intend to carry out the functions they had at some point in the past, albeit apparently not recently. Secondly, there is a danger of the surplus from the sale somehow going to wherever income has gone in the past, with little to show for it. Thirdly, the reference to not needing as much space sets alarm bells ringing because of the library and archives, which could be dispersed on the grounds there is no space for them. Technically the ASPR could function from a small office to maintain its existence but delivering little in the way of services, while its assets were deployed for expenses. If the archives and library were liquidated they would be worth a fortune. In the absence of a specific statement from the ASPR, they should be considered at risk.⁶¹

Research and Other Activities

Anthropology student Janny Li described participating in a private [Ganzfeld](#) session at the ASPR in 2014,⁶² which suggests that the Society may have had some research ongoing after 1990, although none has been published or presented in professional forums.⁶³ Deborah Blum⁶⁴, Beth A Robertson⁶⁵, and Alicia Puglionesi⁶⁶ have gained access to the ASPR archives, but many other researchers have found the doors closed to them. David Jaher was evidently not allowed in for his well-researched book on Margery,⁶⁷ nor was Stacy Horn for her history of the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory.⁶⁸ There have been complaints from other quarters about difficulties of getting into the ASPR for years.⁶⁹ Ruffles noted, 'Researchers wishing to use the library – proudly displayed on the Society's website – were not being granted access, with no reason given. Emails were not being answered'.⁷⁰

The ASPR's lecture series also has been curtailed with no income from events recorded on the Society's tax returns in the majority of recent years. No lectures or other activities are announced on the Society's [website](#). George Hansen remarked, 'It is unclear what services the ASPR actually provides'.⁷¹ Guy Lyon Playfair concluded his article on the ups and downs of the ASPR with this sentence: 'After the longest "down" period in its history, it is beginning to look as if this once fine institution is not only still down, but possibly down and out'.⁷²

End of the ASPR? (2020–2025)

Personnel and Main Events

Events of recent years suggest that Playfair was right in his appraisal of the ASPR's condition. The ASPR's building failed to fetch its ,000,000 2019 asking price. With no offers forthcoming, the price was reduced to ,750,00, then the property was withdrawn from the market. When the mortgage came due on 29 July 2020, the ASPR failed to make the required payment, thereby defaulting on the loan. This resulted in a foreclosure lawsuit filed in the New York State Supreme Court on 11 February 2021.⁷³ Ruffles and Conrad describe what happened next.

The ASPR initially offered a defence to the lawsuit, but later withdrew it, and the judge granted a motion by the lender (Plaintiff) for the court to appoint a trusted individual called a Receiver to take operational management and financial oversight of the property in May 2022. At this point the ASPR lost physical control of the building (but not legal ownership), as the Receiver would be responsible for preserving the property, subsequent financial transactions, and settling the debt, returning any remaining balance to the organisation. A "vacancy deadline", for the building to be vacated, was set at 11.59 pm (New York time) on 19 September, 2022, although this was amenable to modification by mutual agreement between Plaintiff and Defendant. ...

In a judgement filed on 24 June, 2022, the Hon. Francis Kahn III ordered the building and lot to be sold at a public auction. ...

The auction took place on 1 February, 2023, with an outcome of 'Sold'. [However,] a "Receiver's Deed" wasn't signed and recorded in the official property records until June 2024

The PropertyShark website, containing information about the building,

includes the question “When was 5 West 73rd Street, New York, NY 10023 last sold and what was the last sale price?”, to which the answer is: “5 West 73rd Street, New York, NY 10023 was last sold in [sic] 06/25/2024 for 0”⁷⁴ The payment of this nominal amount served to seal the deal.⁷⁵

The 0 figure would be the amount returned the ASPR after its debt was settled and represents the total profit received from the sale of the building Chester Carlson had helped the Society purchase in 1966. It would seem that at this point the ASPR must have been destitute, but apparently not. Keane’s salary, which had ballooned to 3,662 in 2020, plummeted to ,300 in 2021, before rising again to ,585 in 2022 and to 9,000 in 2023, the year the ASPR’s building was sold.⁷⁶ No explanation or justification is provided for this seesawing of Keane’s compensation, which must be read against the history of the ASPR’s fortunes.

The ASPR’s large library and archival holdings appear to be in storage, although their whereabouts is unknown, and they are unlikely to be accessible to the public. Ruffles and Conrad discovered a considerable amount had been paid on ‘rent/storage fees’ since the ASPR building was put up for sale in 2019—,115 that year, ,940 in 2020, ,042 in 2021, then a jump to ,022 in 2022 and to ,250 in 2023.⁷⁷ The rate can be expected to rise year after year, producing increasing pressure to sell off some of what is in storage, unless the ASPR finds a way to make its activities considerably more profitable or a new benefactor emerges. Against this background, Keane’s salary looks especially odd and out of balance.

Research and Other Activities

There is no evidence that the ASPR has undertaken research or other activities in recent years, but can the Society turn itself around again? As of April 2025 it is still in existence and still maintains [its website](#), which except for the absence of the picture of the building at 5 West 73rd Street is little changed from earlier years. The list of sub-pages is intact, including [membership categories](#), from a annual Associate Membership to Benefactors, who are expected to give ,000 or more. The benefits of membership are not clearly outlined, although there are pages for the [Library](#) (which is no longer open), [Journal](#), and [Newsletter](#) (neither of which has been published in years), as well as an [invitation to share psychic experiences](#), as if there were an active research program. No meetings or other activities are indicated on the website.

Ruffles and Conrad once again supply a resume of recent events, including attempts to get the New York Charities Bureau to investigate the ASPR for fraud.

Complaints by a small number of individuals who were appalled at what was happening have been sent to the New York Charities Bureau since 2019, urging it to investigate what was possibly the serious offences of embezzlement and money laundering (no counter-explanation for the disposal of the funds being forthcoming). Jay Gerzog, the attorney for the ASPR who is listed on the 2019 mortgage consolidation agreement, was notified of the controversy via email by James A. Conrad on 21 September 2020, and a copy was forwarded to the New York Charities Bureau on 23 September, but neither responded. It included the information that there was a five-year statute of limitations for

grand larceny and money laundering, and, based on the publicly recorded date of the loan consolidation, it was due, in Conrad's view, to expire on 30 July 2024. Regular follow-up emails to the Charities Bureau were ignored. These emails urged the intervention of New York Attorney General Letitia James and Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, because if there had been malfeasance time was short. The Charities Bureau is run by the New York Attorney General's Office, of which Letitia James is currently in charge.

Someone who wrote to the Charities Bureau in 2023 did receive a reply, which was passed to us. It appears mostly to be a standard response which says that due to the high volume of complaints and limited resources it is not possible to investigate every allegation. It continues that the Bureau will scrutinise this particular complaint to see if there are grounds for action by the Attorney General, adding: "In addition, we will contact American Society for Psychical Research to request that it remedy its delinquency in filing annual reports with the Charities Bureau." While the letter acknowledged there were governance issues, there was no follow-up correspondence. It is possible that prompting by the Charities Bureau was a factor in the ASPR submitting the outstanding financial returns, though it still took a year for them to act. ...[78](#)

To date, there has been no action taken by the New York Charities Bureau against the ASPR, but this approach is more likely to succeed than efforts made in the past to challenge Patrice Keane and Nancy Sandow's governance on legal grounds. The present bylaws present no opening for such a challenge, as Ian Stevenson and colleagues then in the Voting Members committee learnt in the early 1990s. But the level of Keane's salary, when the ASPR for years has carried out little or no activities, has lost its building and its library and archives are inaccessible to members, while at the same time memberships and donations are sought, certainly should, one would expect, raise the eyebrows of regulators if they go past the likely misleading reports filed to determine what exactly what substance they have. It is hard to imagine how the ASPR can turn around until Keane and Sandow are no longer in their respective positions, but it may be too soon to pen the Society's epitaph. Given the ASPR's storied history, one can imagine a financial benefactor coming forward once they are gone – though there is probably little hope of that happening before then.

James G. Matlock

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Sommer (2016).
- [2](#). Ruhling, (2019).
- [3](#). Ruffles & Conrad, 2025.
- [4](#). Gauld (1968); Berger (1985a).
- [5](#). *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 1/1, July 1885, 1.
- [6](#). Newcomb (1885), 63-86. See also Blum (2006), 87-89. Newcomb's change of heart was likely related to new revelations about the [Creery Sisters](#), with whom Barrett had conducted a series of well-controlled experiments in their youth but who were later caught cheating, causing the SPR to withdraw its endorsement of them.
- [7](#). Sommer (2016).
- [8](#). Four numbers of Vol. 1 of the *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research* were published between July 1885 and March 1889.
- [9](#). Peirce (1887).
- [10](#). James (1886). James never became convinced that this meant the Mrs Piper was in contact with spirits, however. See James (1909), which discusses communications purportedly from Hodgson after his death.
- [11](#). Quoted in Berger (1985a), 52.
- [12](#). Berger (1985a), 51.
- [13](#). Berger (1985a), 52.
- [14](#). Anderson (1985a).
- [15](#). Berger (1985a), 53.

- [16.](#) Berger (1985a), 52.
- [17.](#) See Hodgson (1892) and Hodgson (1898). Hyslop (1901) contributed a major study on Mrs Piper for the SPR *Proceedings*.
- [18.](#) Anderson (1985), 177, citing Hyslop's Preface to his 1918 report on Mrs Smead in the ASPR's *Proceedings*.
- [19.](#) Anderson (1985), 176-77.
- [20.](#) Berger (1985b).
- [21.](#) Berger (1985b), 215-16.
- [22.](#) Hyslop (1917a).
- [23.](#) Hyslop (1909).
- [24.](#) Prince (1915); Prince, (1916); Hyslop (1917b).
- [25.](#) Hamilton, White, & Henkel (1985a, 1985b).
- [26.](#) Mauskopf & McVaugh (1980), 17-18.
- [27.](#) Mauskopf & McVaugh (1980), 19-22.
- [28.](#) Tietze (1985). For historical treatments of the Margery mediumship, see Tietze (1973), Jaher (2015), and Robertson (2016).
- [29.](#) Tietze (1973), Tietze (1985), Jaher (2015).
- [30.](#) Playfair (2014).
- [31.](#) Tietze (1985); Matlock (1987).
- [32.](#) Hamilton, White, & Henkel, L. (1985b, 1985c).
- [33.](#) Osis (1985), 507, 518-19.
- [34.](#) Prescott (2014).
- [35.](#) Osis (1985), 503-4.
- [36.](#) Mauskopf & McVaugh (1980).
- [37.](#) Osis (1985), 518-19.
- [38.](#) Osis (1985), 505-06.
- [39.](#) Mauskopf & McVaugh (1980), 515.
- [40.](#) Osis (1985), 520-21.
- [41.](#) Osis (1985), 521.
- [42.](#) See *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 83/3, 287.
- [43.](#) Osis (1985), 504-8.
- [44.](#) Osis (1985).
- [45.](#) Osis (1985), 408-518.
- [46.](#) Osis (1985), 520-21.
- [47.](#) McConnell (1991, 1995).
- [48.](#) McConnell (1991, 1995).
- [49.](#) Cook (1991).
- [50.](#) McConnell (1991).
- [51.](#) Ruffles (2019), citing Hansen (2007). For other analyses, see Prescott (2014) and comments in Sciborg (2014).
- [52.](#) American Society for Psychical Research (2017). 2016 is the latest year available.
- [53.](#) McConnell (1991).
- [54.](#) Hansen (2007); Ruffles (2019).
- [55.](#) Hansen (2007).
- [56.](#) The final issue may be seen [here](#).
- [57.](#) Cook (1991).

- [58.](#) See Prescott (2014) for Keane's salary from 2001 to 2012. The 9,955 figure appears also on the ASPR's 2016 tax return, the latest available. Hansen (2007) reported her total compensation in 2005 to be 7,297.
- [59.](#) The ASPR's mortgage loan amounts and dates signed by Sondow are as follows (these are the dates signed, not the document dates): ,500,000 (26 September 2002), ,951,784.35 (21 July 2011), ,000,000 (12 May 2014), ,800,000 (22 May 2016), and ,750,000 (30 July 2019) (Ruffles & Conrad, 2025).
- [60.](#) Ruhling (2019).
- [61.](#) Ruffles (2019).
- [62.](#) Li (2014).
- [63.](#) On its website, [here](#), the ASPR solicits information on 'exceptional experiences and near-death experiences,' but there is no indication of what is being done with this information, which has not been reported in a professional forum.
- [64.](#) Blum (2006).
- [65.](#) Robertson (2016.)
- [66.](#) Puglionesi (2020).
- [67.](#) Jaher (2015).
- [68.](#) Horn (2011).
- [69.](#) 'I've tried to get access to certain ASPR journals and papers for ages, but never been able to get a response from them to my requests,' Max_B commented on a blog about the situation at the ASPR (Sciborg, 2014).
- [70.](#) Ruffles (2019).
- [71.](#) Hansen (2007).
- [72.](#) Playfair (2014), 53.
- [73.](#) Ruffles & Conrad (2025).
- [74.](#) See [here](#).
- [75.](#) Ruffles & Conrad (2025).
- [76.](#) Ruffles & Conrad (2025).
- [77.](#) Ruffles & Conrad (2025).
- [78.](#) Ruffles & Conrad (2025).