

Walter Franklin Prince

Walter Franklin Prince (1863-1934) was a clergyman and parapsychologist known for his 'Doris Fischer' study, a notable case of dissociative identity disorder. He also wrote extensively about telepathy, psychometry, clairvoyance and mediumship.

Life and Career

Walter Franklin Prince was born on 23 April 1863 in Detroit, Maine, USA, an eighth-generation American with English roots.¹ He graduated from Maine Wesleyan Seminary aged eighteen to become pastor at Methodist and Episcopal churches in Maine. He furthered his education studying arts at Yale and divinity at Drew Theological Seminary. Aged 36, he gained a doctorate at Yale with a thesis on multiple personality disorder, now known as dissociative identity disorder (DID).

Taking up the ministry again at the age of forty, Prince served as pastor at Methodist and Episcopal churches in Maine and Connecticut. He was pastor of several Protestant Episcopal churches in New York, Pennsylvania and California. In 1910, he served as rector at All Saints Church in Pittsburgh and went on to become director of psychotherapeutics at St. Mark's Episcopal Church on the Bowery in New York City.

In mid-life Prince struggled with depression, which he overcame by a self-prescribed discipline of positive thinking.² At this time he started to take notice of a young woman, a regular visitor to his church, who he came to realise was suffering from a severe case of multiple personality disorder, as it was then known. By removing her from her abusive father and treating her kindly, he facilitated an integration of the personalities over a four-year period.

Later he collaborated with parapsychologist [James Hervey Hyslop](#), head of the [American Society for Psychical Research](#) (ASPR), and a spirit medium, to further investigate the origin of the personalities. Prince and Hyslop documented her case (referring to her by the pseudonym [Doris Fischer](#)) in what has been described as the most detailed and prolonged study of its kind ever made.³

Prince's interest in parapsychology was further kindled by a fleeting planchette session in 1912 in which the message 'Your father, WM Prince' came via a medium who had no way of knowing his father's first two initials.

In 1916, Hyslop appointed Prince research officer for the ASPR, for which he published many papers in the society's *Journal* and *Proceedings* in the next five years. Sceptical about claims of séance phenomena such as levitations and 'spirit voices', Prince acquired knowledge of conjuring by joining the Society of American Magicians, in order to expose the sleight-of-hand tricks used by some mediums.

Curiosity about [psychometry](#) brought Prince, via a German doctor, [Gustav Pagenstecher](#), into contact with a Mexican woman, Maria Reyes de Zierold, who was

apparently able to perform it under hypnosis, reading from sealed letters with a high degree of veridicality.⁴

Prince's relations with the ASPR became strained following its election of a new president in 1923 and the adoption of a more popularizing and – in Prince's view – less scientific approach. A particular object of contention was its investigation of Mina Crandon, a Boston medium known as 'Margery', whom Prince denounced as a fraud in *Scientific American*. In 1925, Prince left the ASPR to join the rival Boston Society for Psychical Research (BSPR), together with other parapsychologists who agreed with him that a more rigorous approach was needed. In the following year he began acting as mentor to [Joseph B Rhine](#) and his wife [Louisa E Rhine](#), who went on to establish a successful [parapsychology laboratory](#) at Duke University.⁵

Prince wrote and edited for BSPR's publications on a variety of topics, including experiments or cases of physical and [mental mediumship](#), a claimed haunted house, DID cases with apparent paranormal aspects, and telepathy. He analysed responses to a questionnaire sent to ten thousand people mentioned in *Who's Who in America* asking about paranormal experiences. An issue of the BSPR *Proceedings* was filled with his study of the [Patience Worth](#) case. Another issue described Doris Fischer's mediumship (see below, section 'Publications: Doris Fischer').

Prince was a member of the London-based [Society for Psychical Research](#) (SPR), serving as its president in 1930 and 1931.

After the death of his wife, Prince was supported by his adopted daughter Doris Fischer, now named Theodosia Prince. He wrote, 'she has been all that a daughter possibly could be'.⁶ Shortly before his death he answered questions about his beliefs: clairvoyance and telepathy he considered proven, but he was more cautious about [postmortem survival](#), stating that he had not yet seen conclusive evidence and that judgment on the matter was vulnerable to wishful thinking.

Prince died at his home in Hingham, Massachusetts, on 7 August 1934, aged 71.

Publications

Books

The Psychic in the House (1926). Boston: Boston Society for Psychical Research. 2010: Kessinger Publishing. [Detailed account of Doris Fischer's time as part of the Prince household after the integration of her alters and associated mediumistic phenomena.]

[*The Case of Patience Worth: A Critical Study of Certain Unusual Phenomena*](#) (1927). Boston: Boston Society for Psychic Research. (Reprinted 1964: by University Books, New York.).

[*The Enchanted Boundary Being a Survey of Negative Reactions to Claims of Psychic Phenomena 1820 to 1930*](#) (1930). Boston, Massachusetts, USA: Boston Society for Psychic Research. (Reprinted by Kessinger Publishing.)

Noted Witnesses for Psychic Occurrences (1928). Boston, Massachusetts, USA: Boston Society for Psychic Research. [Accounts of spontaneous psychic phenomena from notable people such as Goethe, Luther Burbank, Robert Browning, Mark Twain, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Victor Hugo, Alfred, Lord Tennyson and many more.]

[Leonard and Soule Experiments in Psychical Research, Also Experiments with Sanders, Brittain, Peters and Dowden, Paperback](#) (1929, with L.W. Allison, main author). Boston, Massachusetts, USA: Boston Society for Psych Research.

Doris Fischer

[The Doris Fischer case of multiple personality:](#)

- Part I (1916 with JH Hyslop). *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 10/7, 381-399.
- Part II. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 10/8, 436-454.
- Part III. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 10/9, 486-504.
- Part IV. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 10/10, 541-558.
- Part V. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 10/11, 613-631.
- Part VI (with JH Hyslop). *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 10/12, 661-678.[7](#)

[The Doris case of multiple personality Part I](#) (1915). *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research* 9, 23-866.

[The Doris case of Multiple personality Part II](#) (1916). *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research* 10, 701-1419.

The Doris case of multiple personality (1929). In *An Outline of Abnormal Psychology*, ed. by G. Murphy, A.S. Barnes & Co. [Adapted from [original text](#) in the *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research* 9.]

Articles in *Scientific American*

All are available for a fee [here](#).

The psychic detective: Some of the pitfalls in the path of the psychic investigator, and how he avoids them (1 July 1922).

Experiences which I cannot explain away: Are the observations of this noted investigator explainable by mental telepathy? (1 December 1924)

The psychic investigation, February 1925: A letter from Dr Walter Franklin Prince, Chairman of the *Scientific American's* Psychic Committee (1 February 1925).

My doubts about spirit photographs (1 December 1925).

The riddle of Patience Worth: Here are presented the records, to date, of an investigation conducted in a scientific manner by a serious seeker after the truth (1 July 1926).

Specimens from the telepathic mine: There is a mine of interesting evidence tending to establish the genuineness of thought transference (1 September 1927).

Make-believe telepathy (1 January 1927).

Mrs. Sinclair's 'mental radio' (1 March 1932).

The case against Margery (1 May 1933).

Extra-sensory perception: Results of a remarkable series of controlled experiments for telepathy and clairvoyance (1 July 1934).

Other Selected Articles

[Noted witnesses for psychic occurrences: Men of science](#) (1923). *Hearst's Magazine* (May).

[Psychometrical experiments with Señora Maria Reyes de Z](#) (1921). *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research* 15, 189-314.

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Literature

Berger, A.S. (1988). Walter Franklin Prince: A portrait. In *Lives and Letters in American Parapsychology: A Biographical History, 1850-1987*. New York: McFarland, 75-108.

Hyslop, J.H. (1917). [Experiments with the Doris case](#). *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 11, 153-177, 213-237, 266-291, 324-343, 385-406, 459-492.

Matlock, J.G. (1987). [Cat's paw: Margery and the Rhines, 1926](#). *Journal of Parapsychology* 51, 229-47.

Prince, W.F. (1921). [Psychometrical experiments with Señora Maria Reyes de Z](#). *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research* 15, 189-314.

Worcester, E, & McComb, S. (1931). *Body Mind and Spirit*. New York: Scribners.

Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Berger (1988). All information in this article is drawn from this source unless otherwise noted.
- [2](#). It is described in Worcester & McComb (1931).
- [3](#). Berger (1988), 82.
- [4](#). Full case report: Prince (1921).

- [5.](#) For more detail on the interrelationships between the Margery sittings, Prince's break with the ASPR, and the early parapsychology careers of JB and Louisa Rhine, see Matlock (1987).
- [6.](#) Cited in Berger (1988), 108.
- [7.](#) See also Hyslop (1917).