

Collection #
P 0877

**MARY HOSTETLER WISE SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHS
CA. 1910–1920S; 1981**

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Processed by

Barbara Quigley
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

**VOLUME OF
COLLECTION:** 2 folders

**COLLECTION
DATES:** Ca. 1910–1920s; 1981

PROVENANCE: Gift from Joan Hostetler, Indianapolis, July 1994

RESTRICTIONS: None

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**ALTERNATE
FORMATS:**

**RELATED
HOLDINGS:**

**ACCESSION
NUMBER:** 1994.0990

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL / HISTORICAL SKETCH

Mary Hostetler Wise was a devotee of spiritualism who attended Fort Wayne Spiritualist Church and meetings at Camp Chesterfield. She was born Mary Catherine Hochstetler (the spelling was changed later). She was born on 11 February 1853 in Wells County, Indiana, to Daniel and Catherine Crites Hochstetler. She grew up as the second eldest of several siblings on a Union Township farm in that county.

Mary married Frederick Miller (1850–1887) in October 1875 in Wells County. They made their home in the Union Township of Huntington County, Indiana, where they farmed. They had two daughters: Lula, who died at birth on 16 February 1878, and Viola (1882–1940).

About 1889 Mary married Philip Wise (1842–1906). At the time of the 1900 census, they were farming in Union Township, Wells County. At the time of the 1920 census, Mary, widowed for a second time, was living in Markle in Huntington County, with her foster son, Claude M. Wise (1902–1988). Mary died on 11 December 1930 in Markle.

In 1886 John Westerfield founded the Indiana Association of Spiritualists. The organization opened Camp Chesterfield, located on the banks of the White River in Madison County, in 1891. The site still offers Spiritualist church services and psychic readings from mediums.

Spirit photographs are those in which a ghostly figure appears next to or above a person who is the subject of a portrait. They were first made in the nineteenth century by having the person portraying the spirit remain in view through the camera only briefly during a long exposure time, while the main subject of the portrait sat still. The result is that the person playing the spirit appears in the photograph to be transparent and whitish in tone. The purpose of these photographs was to convey the impression that a spirit was present with the person who was the subject of the portrait.

Sources:

Information from the donor

Ancestrylibrary.com (Accessed 16 February 2024):

Find a Grave
Indiana, U.S., Death Certificates, 1899–2017
Indiana, U.S., Marriages, 1810–2001
United States Federal Census, 1860–1920

Baldwin, Gordon. *Looking at Photographs: A Guide to Technical Terms*. Malibu, California: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1991, p. 49, 78.

Camp Chesterfield. “A Brief History of Camp Chesterfield” <https://campchesterfield.net/history/>
Accessed 16 February 2024.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of two mounted black-and-white portraits of Mary Hostetler Miller Wise that are “spirit photographs” believed to have been made at Camp Chesterfield in Madison County, Indiana. They are not dated but were likely made sometime from 1910 to the 1920s. They show Mary surrounded by ghostlike images of other people. There is also a 1981 manuscript prepared by Mary’s great-great-niece, Joan Hostetler, which includes transcripts of oral history interviews conducted with three relatives of past active members of the Fort Wayne Spiritualist Church. These include Mary Wise’s foster son, Claude Wise, and the son and daughter of Mary’s younger sister, Amanda Hostetler Smith.

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CONTAINER

Portrait of Mary Wise with four “spirit” faces above her in the background.

Folder 1 of 2

Portrait of Mary Wise with “spirit” image of a little girl over one shoulder and images of eight other people above her. Some of the images of the eight people above appear to have been drawn or painted before the photograph was made.

Folder 1 of 2

Manuscript by Mary Wise’s great-great-niece, Joan Hostetler, prepared for coursework at Indiana University in 1981, and deposited in the University’s Folklore Archives. Includes transcripts of three oral history interviews conducted with the offspring of past active members of the Fort Wayne Spiritualist Church: 1) Claude Wise, foster son of Mary Wise; 2) Don Smith, son of Amanda Hostetler Smith (Mary’s younger sister); and 3) Hazel Smith Scarlet, daughter of Amanda Hostetler Smith.

Folder 2 of 2