

## Mysticism

- This is a catch-all phrase for many of the “fringe movements” of the Victorian Era.
- Witchcraft, Spiritualism, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Transcendentalism, etc. Were all very popular in America & Europe.
- Originally started by Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish mystic in 1744.
- But for the “modern’ movement in the US, credit goes to the Fox sisters, Kate & Margaret.
- Of the many movements, Spiritualism was one of the largest & most popular.

## Spiritualism

- This was born out of the Burned-over District.
- Very popular from 1840 – 1920’s.
- Many different areas under this category, i.e. Hypnotism (Mesmerism), Mediums, Séances, Spirit (Ghost or Automatic) Writing, Table Turning, etc.
- Very controversial because of the many charlatans fraudulent claims

- With the availability of cameras at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spirit or “Ghost” photographs began to surface.



## Witchcraft

- This is another catch-all area.
- Everything outside the Judeo-Christian ethic was grouped in Witchcraft.
- Animists, shamanists, pagan, “the wise ones” or “cunning ones”, nature worship, folk healing & remedies, etc.
- A very strong stigma was attached to anyone who professed to use witchcraft. (it will stay that way until the 1990’s)
- The use of witchcraft has always been rather ambiguous in the US. One minute people are burning witches at the stake, the next they are seeking help & advise.

- Witchcraft will also have regional characteristics, Dowsters, folk healers, “sin eaters”, charmers & the like were fairly common in the south, Appalachia & most rural areas.
- True witchcraft has always been associated with nature, “White” witches were benevolent, while “Black” witches were malicious.
- The 1960’s will see a rise in Satanic witchcraft, due to the followers of Aleister Crowley & Anton Zandar LeVay.

## Theosophy



- Theosophy, literally "knowledge of the divine", designates several bodies of ideas.
- The word was revived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian immigrant to the US, as a designator for her religious philosophy.
- All religions are attempts by humanity to approach the absolute, and that each religion therefore has a portion of the truth.
- Together with Henry S. Olcott, William Q. Judge , and many others, founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. This society has since split into a number of organizations, some of which no longer use the term "theosophy".

- The basic tenants of their belief are strongly rooted in Buddhism & Hinduism.
  - Consciousness is universal & individual
  - Man is "provisionally" immortal
  - Reincarnation is universal
  - Karma
  - Universal brotherhood
  - Evolution
  - The Septenary