

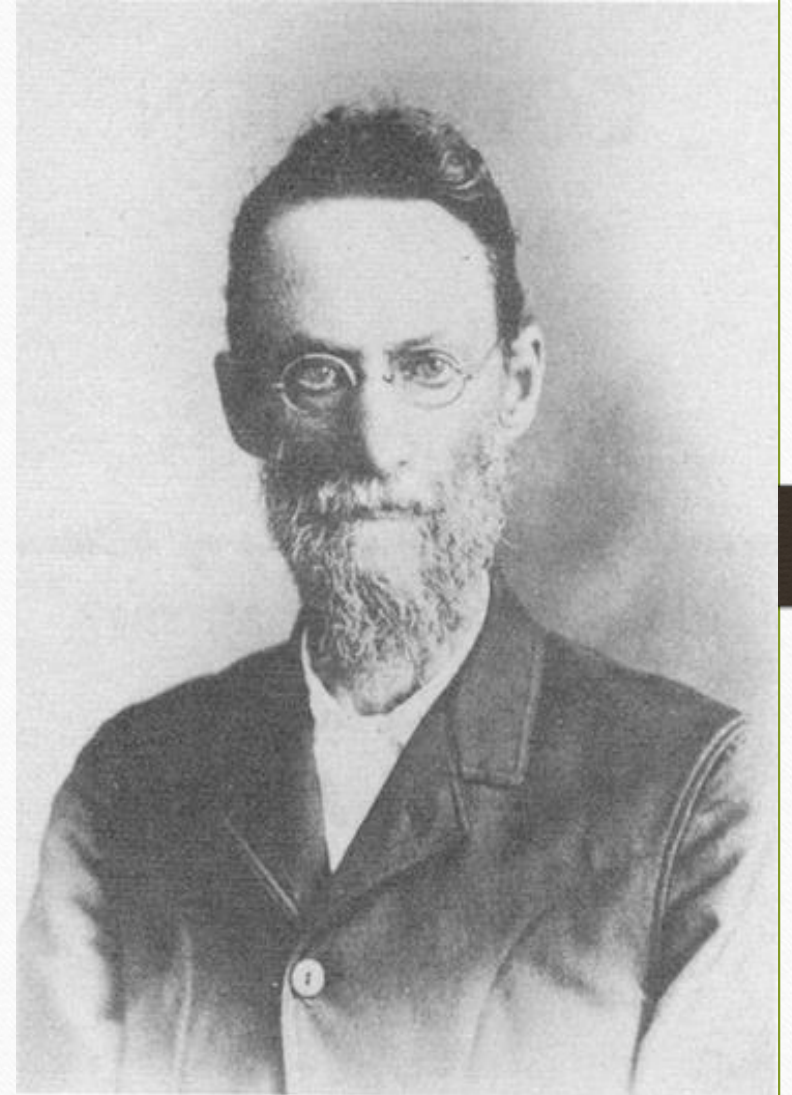
LETTERS TO THE SAGE

Selected Correspondence of Thomas Moore Johnson

Volume I: The Esotericists

THOMAS MOORE JOHNSON

- Today, Thomas Moore Johnson (March 31, 1851 - March 2, 1919), the “Sage of the Osage,” is best known as a translator, expositor, and promoter of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought. The journals he edited in the 1880s—*The Platonist* and *Bibliotheca Platonica*—are recognized for their influence on the development of the American study of philosophy, and his translations of the writings of the Neoplatonists Iamblichus and Proclus remain some of the most well-known English versions of their works...during the 1880s Johnson was also one of the leading figures in the American esoteric community. He not only helped establish, govern, and popularize the best known esoteric organization of the late nineteenth century, the Theosophical Society, he also acted as the American president of the H.B. of L.



THE JOHNSON LIBRARY AND MUSEUM, OSCEOLA, MISSOURI

As a respected and well-known figure in American esotericism for nearly a decade, Johnson received hundreds of letters on the subject from the US, England, Greece, and India...saved and later passed down by his descendants. In 2013, the Johnson family, through its non-profit, the Thomas M. Johnson Library and Museum, generously granted us permission, with the help of the Special Collections Department at Missouri State University, to examine and publish the several thousand pages of extant letters to Johnson.



PASCHAL B. RANDOLPH'S ROSICRUCIANS

In the late 1850s, Paschal Beverly Randolph, a former prominent spiritualist medium who had recently visited England and possibly France and the Middle East, began publishing and telling people the claim that he had learned the means for any person to achieve clairvoyance and other magical powers, such as the ability to make one's spirit travel while still alive...furthermore, that this information was passed on by a secret worldwide "Rosicrucian" brotherhood...Randolph soon set about initiating people into an American branch of this order. Although he would later claim that he first organized followers in 1855, no evidence exists for his groups prior to 1861, when he verifiably formed in San Francisco what was called the Supreme Grand Lodge of the Triple Order.



THE
TEMPLE OF THE ROSY CROSS.

The Soul:

ITS POWERS, MIGRATIONS, AND TRANSMIGRATIONS.

SECOND EDITION.

REVISED AND ENLARGED

By F. B. DOWD,
HEMPSTEAD, TEXAS.



"For these things that appear delight us, but make the things that appear not
hard to believe; or the things that appear not are hard to believe."

—HERMES.

1888

ROSY CROSS PUBLISHING CO.
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

- Johnson's earliest known connection with American organized Rosicrucianism came in 1881 when he printed in the August issue of the *Platonist* a circular for a new esoteric-themed book by Freeman B. Dowd, who proclaimed himself to be a "Grand Master of Rosicrucia." Johnson pre-ordered a copy of Dowd's forthcoming work and in October Dowd wrote a letter to Johnson telling him about the progress of the book. In the following July, although the book was still not out, Dowd was agreeing to distribute Johnson's magazine, presumably to others with an interest in Rosicrucianism.

ROSICRUCIANS IN SAINT LOUIS?

The Rosicrucian Physician
And Sympathetic Clairvoyant's.
ELECTRO-MAGNETIC MEDICINE

For the cure of all known diseases, are sent to all parts of the world, on application to DR. GOODWIN, PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON, St. Louis, Mo., U S. Letters of inquiry must contain three 3 cent P. O. stamps.

All newspapers publishing the above card can have our medicines and service as pay. Test our wonderful cures.

Johnson's curiosity had been piqued by a recent article in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* concerning the Rosicrucian connections of an Irish immigrant named Dr. R.D. Goodwin in which he claimed he and a few others had been attempting to open a Rosicrucian College and School for Neophytes in and others in America who desire a knowledge in the occult sciences"...—He had recently received a letter from the group's brothers in Europe and was expecting a "Grand High Priest of the Rosicrucian Order" to soon come to St. Louis where he would help establish a college.

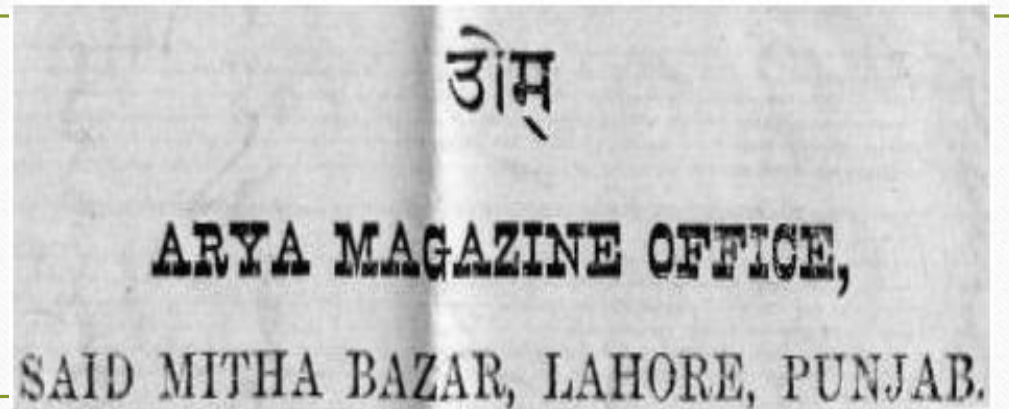
ABNER DOUBLEDAY

Abner Doubleday's letters, which were sent over the course of three years, reveal some of the behind-the-scenes events and exchanges of ideas that inspired the emergence of the relatively widespread interest in the Tarot among Theosophists and H.B. of L. members in the 1880s... Doubleday's correspondence shows that the Tarot's early promotion and popularization was largely due to the efforts of particular individuals, of whom Doubleday and Johnson were some of the most important.

During the correspondence, Doubleday was working on a translation of Eliphas Levi's *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, which was not published in full until 1910 when it was serialized by *The Word* magazine.



YOGA IN THE EARLY TS



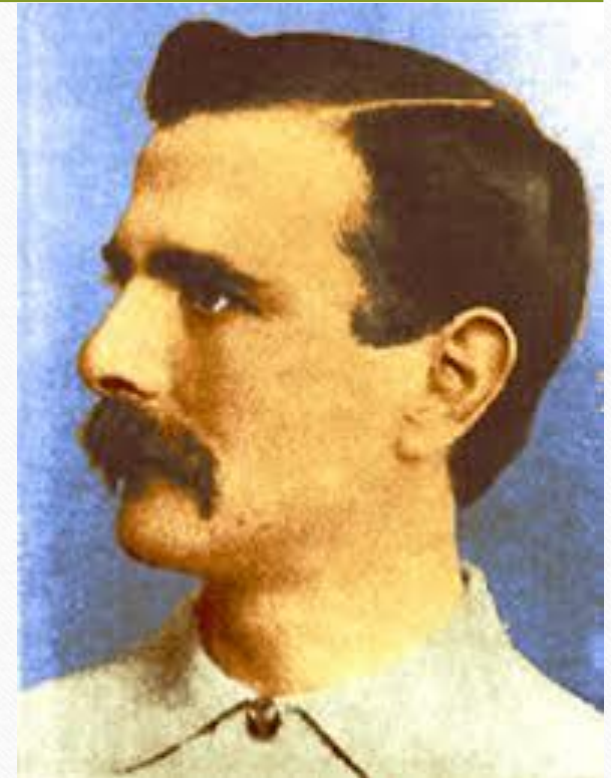
The desire to study yoga was what had initially motivated Blavatsky and Olcott to visit Swami Dayananda in India. Almost immediately after arriving in the country, the Theosophical leaders began promoting in both the *Theosophist* and in speeches the notion that mesmerism was merely the Western counterpart to yoga, and that it would be through yoga that one could achieve what they generally presented as the highest occult power: astral travel, or the ability to have one's spirit leave one's living body and travel throughout the universe... Olcott became particularly attracted to Kundalini yoga, and met with Swami Sabhapaty, a Kundalini teacher whose brief biography ran in the *Theosophist* and who had written an English-language book on yoga that promoted the use of Kundalini to achieve occult powers.

YOGA IN THE HBofL

This is probably the earliest known example of the organized practice of yoga in the US. there were undoubtedly several Americans who privately attempted to practice the discipline, but as far as is currently known, there were no organizations suggesting its regular practice prior to the H.B. of L.—a fact that had been previously unknown to historians...despite the H.B. of L.'s occasional criticism of the TS for relying on oriental occultism, at least in 1885 the H.B. of L. was doing so to some extent as well, perhaps as a way of attracting and retaining those who had gained an interest in yoga through the TS a few years earlier.

BURGOYNE RETURNS

- But then, on September 5, when the “Central Council of the H.B. of L.” convened in St. Louis, the same three members unanimously decided that “the charges against Mr. T.H. Burgoyne are not worthy of further attention on the part of this Council.” Burgoyne was welcomed back, and was even made secretary *pro tem*.
- Johnson letter, September 5, 1886.



Confine the breath and breath a[s] deep as possible, with the face towards the sun for the first half and the Back the latter half of the time-the respiration must be as long as possible. draw the breath inwardly slowly gradually filling and expanding the lungs to the sun then retain it in the lungs at least half a minute. then as gradually exhale it. at the same time consciously willing to absorb the Vital spirit of the solar ray's into your inmost being. this over. quietly dress and take a little cold Pure water[,] magnetise it with seven passes of the right hand. and then drink. (not more than half a wine glass or a wine glass full at most is necessary). it all off at a draught. this over. The morning's half hours meditation must commence. sitting in an easy posture with the Hands together (as in Prayer) but resting down upon the and the eyes centered upon that region just above the Pit of the Stomach with the thoughts centered upon divinity. slowly repeat the following mantram. "My soul is one with the universe and my spirit an emanation from God."— let the mind struggle to realise these significant words. (Burgoyne's meditation guidelines)



WAGNER AS JOHNSON'S SUCCESSOR

Denver, it seems, had become the American H.B. of L.'s de facto headquarters by 1888, and was the only H.B. of L. community to survive into the 1890s. After Wagner and Johnson had begun lamenting the group's decline in 1888, in the following year, Wagner and his wife, Belle, spent three months in California, where they presumably met and devised new plans with Burgoyne and other New Thought-influenced occultists

ASTRO-PHILOSOPHICAL PUBLICATIONS



In the fall of 1891 Henry purchased a large and expensive house in Denver near 16th and Downing in which he set up a publishing house called the Astro-Philosophical Publishing Company. This publishing effort was accompanied by the creation of a “Hermetic Institute,” through which Wagner (and Cundey, early on) worked as a healer, using his knowledge of “Astral-Magnetic Fluid.”

Be it enacted by the American Central Council of the HB of L. as follows:

There is hereby established a Sufic Circle or Chapter.

The objects of this Chapter shall be the systematic study of Sufism, the practical application and realization of its teachings, and the dissemination of its precepts and doctrines.

The principle officers of the Chapter shall be a Master, Guide, and Secrty.

The officers named in the preceding section shall constitute the Executive Council of the Chapter, and shall have power to pass rules and by-laws for its government

The President of the Cent. Council shall be Ex officio the Master of the Chapter and all other officers shall be appointed by him. (1887)

In 1896, Gould discussed...a group known as the Order of Sufis. This organization, he wrote, represented “the Sufistic and Unitarian Theosophy of the Persians”; it focused on Sufi poets; and it had a Masonic- (or Sufi-) like degree structure. Its members were not named, but they were said to be residing in New York and Missouri. In 1908, when he updated his list, Gould explicitly identified himself, Johnson, and a man named C.H.A. Bjerregaard as members.

BURGOYNE'S MYSTERIOUS ARABIAN

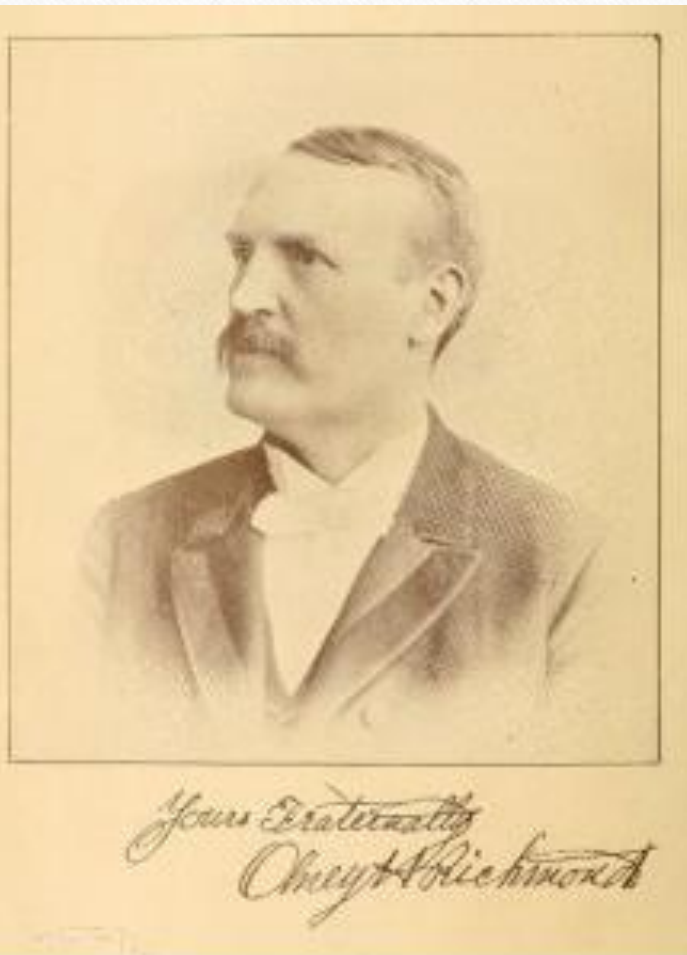
- The above are all the details necessary to send at this time. I would also say that you will note what a peculiar date Dec. 25th is. All Gods are born upon that date it is also ☉ day, further I think that certain words which fell from M Theon's lips that your Guru will be an Arabian if so I am personally acquainted with him as **he assisted** at the final ceremony in my initiation. (I did not see the Masters during the initiatory ceremonies until the 7th ceremony I only felt that they were present.) I must send you the account which I have written and which I promised you in Topeka. this Arab is there mentioned. (Burgoyne to TMJ, September 8, 1887)



JAMES D. KEIFER

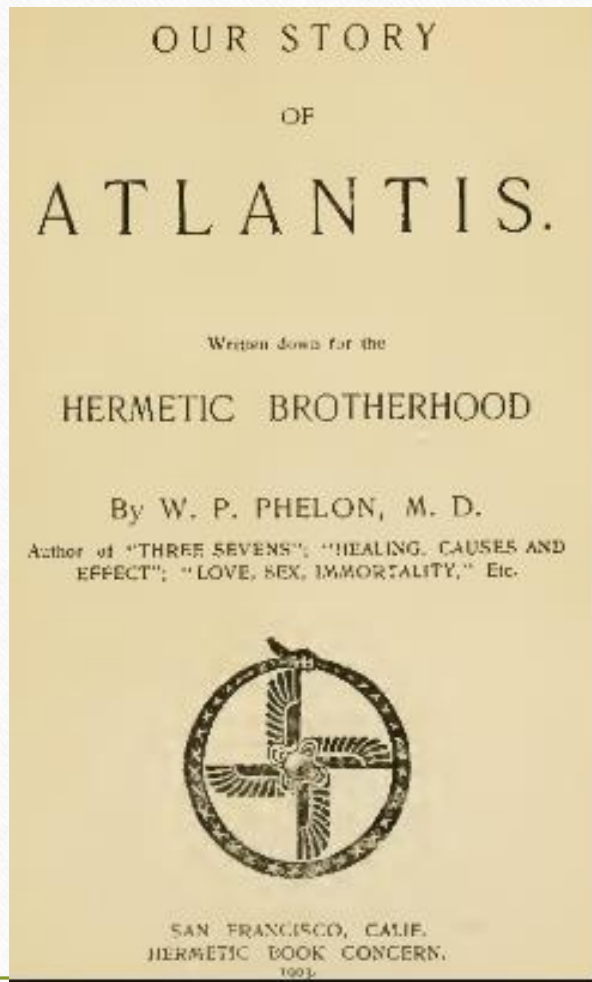
began promoting himself as a professional astrologer in Salt Lake City...Keifer moved to Los Angeles where he established the First Temple and College of Astrology and published his own astrology-based works, all of which contained the H.B. of L.'s logo on them.

ORIENTAL MAGI AND THE RELIGION OF THE STARS



Richmond called his own exoteric teachings the “Religion of the Stars,” and even made this the name of the version of his teachings published in 1893... “Astro Magnetic” (and the similar “Astral Magnetic”) was an extremely rare term in nineteenth-century American occultism...used by the astrologer-mesmerist H.H. Sherwood, but after that, the only known use, besides that of Richmond, is by the H.B. of L. members Wagner and Cundey in the early 1890s...the OOM also served as a key pool of recruits for the decade’s movement for the Baha’i faith, which was the first Asian-majority religion to obtain over a thousand American converts.

THE FIRST OFFSHOOT OF THE AMERICAN H.B. of L.



- In Chicago, the H.B. of L. was led by the prominent Theosophist and Christian Scientist William P. Phelon [who] decided to use his knowledge of the H.B. of L. and start a new organization, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Atlantis, Luxor, and Elephante (HBALE) In the 1890s, Phelon became extremely influential in the Chicago New Thought, spiritualist, and esoteric communities, and he worked closely with and was influenced by the new, extremely popular organizations based in Chicago, including the OOM and the Baha'i movement led by Ibrahim Kheiralla. Perhaps the most famous member of the HBALE was Frank L. Baum, the author of the *Wizard of Oz*.

THE HERMETIC BROTHERHOOD OF LIGHT

- Meanwhile, in Boston in 1895, four men met on the roof of what was then the highest building in the city and created what was called the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light. Its teachings on sexual magic, which was likely derived from the H.B. of L., influenced Aleister Crowley's *Ordo Templi Orientalis*. The little information we have on this Brotherhood of Light comes from S.C. Gould, an H.B. of L. member since 1885, who discussed this new group in his esoteric studies journal in 1908.

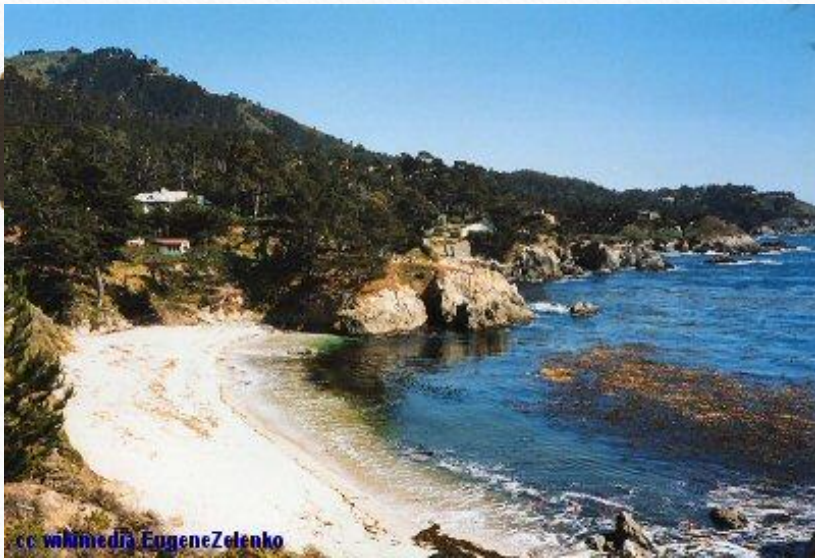


MARTINISTS AND “PAPUS”

- In early 1896 both Webb and Gould joined the Martinist Order, a French esoteric Masonic group led by the FTS and H.B. of L. member Papus, who reportedly intended the order to be a gateway for the H.B. of L. Papus’s Martinism was very concerned with unifying religions and the numerous esoteric Masonic movements...there is a strong possibility that the Order of Sufis was developed by the Johnson-affiliated Islamophilic FTS after being inspired by Papus and Martinism.

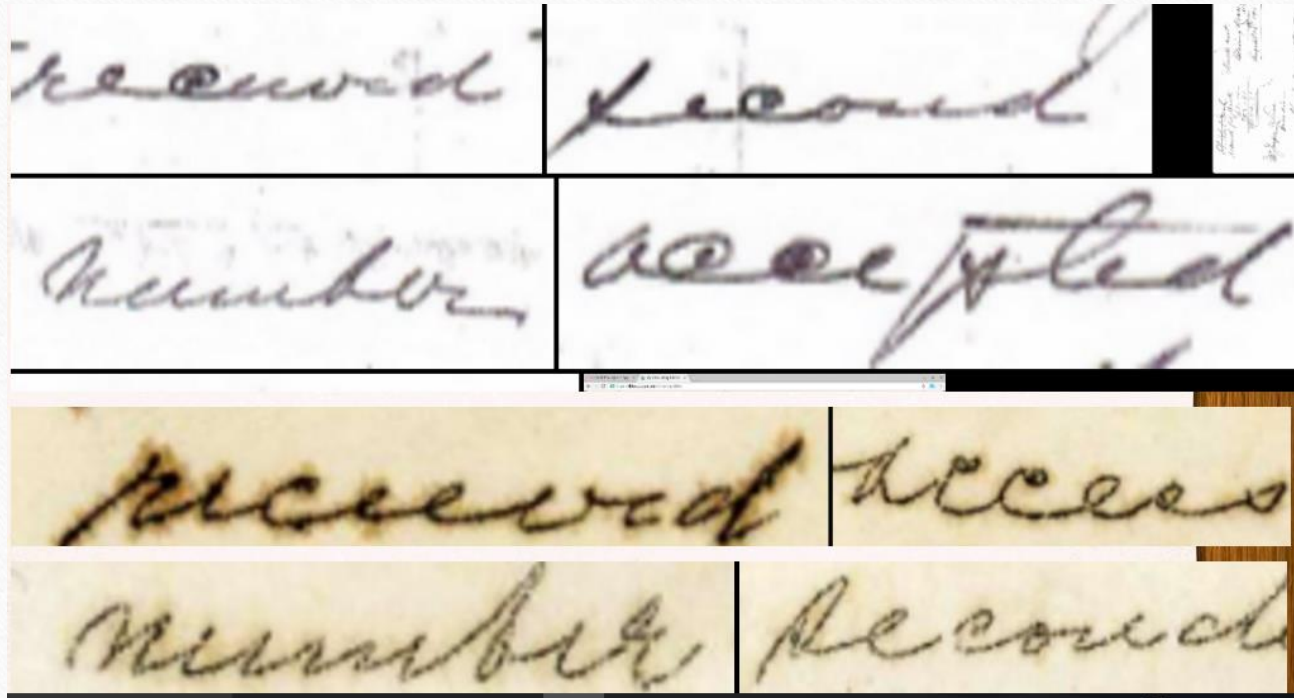


THE ASTLEYS AND THE WAGNERS



- Mr. Astley took me to the exact spot on Point Lobos where THE LIGHT OF EGYPT mostly was written, and I plucked a flower from the spot where Burgoyne used to sit, and now have it pressed...The Astleys said many hard things about the Wagners, calling them usurpers among many other things, but I believe they were unable to understand. I still believe the Wagners were good people who had met a force too powerful for them. (Benjamin to Elbert Kagy undated letter, Church of Light archives)

NORMAN ASTLEY'S HANDWRITING



THE JOHNSON LETTERS' HISTORICAL VALUE

Without the network of American TS lodges that Johnson helped build, it is hard to imagine the H.B. of L. having *any* real impact in the country. Johnson went even further with that organization than he had gone with the TS, becoming its main American leader ... showed others that esoteric groups could indeed succeed in the US. Numerous organizations started springing up, many of which were led by current or former members of the TS and H.B. of L., and they in turn produced their own innovations, such as connecting with the Mind Cure and New Thought communities and creating esoteric groups centered around Atlantis and Islam. From there, the organizations multiplied exponentially in a virtual explosion of esotericism. Johnson, through his efforts in the 1880s, did not simply light the fuse, he helped manufacture it. The letters to Johnson that are contained in this volume serve to document this important historical phenomenon.

♂ Thomas Johnson
 Mo., 31 March 1851 Time: 12:00 p.m. LMT
 Osceola, MO (US) Univ.Time: 18:14:48
 93w42, 38n03 Sid. Time: 0:34:05

Natal Chart
 Method: Web Style / Placidus
 Sun sign: Aries
 Ascendant: Cancer

☉ Sun	10 Ari 26'29"
☾ Moon	29 Pis 8'50"
☿ Mercury	9 Ari 12'14"
♀ Venus	26 Aqu 34'33"
♂ Mars	10 Pis 27'13"
♃ Jupiter	19 Lib 7' 11"
♄ Saturn	22 Ari 15'29"
♅ Uranus	29 Ari 8'30"
♆ Neptune	7 Pis 56'58"
♇ Pluto	28 Ari 53' 1"
♁ True Node	3 Leo 17'30"
♂ Chiron	23 Sag 3'46"
♈ PC	24 Can 21' 2:14 Leo 55' 3: 9 Vir 5'
♈ MC	9 Ari 17' 11:15 Tau 27' 12:22 Gem 18'

	C	F	M
F	☉☽☿♃♄♅♆♇♁		♂
A	♈	♏	
E			
W	♈		♃♄♅

