

Sophia Huggins (1832-1903)

Sophia Roundtree Huggins was a fortune teller and clairvoyant. She used her psychic powers to earn enough money to support herself, her mother, and two children. A clairvoyant is a person who is “able to see images of people, places and things in their mind’s eye” and use their visions to help clients understand events past and even the future. Bloomington citizens found “Aunt Sophie” as she was called, valuable in providing services to help them deal with their daily lives.

According to interviews published in the *Daily Pantagraph* and *Daily Bulletin*, both Bloomington newspapers, Sophia was born in Kentucky in 1832. Her mother was a Native American and her father a Frenchman. She was the youngest of seven children. She spent her early life near Indian Territory where many of the inhabitants were French traders. “I speak French even better and easier than my own tongue” she said.

By 1851 Sophia was living in Bloomington and in October of that year, she married John Huggins. They had at least two children; a daughter named Sophia born about 1860 and a son named Isaac born in 1865. According to the city directory of 1855, John worked as a laborer and Sophia as a seamstress. Unfortunately, the city directory in 1866 lists Sophie as a widow so apparently John died sometime shortly before or after Isaac’s birth.

In the following years Sophia made her living using her psychic powers. In an interview in the *Daily Pantagraph*, Sophia told of receiving her abilities at the age of twelve. But according to a *Daily Bulletin* article in 1899 by feature writer Madame Annette, Sophia claimed to have been “born with a veil over my face, with the power to read lives and see things unknown to other people.” Sophia went on to say that she was consulted by “kings and princes with great success.” She also said that she had gone on fortune telling tours quite often and had visited many states, territories, and other countries “across the big pond”.

Sophie’s customers in Bloomington/Normal included “luckless swains, love-sick girls, unhappy husbands and wives, and businessmen in financial distress.” Her fees ranged from one to ten dollars depending on how far she had to “send her mind away to get their past lives.” Sometimes additional sittings with a client were needed which cost an additional fifty cents each. However if a person’s life was so bad Sophie could not bear to think of it, she would turn customers away, unwilling to read past, present, or future events. According to Madame Annette of the *Daily Bulletin*, Sophie became a “great curiosity” to the people of Bloomington and many men and women sought her advice. Many residents referred to her as “The Witch of Endor,” a reference to the story in the Bible of King Saul trying to rouse the spirit of the prophet Samuel.

For most of her Bloomington life Sophia lived in a part of town called “Pone Hollow.” This was a very poor neighborhood built in a low, marshy area of town. It was located between the German settlement on South Hill and downtown. Pone Hollow was also close to an area of meat packing plants known as Blood Alley. Due to the blood and other slaughter-house by-products which were dumped in a nearby creek, the area had a terrible smell. Sophie’s home had a little barnyard with a chicken coop, several ducks and geese, and a family dog. As she gained more success in her fortune telling business, Sophie began investing in real estate in Pone Hollow. Perhaps she saw that the growing city’s development would soon spread to her neighborhood and wanted her heirs to profit.

Sophie’s daughter, Sophie, later became Mrs. Marie Clifford of Indianapolis. Apparently she and her mother became estranged as the younger Sophie was left out of Sophie’s will. Her son Isaac continued to live in Bloomington. He owned property outside of town where

he raised hogs. He worked for a while collecting garbage for the city, spent some time in jail, and was married several times.

Sophia Huggins died at her home on West Taylor Street on August 8, 1903. Her funeral was held at Mt Pisgah Baptist Church where she had been a member. She left her property to her son Isaac, an adopted daughter, Ruth Hunter, and a friend, David Rogers. She is buried in Evergreen Cemetery next to her son and his last wife, Anna.

Discussion Questions: Why would Sophie Huggins clients seek information from her?

How do you think she gained the information she needed to give a “reading”?

Were her services of any “real” value...to her clients? To the community? To herself?