

# THE TEXAS SPIRIT GATHERING

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**AN OCCULT CONFERENCE  
FEB. 2-3, 2024**



**PRESENTED BY  
THE AUSTIN SÉANCE AND THE  
FIRST SPIRITUALIST CHURCH OF AUSTIN**

**THE FIRST SPIRITUALIST CHURCH OF AUSTIN  
4200 AVENUE D, AUSTIN, TEXAS**

**TEXASSPIRITGATHERING.COM**



**A PROGRAM GUIDE  
TO THE CONFERENCE**

# HOSTS

WANDA GARCIA  
THE FIRST SPIRITUALIST  
CHURCH OF AUSTIN

Longtime Austin resident Wanda Garcia, a medium and the current Board President of the First Spiritualist Church of Austin, joined the church in 2002.



JAKE CORDERO  
THE AUSTIN SÉANCE

Award-winning journalist Jake Cordero is a longtime student of philosophy and magic. His travels have taken him to Haiti, where he has observed vodou practices, and to Mexico City, where he reported on a series of cult murders. Jake has spent several years working with The Girl Who Knows, an Austin street psychic.



ALBERT LUCIO  
THE AUSTIN SÉANCE

Things that go bump in the night have always fascinated A. Lucio. With a degree in sociology and psychology Albert Lucio has set out to understand how we shape and are shaped by supernatural beliefs. He has spent years studying ghost hunters, consorting with psychics and researching the occult.



# PRESENTERS

DR. JOSEPH LAYCOCK  
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Joseph Laycock is an associate professor of religious studies at Texas State University. He is the author of several books, including *The Exorcist Effect: Religion, Horror, and Demonic Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2023).



DR. JOSHUA PADDISON  
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

The research of Dr. Joshua Paddison, a Texas State University history professor, focuses on race, ethnicity, and religion in nineteenth-century America. His book *“Unholy Sensations: Sex, Scandal, and California’s First Cult Scare”* explores an international 1890s sex scandal that surrounded the Brotherhood of the New Life, a multi-racial spiritualist community in northern California.



BRANDON HODGE  
SPIRITUALIST HISTORIAN  
AND COLLECTOR

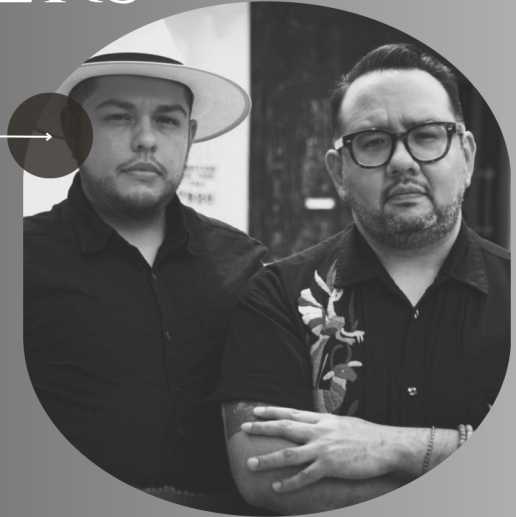
Author, collector, and historian Brandon Hodge owns the world’s finest collection of writing planchettes and other séance-related devices, many featured on his popular website, [MysteriousPlanchette.com](http://MysteriousPlanchette.com). Brandon has served as on-air talent for dozens of popular radio and television programs, and his research and his séance artifact collection were featured on both the Science Channel’s hit show *Oddities* and the Travel Channel’s *Mysteries at the Museum*. His research on Spiritualism history has appeared in *Smithsonian Magazine*.



# MINI TALKS

ERIC LABRADO  
ALEXIS ARREDONDO  
CITY ALCHEMIST

Eric Labrado and Alexis Arredondo are the proprietors of Austin's popular City Alchemist apothecary, an esoteric purveyor of occult merchandise. At its brick-and-mortar store in East Austin, City Alchemist sells occult books, candles and other esoteric products for the curious or advanced practitioner.



BRITTANY SHELTON  
MEGAN KEITH  
WEIRD ATX

Brittany Shelton and Megan Keith, proprietors of WeirDATX.com and the Beyond Weird Paranormal Podcast, have nearly 20 years of experience with paranormal investigations. Their adventures have taken them all over central Texas, out to the deserts of west Texas to the swamps of Big Thicket.



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**FEBRUARY 2-3, 2024**  
**THE**  
**TEXAS SPIRIT**  
**GATHERING**  
**AGENDA**



**THE FIRST**  
**SPIRITUALIST**  
**CHURCH OF**  
**AUSTIN**



4200 Avenue D, Austin

**Friday Reception and Workshop: 6-9:30 PM, Friday, Feb. 2**

**Hosts:**  
**Wanda Garcia**  
**Albert Lucio**  
**Jake Cordero**

A wine-and-cheese welcome reception for The Texas Spirit Gathering, along with an evening Ouija workshop, hosted by Albert and Jake of The Austin Séance, plus an invocation from Wanda Garcia of The First Spiritualist Church of Austin.

**Saturday Morning Welcome: 10-10:30 AM, Saturday, Feb. 3**

A morning ice-breaker and conference sign-in for the Texas Spirit Gathering, plus an invocation from Wanda Garcia of The First Spiritualist Church of Austin. Expect coffee and pastries.

**Spiritualism and the Civil War: 10:30-11:30 AM, Saturday, Feb. 3**

**Speaker:**  
**Dr. Joshua**  
**Paddison**

The research of Dr. Joshua Paddison, a Texas State University history professor, focuses on race, ethnicity, and religion in nineteenth-century America. He received his ph.D from UCLA and has authored two books.

**Mini-Talk: City Alchemist, 11:45-Noon, Saturday, Feb. 3**

**Speaker:**  
**Alexis Arredondo**  
**Eric Labrado**

An esoteric purveyor of occult merchandise., Austin's City Alchemist offers readings, cleansings and apothecary goods — plus workshops on brujeria and Spiritism.

**Lunch Break: Noon, Saturday, Feb. 3**

Nearby restaurants include New World Deli, Hyde Park Grill, Curras Hyde Park, Julio's Cafe and The Parlor Pizza. Details on back cover.

### **Psychometry Workshop: 1:45-3 PM, Saturday, Feb. 3**

**Presenters:**  
**Jake Cordero**  
**& Albert Lucio**

The ability to decipher sudden messages that come to us through contact with physical objects has a name: psychometry. In this hands-on workshop, attendees will learn how to fine-tune their own psychometric abilities, and get an opportunity to test them.

### **Cases that Inspired The Exorcist: 3:30-4:30 PM, Saturday, Feb. 3**

**Presenter:**  
**Dr. Joseph**  
**Laycock**

Texas State University associate professor Joseph Laycock will describe two exorcism cases that inspired the famous Hollywood movie. Dr. Laycock is the author of *The Exorcist Effect*, released in 2023 by Oxford University Press.

### **New Perspectives on Paranormal: 4:45-5:15 PM, Saturday, Feb 3**

**Presenter:**  
**Megan Keith**  
**Brittany Shelbon**

Megan Keith and Brittany Shelbon of *Weird ATX* discuss methods for everyday ghost hunting, plus a discussion of the Estes Method.

### **Dinner Break: 5:30 PM, Saturday Feb. 3**

Nearby restaurants include New World Deli, Hyde Park Grill, Curras Hyde Park, Julio's Cafe and The Parlor Pizza. Details on back cover.

### **Talking Board History: 7-7:45 PM, Saturday, Feb 3.**

**Presenter:**  
**Brandon**  
**Hodge**

Historian Hodge will discuss the history of spirit communication devices, including automatic writing planchettes, talking boards and spirit trumpets. Participants will have the opportunity to handle historical apparatus from Hodge's extensive collection.

### **Magic Latern and Spirit Photos: 8-8:20 PM, Saturday, Feb 3.**

**Presenter:**  
**Brandon**  
**Hodge**

Brandon Hodge presents a magic lantern show using an antique glass slide projector to display approximately two dozen historic images featuring the spirit photography of William Mumler.

### **Séance Workshop: 8:30 PM, Saturday, Feb 3.**

**Presenters**  
**Jake Cordero**  
**& Albert Lucio**

Albert Lucio and Jake Cordero of *The Austin Séance* lead a séance workshop.



# A CONGREGATION OF KINDRED SPIRITS

## THE FIRST SPIRITUALIST CHURCH OF AUSTIN



Wanda Garcia, board president of the First Spiritualist Church of Austin.

## 95 YEARS AND COUNTING: HISTORIC FIRST SPIRITUALIST CHURCH WELCOMES MEDIUMS, ENERGY HEALERS

By Kristen O'Brien  
Special for The Austin Séance

The building on the quiet corner of Avenue D and 42nd street in Hyde Park is rather unassuming. It's small and one-story and with a wooden exterior painted with cheerful accents of vibrant green and orange. But what occurs inside on the second and fourth Sunday of each month is far from somber. Like many churches in America there is joyful singing, exchanging of pleasantries between members, a sermon, and an offering. But what sets the First Spiritualist Church of Austin apart from other churches is that the departed also are encouraged to attend, and to share their messages with the congregation. Spirits are invited to communicate either through the minister in the Spirit Greetings part of the service, or through other members of the Church, many of whom are mediums, psychics, and energy healers. Here Spiritualism, the belief in communication with those who have left this world and are now spirits, is the religion of choice.

The birth of Spiritualism as a religion in the United States dates back to the late 1840s when Maggie and Kate Fox began communicating with a "spirit" in their home in Hydesville, New York through rappings and knockings. As news spread of what the sisters could do, they soon developed an immense following. Through their influence, spiritual mediums popped up in almost every town across the nation. A foundational tenet of Spiritualism, just as with other religions, is the idea that the soul can live on after death. Unlike more traditional religions, however, Spiritualism teaches that one can prove the existence of the afterlife by attending séances and through spirit communication. Therefore Spiritualism, unlike other religions, is not based on blind faith alone.



The First Spiritualist Church of Austin opened its doors in 1926 and joined the National Spiritualists Association of Churches in 1928. It was founded by the Reverend August Cervin who had immigrated to America from Sweden with his wife, Jennie, a clairvoyant medium, healer, and a reverend in her own right. Initially Austin Spiritualists met at the old Labor Temple at 10th and Brazos. Sometimes services were held at the Driskill Hotel. When Reverend Cervin died in 1940, it was his daughter Rev. Alma Cervin Johnson who took over from her father and led the Church until her death in 1965. The current location in Hyde Park was purchased in 1941, giving the congregation a permanent home.

Wanda Garcia, the current President of the Board and a member of the Church since 2002, said she first joined somewhat against her will and at the urging of her father. Although raised Roman Catholic, she came to feel that none of the faith traditions were meeting her needs. Until “one morning I was laying around and I heard the voice of my father who had passed in spirit, and he said he wanted me to go to the Spiritualist church. And I said, ‘I don’t go to church on Sundays, I rest.’ And he said, ‘I want you to go,’ he’s very persuasive, so, I went there and was very skeptical.”



The church meets on the second and fourth Sundays.

After the service Garcia says a member of the church befriended her and asked her to stay for coffee. “And I said, well, I’ll think about it. But he said, ‘oh, come on.’ And I stayed for coffee and then I started going ever since then.”

Garcia says there is no stereotypical member when it comes to those who attend a spiritualist church, other than “everybody who comes there likes to have spirit messages. They like to contact their spirits from the other side when they have problems or issues. I think that’s what we all have in common.”

Some of the Declaration of Principles found in the Hymn book that the congregation follow include, “We believe in infinite intelligence, We affirm that communication with the so called dead is a fact, scientifically proven by the phenomena of Spiritualism, and We affirm that the precepts of Prophecy and Healing are Divine attributes proven through Mediumship.” There are hymns that have been written for the Spiritualist church, as well as traditional inspirational songs, like the gospel song, “This Little Light of Mine.” So much of the structure is familiar, but the content is uniquely tailored to support and nurture mediumship.

### More Details

**The First Spiritualist Church of Austin, 4200 Avenue D in Austin, holds services on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month at 10:00 a.m. Central Time. Church Services are also conducted via Zoom.**

**For more info, email: [FSCOAustin@gmail.com](mailto:FSCOAustin@gmail.com).**

THE JOHN THE BAPTIST OF  
AMERICAN SPIRITUALISM

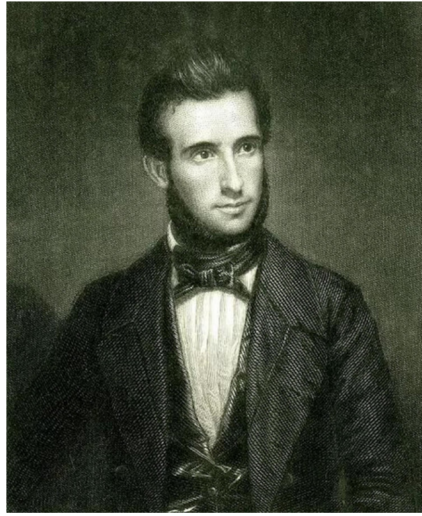
# Andrew Jackson Davis: American Prophet

By Elizabeth Thomas  
**SPECIAL FOR THE AUSTIN SÉANCE**

The story of Andrew Jackson Davis could qualify as a classic tale of the American dream, as how one man rose without education or means in rural America to become one of the 19th Century's most famous healers. And yet, Andrew Jackson Davis — or “AJ” as his followers called him — pursued a path far from classically conventional. He claimed that visions guided him, and present-day followers now point to the prescient accuracy of some of those visions. AJ Davis also is remembered as perhaps America's first true Spiritualist, and could boast a career that partially predated even that of the famous Fox Sisters.

## The Early Years

Andrew Jackson Davis was born on Aug. 11 1826 in a rustic cabin in Blooming Grove, a small community along the Hudson River in New York. His father was an alcoholic; his mother was said to have been meek and religious. According to popular accounts, he received his name from a neighbor who had stopped by to discuss politics and see the then four-day-old baby. The neighbor purportedly said: “I want this boy to bear that great man's name — Andrew Jackson” and then this neighbor proceeded to eerily predict that the baby would reach a fame in life even surpassing that of the former president. And arguably that prophecy came true — Davis rose to a



*AJ Davis, the John the Baptist of American Spiritualism.*

towering fame as a healer and author just as the American public's memories of the former president had begun to fade.

## The Poughkeepsie Seer

One famous title bestowed upon Davis was that of “The Poughkeepsie Seer.” The title was derived from a message given to him from a guiding voice that AJ Davis claimed to have begun hearing around the age of eleven. According to accounts, this voice told him to go to Poughkeepsie, New York, where he claimed more guiding visions. Initially he said he didn't understand who was speaking to him or how such communication was possible.

It was also in Poughkeepsie that he met William Levingston, who was interested in mesmerism (which is similar to today's hypnotism). Mr. Levingston approached AJ Davis with a request to mesmerize him in front of an audience, and the results were astonishing. Andrew claimed to remember nothing, but was told he accurately read a newspaper pressed against his forehead and supposedly was able to correctly diagnose several illnesses suffered by audience members. Thus began his career of diagnosing illness and prescribing cures. He was 19 at the time.

## The John the Baptist of Spiritualism

Another title bestowed upon AJ Davis was that of the “John the Baptist of Spiritualism.” This was because AJ correctly foretold of the coming of the Spiritualist movement, which is defined by the belief that spirits can make contact with the living. AJ appeared to have begun speaking of this coming movement even before the Fox Sisters made Spiritualism famous when they hosted America’s first-ever séance in 1848.

For instance, in his *Principles of Nature*, first published in 1847, AJ Davis wrote: “It is a truth that spirits commune with one another while one is in the body and the other in the higher spheres — and this, too, when the person in the body is unconscious of the influx, and hence cannot be convinced of the fact; and this truth will ere long present itself in the form of a living demonstration.” Then, in his diary entry of March 31 of 1848 — that is, the precise day of the Fox Sisters’ first séance — Davis wrote: “about daylight this morning a warm breathing passed over my face and I heard a voice, tender and strong, saying ‘Brother, the good work has begun—behold, a living demonstration is born.’”

AJ Davis also enjoyed a successful career as an author. At first, others transcribed his books while he remained in a trance-like state. Eventually, however, he claimed he had come to remember what his guides told him and so wrote the books himself. He completed around 30 books in all and they described visions of healing, the death process, the formation of the Earth, and predictions of modern times.

In a book about Davis published in 2005, *Andrew Jackson Davis — The first American Prophet and Clairvoyant*, author John De Salvo Ph.D. states: “I decided to verify the dates in which he made certain statements and compare them with the actual documented discovery dates to rate his accuracy. I must say, in all my readings, I have never come across any prophet or seer who can come close to the accuracy of Davis.”

In his research, De Salvo reviewed *The Principles of Nature*, AJ Davis’ book published in 1847 that included planetary descriptions that some say correspond to the then-undiscovered planets of Pluto and Neptune. *The Principles of Nature* also includes descriptions of scientific theories that some say correspond to modern day ideas of Relativity, Quantum Mechanics and the Big Bang Theory.

One of the most poignant predictions AJ Davis gave related to the future history of the United States itself. Sometime after the American Civil War, AJ Davis wrote of the coming of a “new earth” where “not circumstances, but interior spiritual growth bringeth the Kingdome of love, justice, joy and peace. Harmony with the movement of laws of nature, which reign universal, brings a new heaven and a new earth. America is the promised land.” Amidst all the fearful stresses of modern life, these words from AJ Davis seem to convey sentiments both radical and comforting.

AJ Davis died on Jan. 13, 1919.



*Elizabeth Thomas is a practicing medium, trance speaker and healer in Austin, Texas. She enjoys researching mysterious history and psychic phenomena and bringing the mystery to "light". She can be found at [www.hearttoheartjourneys.com](http://www.hearttoheartjourneys.com).*

# NEARBY EATS



**New World Deli, 4101 Guadalupe Street**  
<https://newworldeli.com/menu>

A charming deli-style cafe serving a variety of sandwiches, in a coffeehouse-like space.



**Quack's Bakery, 411 E. 43rd St.**  
<https://quacks43rd.com>

Pastries and coffee.

**First Light Bookshop Cafe, 4300 Speedway**  
<https://www.firstlightaustin.com>

Espresso and pastries, yogurt and granola, fruit.  
— in a cool bookstore.



**The Parlor Pizza, 4301 Guadalupe**  
<https://www.theparloraustin.com/menu>

Pizza, beer and wine.

**Hyde Park Grill, 4206 Duval St**  
<https://hpbng.com>

Comfort food & American standards in a casual dining room, plus a bar & regular weekend specials.



**Julio's Cafe, 4230 Duval**  
<https://juliosaustin.com>

Mexican eats from breakfast tacos to roasted chicken in a casual setting.

**Curra's Hyde Park, 4215 Duval**  
<https://currashydepark.com>

Mexican favorites, plus vegan options.

