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an educational resource on the paranormal, pseudoscientific and the supernatural



## An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural

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**Fox sisters** The three Fox sisters were Katherine (circa 1836-1892; known as Kate), Leah (circa 1811-1890), and Margaret (circa 1833-1893). They lived in Hydesville, New York, near Rochester. (Hydesville no longer exists.)

In 1848, when Katherine and Margaret were twelve and fifteen years old respectively, they began reporting that at night they heard strange [rappings](#) in their bedroom. On the night of March 31, the noises were so distracting that the family left the house after calling in witnesses. This was the birth of the whole [spiritualism](#) movement which in some parts of the world still flourishes.

Following a sensational public exhibition of rapping at the Corinthian Hall in Rochester, and under the management of their older (by more than twenty years) married sister Leah, the girls went on tour exhibiting their skill before enthusiastic audiences in the United States and abroad.

Scientists such as physicist/chemist [Sir William Crookes](#) were completely taken in by the act. After one [séance](#) in London in 1871, Crookes reported that

*I have tested [the raps] in every way that I could devise, until there has been no escape from the conviction that they were true objective occurrences not produced by trickery or mechanical means.*

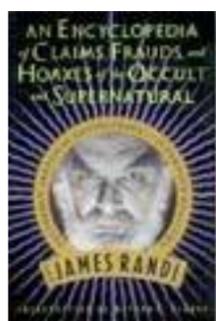
Leah Fox shed her husband, Fish, and married a wealthy New York banker named Underhill. Her younger sisters became a burden to her in her new social position, and she dumped them, becoming a sought-after [medium](#) in her own right.

Then in November 1888, the sisters publicly confessed that they had produced the raps by cracking their toe joints, a peculiar skill they each had. As for their earliest efforts as children, the bumps had been accomplished by fastening an apple to a string and surreptitiously bouncing it off the floor. In that same Hydesville house, in 1843, similar noises had been reported by earlier occupants. This would surely have been known to the sisters, and they doubtless made good use of a reputation already assigned to the residence.

Katherine, married and known as Kate Fox Jencken, became a hopeless alcoholic and though she toured lecturing on her fraudulent past, she also held private séances. Arrested in 1888 for drunkenness and idleness, she lived from then on by begging and borrowing and died impoverished in 1892.

Margaret (also known as Margareta) Fox Kane toured for a while with sister Kate after they had both recanted their confessions, until the end of 1889, finally giving it up when Kate's (and her own) alcoholism made the lecture business impossible. She died a few months after her sister Kate, and followed her into a pauper's grave.

The public confessions had done nothing to dampen the belief in the Fox sisters or the movement they had started. The believers expressed their regret at the fact that the sisters had been forced into lying, and spiritualism continued as if the confessions of the Fox sisters had never happened.



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