



HISTORY OF ASD

by

T.E. ROSS II

*An address given on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the American
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by Terry Ross.*

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There is what might be called a seminal incident at the beginning of any worthwhile undertaking, and it usually involves personality. Let me quote from a letter published in the May, 1981 issue of the American Dowser.

"I am going to have to ask you to bear with me while I give you a bit of ASD background about which very, very few present day members of ASD have any knowledge.

"The town of Danville, Vermont is bordered on the north by the town of Wheelock. In Wheelock about the year 1800 was born one Bezaleel Bemas. As a youth he learned how to make water pipes and pumps. He also discovered he was an able and reliable dowser. Pipes were made of wood, and pumps were a great sanitary improvement over the old open wells. A man who had the tools and knowledge could make a good living.

"Bemas started about 1820 with a horse and wagon of his own. He quickly made a name for himself as an extremely competent dowser and water technician. For over 50 years he was busy finding water and making pumps and pipe for the settlers. He charged 50¢ for a pump and 2¢ a foot for pipe, if you supplied your own logs.

"From Wheelock he covered a territory in Vermont extending north to Newport, west to Waterbury and as far south as Woodstock. Unusual for a man of his time (as well as today) he drank only water, the best of spring water. As he traveled he saw the need along the roads for watering places for man and beast; he approached his Congressman with a plan, but was laughed at.

"So for a few pennies he bought old barrels which he cut into two to make tubs. Wherever he went he would find a spring in a likely place, make a turnout in the road, set up the tub, and pipe water to it. He dotted the area of his travels with these oases and would tack a Bible verse to a board over the tub. He was known throughout his territory as "Springwater" Bemas. One of his famous springs was the All-Wright Spring on the North Danville Road; it was still functioning in 1961 when ASD was incorporated, but may since have been destroyed by road construction.

"Springwater Bemis was a professional dowser, an artist with a hazel stick, a tough practical water technician and also a most humane, kind, charitable, beautiful human being. Stalwart professionalism balanced by essential goodness and beauty. He was the dowsing "hero" and inspiration for founders of ASD, and as such is part of the tradition of ASD.

"It is reported that the most competent scientists admit to combining conscious rational thinking with intuition; that the best of science comes from a balance between the two; that man, as knower, always knows by means of the interaction within himself of both poetic and logistic principles. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), who laid the foundation of the 'Age of Reason' said: "The heart has its reasons that reason does not know. It is by the heart that we know the first principles, and reason must rest on the perceptions of the heart and instinct".

"ASD has from its beginnings recognized the need for the traditionally 'feminine' virtues of compassion, sensitivity, intuition and beauty to balance 'Science' and the excesses of the industrial age"¹

We now turn the pages of the calendar. The year is 1958, the place - Danville. Reg Smith - for years moderator of the Town Meeting - and Clint Gray - railroad hand and pulp cutter - were cutting brush together when Reg noticed that his wrist-watch was gone. Clint, after visual search had failed, offered to find it by a forked stick, which kept bending in his hands over a particular spot. Nothing. More search. Nothing again. More search. Clint insisted. Still nothing. The next day, in the mud at the rained-out site, still ticking away, Reg's watch was found exactly where Clint said it was.

The Danville Chamber of Commerce had been in the habit of sponsoring a fall Foliage Festival, but Stowe, bigger and better heeled, had appropriated many of its features; so Reg, as head of the Danville Chamber, recalling the incident, urged that Danville feature an exhibition of "water-witching". That suggestion resulted in the first meeting of dowsers at what was to become the dowsing capital of the U.S.A.

The story now shifts to the town of Brandon, Vermont, where a distinguished lawyer from New Jersey happened to turn to a radio program announcing this forthcoming meeting. Galen Otis Hutchison, now 87, had brought to a successful conclusion the largest land case in Massachusetts, dating to the Mayflower Compact, and for ten years he had had the first radio program exclusively devoted to conservation of natural resources. Listening to the announcement at his tree farm in Brandon, Galen was intrigued; he went to Danville to see what it was all about. He found twenty-five or thirty of us gathered there from all over New England and New York, and they included Raymond C. Willey who was in charge of the destiny of some 3,000 workers at the General Electric complex in Schenectady; Robert S. Plimpton, a prominent publicist in Manhattan; Henry ("Hank") Balivet,

retired, with an outstanding record with the OSS of service behind the lines in France; Joseph W. Mooney, vice-president of American Sugar, and of course, Reg Smith.

There was much talk and demonstration of dowsing at this get-together, with sufficient interest aroused to prompt planning for another in 1959, and following that, in 1960. Reg Smith passed the hat at the initial session, and at Ray Willey's urging eighteen of us put in a dollar apiece. Later, when Reg paid ten dollars to the State of Vermont for a preliminary registration of association, we were left with eight dollars for the coming year.

Galen Hutchison, meanwhile, had become convinced there was a lot to this thing called dowsing, and took time off from his work as Judge of the Municipal Court in Brandon to turn out the complete set of By-laws that we have today. He sent it to the others without response, however, except from Willey, who made a digest of it, brief and to the point as it already was. Finally, as Galen tells the story, he sent to those he thought were interested a date on which to meet, with the suggestion they do something or give it up. On the 27th of June, 1961, Reg Smith took the completed Articles of Association to Montpelier to file with the Secretary of State. Galen looked at the calendar. It was his birthday. He was sixty-three.

The early meetings of the Trustees were in Brandon. Bob Plimpton was elected President. He and Roger Savaria entered into the spirit of the fledgling enterprise by journeying to England where they met with Cols. Merrylees and Bell who had had so much to do with the British Society of Dowzers, founded in 1933, (and whose Golden Jubilee some of us attended in 1983, at Oxford.) Plimpton and Savaria were astounded. "We had no idea", they wrote, "how vast the subject we were studying was, until we made that visit". The British were already well along with oil location and archaeological work, and were setting high standards of operation and administration. Encouraged by what they found, Plimpton and Savaria began to correspond with the Drs. Rhine and Pratt of the Parapsychological Laboratory at Duke University, and later went to visit them. It was at that time that Rhine began to feel the importance of dowsing in connection with his work, a possibility, unfortunately, that he was never able to pursue.

Meanwhile, Plimpton and others began to urge that the meetings of the Society be held in New York, at the Hotel Algonquin, where the food and celebrities were attractive considerations; but an inconclusive venture in public relations conducted at the Vermont booth at the World's Fair, together with the difficulty of demonstrating the before-and-afters of dowsing to the passing crowds, convinced the officers that they should stick to their last in Danville. Hank Balivet's devotion and persistence as Secretary had much to do with keeping A.S.D. together during this uncertain period. He and Galen never lost faith. As the latter will testify, he devoted himself almost

exclusively to the Society and its need. "I worked my heart out". Mainly by correspondence from his base in Brandon, he had attracted the first one hundred members. By 1965, exhausted and with congestive heart failure, he was forced to temporarily withdraw from the scene. With much back-and-forth, however, and the aid of a particular Washington lawyer, the steps he had initiated in 1965 leading to a tax-status for the Society with the Federal Government bore fruit in 1967. The IRS had been very reluctant, saying we were a folk society, dealing in superstition, and without proof of what we did. It was owing to a well-to-do investor in real estate, who used dowsing to evaluate properties, that the lawyer became interested in forwarding our case, and then only after Galen had put together many confirmed illustrations of what dowsing had done and of the theories that could account for them.

There were various practical demonstrations of the dowser's art in those early days. A professor living in nearby Peacham put \$3,500.00 into a dry hole. Clint Gray found good water for him for a total cost of \$35.00. Ray Poppelman was said to have picked a county where no oil was believed to exist, wildcatted, and proved the experts wrong. Plimpton and Poppelman journeyed to Kentucky and Tennessee, where they located numbers of archaeological remains. Roger Savaria, according to an early report "gave an amazing demonstration of map dowsing. He dowsed slides showing wells known (only) to members of the audience". Clint Gray, ever the innovator, dowsed an entire almanac of weather for the following year, filing it with the Town Clerk of Danville and with the Secretary of the Society. His accuracy was said to be 85%. Les Mooney of Lebanon, New Hampshire, (no relation to the Trustee of that surname) reported twenty-one successful wells under contract with the State, calling for a minimal flow of fifty gallons a minute each; he also wrote a very sophisticated treatise on his method of diverting water veins by percussion, a method which he felt maximized a technique mentioned "by a German practical nurse working among South African natives and later, briefly, by Penrose in Australia". Verne Cameron of Elsinore, California, wrote to us about map dowsing, dowsing for oil and gold claims. Galen Hutchison compiled a report on Romuald Morin, a member from Montreal, who was responsible for the discovery of 100 million cubic feet per day of gas flowing from the St. Lawrence lowlands.

Through the efforts of these and other selfless men and women, the Society was on its way. By the end of its second fiscal year, we were working toward the first thousand members and setting a rate of growth which, surprisingly to me, it has so far failed to duplicate. Perhaps there was something unique in that first burst of enthusiasm and awareness that we were setting out on a special journey, not only in the sense of locating things, but of service, and ultimately of the raising of consciousness, which both Galen and this speaker feel is the basic goal of A.S.D.

From the beginning, thanks to Joe Mooney, who was the head of sales for his company, and Bob Plimpton, whose specialty was public relations, we were sought out by the press and media. The first issue of the Newsletter, later to become the quarterly journal, *The American Dowser*, assured us that *Woman's Day*, *Look*, the *Boston Globe*, and *New York Herald Tribune*, plus representatives of radio and TV, attended the first Annual Convention, September 30th through October 1st, 1961. Ray Willey, from GE, made the keynote speech. (Years later, Ray told me the secret of his success in handling 3,000 diverse and outspoken electrical workers. You guessed it - the pendulum).

At that first meeting of Trustees, Henry Gross, hero of three closely documented books on dowsing by novelist Kenneth Roberts, came over from Maine, and was made an honorary member. He told us that he never used the word 'dowsing' preferring instead 'divination'. Evelyn Penrose, the famous international dowser and author of *Adventure Unlimited* - then living in Australia - was also made an honorary member. The Newsletter from which I have been quoting was voted into existence. Mrs. Marjorie Hunter, now a lay-preacher in Barre, Vermont, was appointed Librarian. "It is planned", the report went, "that A.S.D. collect books, pamphlets, and articles on the history and practice of dowsing, so that any who wish to do research on the subject may find such material available in the special library". Our annual dues were raised from one to three dollars.

The press, always on the alert for a story with conflict, and by no means as open to our doings as it is today, made the mistake of picking on Clint Gray. A member of the fourth estate began goading Clint with the suggestion of fraud. "How does it work?". Clint responded: "Damfino. But I sure as the dickens didn't turn this farm upside down to find that spring with the naked eye". There can be little doubt we were making progress when a certain professor offered \$100.00 of his own money "to anyone who could prove dowsing", and when Henry Gross appeared as the mystery guest on "To Tell the Truth".

We were fortunate indeed to have that combination of business and dowsing know-how that characterized the Board of Trustees and which is so necessary in dealing with the complex problems of A.S.D. There is, after all, no psychic or new-age organization like it. Essentially, we are the doers of the world of PSI. Our art is developed empirically, by trial and error. As dowsers we strive to meet actual needs, concerned less with the modality than with the results. This is not to say the trustees have been insensitive to theoretical research. In addition to visits with Drs. Rhine and Pratt, they were interested in Peter Hurkos, the famous Dutch psychic, and head of the then Wisconsin based 'Peter Hurkos Foundation for Psychical Research', and they made a point of calling at the Parapsychological Foundation in New York, where they talked with the well-known researchers Dr. Karlis Osis and

Professor Douglas Dean who later came to Danville as one of our speakers. In short, those who guided us in those early years were aware of the potential but concerned with the pragmatic. Along with accounts of dowsing derring-do, there is a quote from Newton - the great Newton - in one of our first Newsletters. 'I am playing on the seashore', he wrote, 'while the vast ocean of truth lies undiscovered before me.'

Our motto, 'Indago Felix', the fruitful search, and the attractive logo that goes with it can be seen on the sign swinging in front of our headquarters, and is imprinted on our official letterhead. We have vice-president Joe Mooney and the ad department of American Sugar to thank for it. I've taken extra pleasure in the design ever since a member wrote that the angle of the rod, held in the search position, is 52 degrees, exactly that of the sides of the Great Pyramid at Gizeh! In 1984 Galen Hutchison designed and had made for us a corporate banner, complete with stand, that contains colors and forms symbolizing the art and ethos of A.S.D. It can be seen at our office where the staff can furnish you with the full explanation that was printed in our November, 1983 *Journal*.

The By-laws had contained the far-sighted provision for the organization and operation of Chapters within the Society, and on July 21st, 1963, the first one was duly chartered, in Southern California, by the Trustees. It was sponsored, approved and recommended by our Senior Counsel. Ed (E.P.) McMillen, an octogenarian, spent the last months of his life organizing and successfully activating this first Chapter. Acting Chairman Ralph Harris, a Los Angeles businessman, had been an officer under Patton in North Africa where he had persuaded the General to let him dowsing the seventeen wells that supplied our troops. (The Germans had poisoned the existing wells). The story is detailed in Christopher Bird's book *The Divining Hand*, and was confirmed to me by Patton's daughter during a visit to her home in Massachusetts. Other signers of that first Charter included two doctors, a Navy Captain, and that great and original dowser, Verne Cameron, exponent of the theory of primary water that we hold today; last but not least was that beloved and devoted dowser 'Gory O'Loughlin, teacher and public relations enthusiast, who did so much to set the stage for the development of the art in the most dowsing-minded state in the Union, at least according to the percentage of our members residing there. The Southern California Chapter was the first in more than one sense of the fifty-nine others that have followed around the United States.

The By-laws also provided authority and guidance for the holding of other Conventions in addition to the Annual Convention traditionally held at our place of birth in Danville, where they were initially master-minded by Hank Balivet from his house just off the Green. It is to the everlasting credit of Virginia Baker, Trustee and President of the Orange County Chapter, that such a Convention was first held on March 22nd to March 25th, 1979, at the

Astara Centre in Upland, California; a municipality, interestingly enough, for which Ed McMillen had dowsed the water supply. Virginia and her cohorts repeated this huge success in 110 degree weather in the June of 1981.

The success story goes on. In 1982 and 1983 John Wayne Blessinghame and program co-ordinator Suzan Emigh Freeland organized the West Coast Conference at Santa Cruz. These wonderful and enlightening conventions, held on the campus of the University of California, were repeated in 1984 and 1985 under the leadership of Mary Marie Satterlee and John Miles Evans. Attendees came from around the country. Trustees held their official meetings there; and with the recently held Land of the Sky Dowzers' Conference, organized in Asheville, at the University of North Carolina this Spring by John Shisler, Ph.D., and Janet Lamb, and the Downeast Dowzers' Festival of last July 19th to 21st (1985) at the University of Maine at Orono, under the guiding hands of Gordon Barton and Trustee Roslyn Strong, A.S.D. is truly becoming a national force and focus of attention. All who attend these, to me, important meetings can attest to the enthusiasm and interest that they generate, and to the values they impart. What satisfaction there must be to those who undertook these pioneering ventures! I, for one, am proud to be their fellow-member, and to know that thanks to the generous help of John and Marilyn Sienkiewicz of Nashua, New Hampshire, the entire proceedings of the conventions that have been organized are on tape and part of the historical record of A.S.D.

There have been so many selfless ones, without whom we simply would not exist. The Quarterly Journal, or Digest, as we know it began with the February 15th, issue of 1964. The mimeographed Newsletter had been produced up to that time on a machine in the Balivet kitchen. Janet Wakefield, Betty Chamberlain and later, Celia Field, were Hank's assistants. Still later it was turned out on Celia's back-porch, and in 1965 in the cellar of Paul and Marion Sevigny's home. All this was gratis to the Society. Hank Balivet was the Editor from 1961 and continued to be until his death in 1967. Thereafter, under the aegis of Ray Willey, who came up from Schenectady to edit it, the Journal was printed in St. Johnsbury, and assumed its current blue and white cover. It was a labour of love for Ray until his death in 1979. Today, there are four volunteer Editors, geographically remote from Danville and each other. Our Director of Operations amasses the material and sends it to them on schedule. I ask you, what other organization could produce such a worthwhile and far-reaching publication under such conditions!

We've been fortunate in our mix of talent and drive. There was always someone to do the job that needed doing. In one of the early Newsletters there is a note of appreciation about Emma Lou Rothman, now living in North Danville, for her single-handed attention to all our affairs. No one knows how much Celia Field and later Paul and Marion Sevigny contributed. There was

cleaning, painting and shelving to be made at our first one-room headquarters under the Legion Hall. In 1975 the Trustees authorized the purchase of a Canadian based Book and Supply business to help meet our rising costs. The price was \$1.00. Paul Sevigny immediately took charge, organized the books, and built up mail-order and on-site sales to an inventory level, by 1985, of \$74,000.00 The accrual to A.S.D. was, and is, of inestimable value and a mainstay of A.S.D.'s corporate existence.

With expanding needs and a growing membership it was inevitable that we would require a professional and salaried staff. This was organized in 1979 with one full time Director of Operations, whose job description was written on the basis of Celia Field's experience and the growing demands. There were two part-time assistants. It would have been impossible to handle the phone, mail, Chapter relations, preparations for Convention, and the mailing of the Journal without this. With the change came our first honest-to-goodness budget, and the opportunity it gave us to scrutinize our operation, and to plan. An Index of our Journal was instituted that same year, compiled by a professional librarian. As a record of all our efforts over the years it has become an ongoing project, hopefully of meaning to researchers who become interested in the potential of our art.

In 1980, thanks to our internal controls and a succession of generous gifts, originating both locally and around the country, we were able to think in terms of a permanent home. The present cheerful and serviceable series of buildings is the result. There, the hospitable and efficient Taffy Todd, Joanne Trainor and Donna Mackay hold forth for our edification and assistance along the dowsing path, as did their predecessors, paid and unpaid. Martha Rose, our prior Director of Operations, did much to professionalize what is the control center of A.S.D. Barbara Roberts, who has just begun her tenth year as hostess with the mostess, has been our great liaison with Danville, no matter where we live, and her admirers, I have found, are not confined to national boundaries.

All in all, it has been a unique and absorbing experience for all concerned. There have been fights - hard ones - over the years; often it seemed the Society might not survive the clashes of those who viewed dowsing in different ways; and there have been seemingly insuperable obstacles. This has been true from the days when Reg Smith passed the hat. What has preserved us, I think, is the sense that what we call dowsing, this new-old art of the mind, can be of inestimable value to the race, not on one level, but on many, and that each of us in our own way, clinging to this idea and ideal, has lived a richer life. I will not worry why we are not 35,000 members instead of 3,500 because I believe that time has made A.S.D. a gift with the challenge of service and discovery that seeks, and will seek, its own moments to manifest and be revealed. We have only to keep meeting - and enjoying - the challenge as it is presented to us, each in our own

capacity and our own way. I'm sure the best is yet to be.

Let me close with a sign of both our heritage from the past, and of the promise for the future. President Emeritus Paul Sevigny has just concluded his first assignment under a contract with the State of Vermont - the successful restoration by re-direction of its hidden source of - and I quote again - "one of Springwater Bemas' famous springs, the All-Wright Spring on the North Danville Road; it was still functioning in 1961 when A.S.D. was incorporated but may since have been destroyed (as *indeed, it was*) by road construction". We stand on the foundation of others as we create and re-create anew. Let us go forward together.

1 Galen OHutchison, President Emeritus and Senior Counsel, ASD