

# Things That Go Bump In A Canadian Night

by Ronald Wolf



## The Ouija Board

You might say the Ouija board is not a Canadian invention and you would be right. But most readers know about or had some experiences with an Ouija Board. Some say it's a parlour trick while other swears that demons use them as portals from hell to the living. Whatever your take on the subject, it has a history and here it is.

A Ouija board (from the French and German words for *yes*, *oui* and *ja*, pronounced also known as a spirit board or talking board, is a flat board marked with letters, numbers, and other symbols, supposedly used to communicate with spirits.

It uses a planchette (small heart-shaped piece of wood) or movable indicator to indicate the spirit's message by spelling it out on the board during a séance. The fingers of the séance participants are placed on the planchette, which then moves about the board to spell out messages.

*Ouija* is a trademark for a talking board currently sold by Parker Brothers. It has become a trademark that is often used generically to refer to any talking board.

Following its commercial introduction by businessman Elijah Bond in the late 1890s, the Ouija board was regarded as a

harmless parlour game unrelated to the occult until American Spiritualist Pearl Curran popularized its use as a divining tool during World War I.

Mainstream Christian religions and some occultists have associated use of the Ouija board with the threat of demonic possession and some have cautioned their followers not to use Ouija boards.

While Ouija believers feel the paranormal or supernatural is responsible for Ouija's action, it may be more parsimoniously explained by unconscious movements of those controlling the pointer, a psychological phenomenon known as the ideomotor effect. Despite being debunked by the efforts of the scientific community, Ouija remains popular among many young people.

One of the first mentions of the automatic writing method used in the Ouija board is found in China around 1100 B.C., and it is first recorded in historical documents of the Song Dynasty. The method was known as *fujū* 扶乩 *planchette writing*.

The use of planchette writing as a means of ostensibly contacting the dead and the spirit-world continued, and, albeit under special rituals and supervisions, was a central practice of the Quanzhen

School, until it was forbidden by the Qing Dynasty. Several entire scriptures of the Daozang are supposedly works of automatic planchette writing. Similar methods of mediumistic spirit writing have been widely practiced in Ancient India, Greece, Rome and medieval Europe.

During the late 1800s, planchettes were widely sold as a novelty. The businessmen Elijah Bond and Charles Kennard had the idea to patent a planchette sold with a board on which the alphabet was printed. The patentees filed on May 28, 1890 for patent protection and thus had invented the first Ouija board. Issue date on the patent was February 10, 1891. They received U.S. Patent 446,054. Bond was an attorney and was an inventor of other objects in addition to this device.

An employee of Kennard, William Fuld took over the talking board production and in 1901, he started production of his own boards under the name *Ouija*. Kennard claimed he learned the name *Ouija* from using the board and that it was an ancient Egyptian word meaning *good luck*.

When Fuld took over production of the boards, he popularized the more widely accepted etymology that the name came from a combination of the French and German words for *yes*. The Fuld name would become synonymous with the *Ouija* board, as Fuld reinvented its history, claiming that he himself had invented it.

The strange talk about the boards from Fuld's competitors flooded the market and all these boards enjoyed a heyday from the 1920s through the 1960s. Fuld sued many companies over the *Ouija* name and concept right up until his death in 1927. In 1966, Fuld's estate sold the entire business to Parker Brothers, who continues to hold all trademarks and patents. About 10 brands of talking boards are sold today under various names.

I have an Ouija board. I even used them in my investigations of haunted houses.

I keep it outside in my storage unit and not in my house, because you just never know. If Ouija boards do bump in the night, they can do all the bumping they want to outside and not in my home.