

WEIRD CAROLINAS

Published by Sterling Publishing Co., Inc.
387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016

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Distributed in Canada by Sterling Publishing
c/o Canadian Manda Group, 165 Dufferin Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6K 3H6
Distributed in Great Britain by Chrysalis Books Group PLC
The Chrysalis Building, Bramley Road, London W10 6SP, England
Distributed in Australia by Capricorn Link (Australia) Pty. Ltd.
P. O. Box 704, Windsor, NSW 2756, Australia

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Sterling ISBN 13: 978-1-4027-3939-2
Sterling ISBN 10: 1-4027-3939-7

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Weird Carolinas is intended as entertainment
to present a historical record of local legends,
folklore, and sites throughout the Carolinas. Many
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the sites described in *Weird Carolinas* are located on
private property and such sites should not be visited,
or you may face prosecution for trespassing.

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Martin eventually got four life sentences. After serving a year for a crime he didn't commit, Roger Dedmond was released. Lee Roy Martin, both good and bad, was murdered in prison by a fellow inmate three years later.

Major Perry, the Sleeping Preacher

Major Perry was born into slavery in Fairfield County, SC, an uneducated farmhand unable to read or write. After the Civil War, he labored in South Carolina as a free man, making a living as best he could. Then in 1880, when he was in his late forties, Perry came down with a fever that put him in a coma for several days. When he awakened, he found that he had acquired a strange gift, but one that he apparently never got to experience firsthand himself.

On the night of June 16, 1880, a few days after recovering from his illness, Perry lay down, and started to talk in his sleep. The voice that came out of his mouth was nothing like his regular speaking voice. When awake, he spoke like the illiterate fieldworker he was; but in his sleep, he spoke perfect King James English, in full, measured sentences. And the words he spoke were beautifully formed sermons, exhorting his unseen audience to fear and praise the Lord. When he reawakened, Perry's normal voice returned and he had no recollection of the sermon.

As this continued to happen night after night, word of the "miracle" soon spread, and people began attending evenings at the Perry house. Soon the Perrys moved to Batesburg in Saluda County, where they bought a larger

property that could accommodate the growing audiences that came to witness Major Perry's "mystery sleep sessions."

Visitors would be offered iced tea or water in the parlor while they waited for Preacher Perry to prepare for bed. Once his wife had given the signal, they'd troop into his bedroom and sit in chairs arranged around the walls. The curtains surrounding the canopied bed would then be pulled back, and they'd get to observe Major Perry lying flat on his back, delivering a sermon with his eyes closed. Amazed, they were only too glad to drop a few coins into the bowl in the hall on their way out.

In the early 1900s, Perry started taking his bedtime preaching on the road, giving sleep-trance sermons throughout Georgia and both Carolinas. As part of the "performance," witnesses were invited to test Perry's trance state by seeing if they could awaken him while he was sermonizing. Some took this to extremes by holding lighted matches against his skin or pinching him until bruises appeared, but nothing could awaken him until he'd reached the end of his lesson. Every night of the year from June 1880 until his death on November 8, 1925, he preached, and never repeated a sermon. He was still preaching on his deathbed, until the moment he finally passed away.

—Thanks to Gloria Caldwell



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