

Madame Groong's Annual Séance

April 2





The Landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock,

by Peter Frederick Rothermel (1854).

The reverence (or disdain) for Madame Groong is clearly captured as Master Jones rapidly helps her to land. Courtesy of the Smoo Museum and Dog Kennel, Popponesset, Massachusetts.

April 2 is Madame Groong's Annual Séance. It is a traditional, American holiday that celebrates not only an important American figure, but also celebrates a significant event in early, American history. It is a holiday that traces its roots back to the arrival of the Mayflower to Cape Cod, Massachusetts in 1620.

A HISTORY

Patience Isadora Groong served both as soothsayer and navigator for the Mayflower – an unusual position for a woman to hold in the predominately male, puritanical world of the 17th Century. According to ship's log, Christopher Jones, the master of the Mayflower, relied quite consistently upon Patience Groong (whom he took to calling Madame Groong) for her navigational services.

In one entry, he wrote:

29 October. Day 44. Winds calm and easterly. Sea showing small waves and smooth; little white-cap observed. Upon the hour, Madame Groong prognosticated and charted our course. We head westerly with great anticipation.

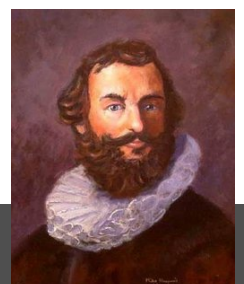
Madame Groong, being of dubious piousness and questionable direction, was apparently more skilled in the foot rubs she gave

the good master than in her ability to navigate.

It is a well-know historical fact that, because of Madame Groong's navigational skills, the Mayflower traveled south-by-southwest and on the first of November, they came upon the island string known to mariners as the *Terras Erradas*.

Making a U-turn, the Mayflower finally anchored at Cape Cod, Massachusetts on eleventh of November 1620, seven days behind schedule.

To acknowledge her nautical accomplishments, Master Jones set sail back for England on April 5, 1621, without Madame Groong.



Portrait of Master Christopher Jones (1618). Courtesy of the Smoo Museum and Dog Kennel, Popponesset, Massachusetts.



Lady with a Fan, by Diego Velazquez (1640).

Patience Isadora Groong personally commissioned this portrait. This work illustrates her high fashion sense and taste. One story has it that Patience Groong caused quite the scandal by wearing a cotton gabardine cloak to church. Most parishioners accustomed to simple burlap bags for outer covering were said to be in shock and dismay.

Courtesy of the Smoo Museum and Dog Kennel, Popponeset, Massachusetts.



Embarkation of the Pilgrims, by Robert Walter Weir (1837). Madame Groong is seen on the left in a fetching gown of velvet, satin, egret feathers, and weasel fur, designed by La Maison de Tenue Inappropriée, Paris France. Courtesy of the Smoo Museum and Dog Kennel, Popponeset, Massachusetts.

PLYMOUTH COLONY

Where Madame Groong failed at seamanship, she excelled at foretelling the future of the Plymouth Colony. This was immediately evident upon the establishment of the colony. Winters in Massachusetts are merciless and treacherous, and November gales are particularly relentless.

The colonists were ill prepared for the cold and snow, and they quickly found themselves running low on food.

On November 28, Madame Groong held her first séance, commonly known as The First Séance, whereby she contacted her spirit guide, Smoo, and asked for his guidance on finding food.

Upon the end of the night, Madame Groong, with the help of Smoo, foresaw a cache of food located outside of the compound and to the left of the big, prickly bush. Immediately, a search party was sent forth, the food was found, and there was much rejoicing.

It must be stated that not all of the colonists found Madame Groong's gifts a benefit to the colony. The Right Reverend Phineas Carmichael wrote in his private journal:

Verily, I find the Madam's attentions to foot rubbing peevish and distracting. And, I knoweth the Smoo is bots on't.

While "bots on't" literally translates to "horse worm," it should be of historical interest to know that today's popular American phrase, "The Smoo's botson," meaning something that is highly clever or unexpected i.e.: "His fresh and wicked dance moves are the Smoo's botson," comes from a misinterpretation of Reverend Carmichael's quote.

Quickly, the demand for Madame Groong's séance services grew, far beyond her foot-rubbing services, and in time, she became the sole source for finding lost items, much to the irritation of the Right Reverend Carmichael, who had appointed himself as the primary providing source to his community flock.

We, one by one/ Come to you/ The light of our flame/ From orange to blue. We say the words/ And speak them true. / Come forth now / Oh, mysterious Smoo.

—Eve of Madame Groong's Annual Séance chant.

A DEFINING MOMENT

The reason we celebrate Madame Groong's Annual Séance occurred early in the morning on April 2, 1622. For reasons never explained, and strangely redacted from his private journal, the Right Reverend Carmichael employed Madame Groong to perform a séance. We know what transpired, in part, due to Abigail Butler, a servant to Madame Groong. In her diary, Abigail Butler writes:

My mistress sate [sic] upon her quilted ottoman and lit the taper sitting upon her table. The Reverend sate [sic] opposite. Before sitting, Reverend put in my charge a glorious ham of some worth. (It must be noted that no explanation is giving as to why the Right Reverend Carmichael had the colony's last ham in his possession). I placed the ham upon the board and removed myself from the room.

It is unfortunate that Abigail Butler was not present for the entire séance; however, the result of the séance was written down in her diary:

I heard a scream from the Reverend and ran into the room. I saw him gesticulating vigorously and shouting. Upon seeing me, he admonished, "Hast thou seen the ham?" I replied, "For sooth, twas right here." Still in a trance, my mistress rose from her sitting and strode outside toward the community square. The Reverend and I followed. He continued to shout, "Hast thou seen the ham?" for which I replied, often, "For sooth, twas right here." In the community square, the good people gathered, attracted to the Reverend's consternation. At once, my mistress stepped upon the Stone of Forbearance, lifted her arms to the sky, and spake, "On the feast, thy bounty will double." Upon my soul, my mistress then died.

As with most historical events involving miracles, what occurred was, initially, misunderstood. Upon hearing that the community's last ham had disappeared and that Madame Groong was, allegedly, the cause of the disappearance, the colonist reacted as would be expected, by dismembering her body with axe and scythe, by burning the body parts with oil and pitch, and by scattering the ashes into the Charles River.

Once their concerns for the ham were temporarily alleviated, the colonist continued with their daily, meager existence.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE HAM

The next month was an ordeal for the colony. Being more pious than agricultural, the colony faced, again, what seemed to be

inevitable starvation. Then, on May 6, 1622, the miracle occurred. Again, we know the account from Abigail Butler's diary:

Upon this day, at mid-morning, a miraculous thing happened. I would have doubted had I not seen with mine own eyes. Upon the Stone of Forbearance, there appeared the missing ham. And more, aside the first ham sate [sic] another ham of the same worth. The Lord be praised, my mistress was true!

Once the Right Reverend Carmichael verified the first ham to be the missing ham, and the second ham to being identical in every way to the first, the colonists commenced to feast upon both hams that night, thus establishing May 6 as The Feast of Smoo's Groong.



This desiccated ham is believed by some to be from one of the original hams of Plymouth Colony. Others believe that it's just a disgusting piece of pork that someone buried many years ago. Courtesy of the Smoo Museum and Dog Kennel, Popponesset, Massachusetts.

HOW MADAME GROONG'S ANNUAL SÉANCE IS CELEBRATED

The time signifying the beginning of Madame Groong's Annual Séance is traditionally 9:15 p.m. on April 1. This time is also known as the Eve of Madame Groong's Annual Séance. This time dates back to 1839 when the International Council of Chronological Adjustments met in Zurich, Switzerland to establish the official beginnings and endings of world holidays. As a side note of interest, there is still some contention amongst academic circles as to the precise starting time for Quinge Day.

The celebration of Madame Groong's Annual Séance always begins at night with the somber observance of the memory of Madame Groong.

The ceremony begins with the family gathered around a small table. Once gathered, the second-oldest child is charged with lighting the séance candle. If a family has only one child, then that family may hire a surrogate second-oldest child to fulfill

"I really don't mind, anymore, being recognized as a living descendant of Madame Groong. While the discussion of the Groong lineage here in the UK is still a forbidden subject, I do enjoy watching your televised showings of the Pelting of the Reverends that you chaps have over in the States. If you ask me, Carmichael got what he deserved, rummy bastard!" -- Sir Benetton Dale Reginald Groong, very distant, and very British descendant of Patience Isadora Groong.

the lighting duties. Also, with the advent of electricity and LED technology, the séance candle may be an electric one. Whether by flame or electricity, the lighting ceremony has remained, more or less, the same for hundreds of years.

As the second-oldest child lights the candle, the family recites these words:

*We, one by one,
Come to you.
The light of our flame
From orange to blue.*

*We say the words
And speak them true.
Come forth now
Oh, mysterious Smoo.*

It has been claimed that these words are a variation of the words Madame Groong recited to open her séance; however, this claim has never been substantiated.

Once the candle is lit and the words are recited, the tradition is for the mother of the family to bring to the table the offering plate. On the plate is an effigy of Madame Groong made from sausage casings stuffed with pork, spiced breading, and raspberries that mother would have either made that morning or would have purchased at one of the special séance shops that open for business during this holiday time.

As mother holds the plate, all other members of the family grab a part of the effigy, the children gabbing the arms and legs with the head being reserved for the head of the household.

In unison, all recite these words, "On the feast, thy bounty will double," then, all together, rip and tear apart the sausage effigy and eat the respective parts. Once finished, with glee and happiness, the mother will shout, "Hast thou seen the ham?" The proper response, usually said with great joy and laughter, is, "For sooth, twas right here!"

This ceremony, on average, lasts no longer than an hour, although more orthodox observers have been know to take over three hours to perform the ceremony. Regardless of observance, The Eve of Madame Groong's Annual Séance is the only solemn part of the holiday.



[Above] The original séance candleholder used by Patience Isadora Groong (Madame Groong).

[Below] A sample from Abigail Butler's diary.

Both Courtesy of the Smoo Museum and Dog Kennel, Popponeset, Massachusetts.





“Verily, I find the Madame’s attentions to foot rubbing peevish and distracting. And, I knoweth the Smoo is bots on’t.”

The Right Reverend Phineas Carmichael, standing beside a table, holding a book (1613). Courtesy of the Smoo Museum and Dog Kennel, Popponeset, Massachusetts.

*“Hast thou seen the Spam?
For sooth, twas right here.”*



THE DAY OF MADAME GROONG’S ANNUAL SÉANCE

On April 2, proper, Madame Groong’s Annual Séance takes on a more festive atmosphere and celebration, and is broken down to three events during the day.

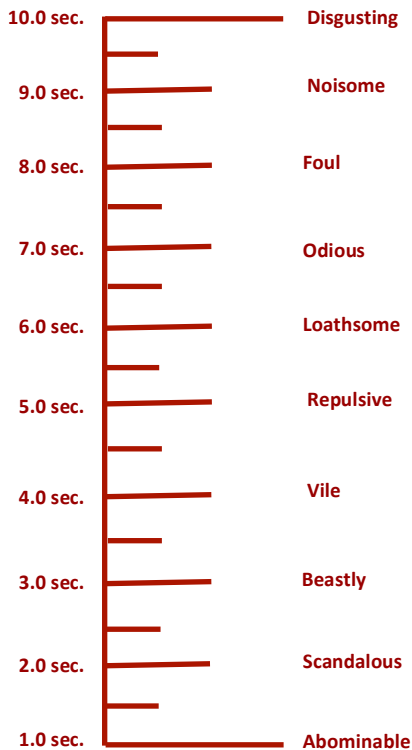
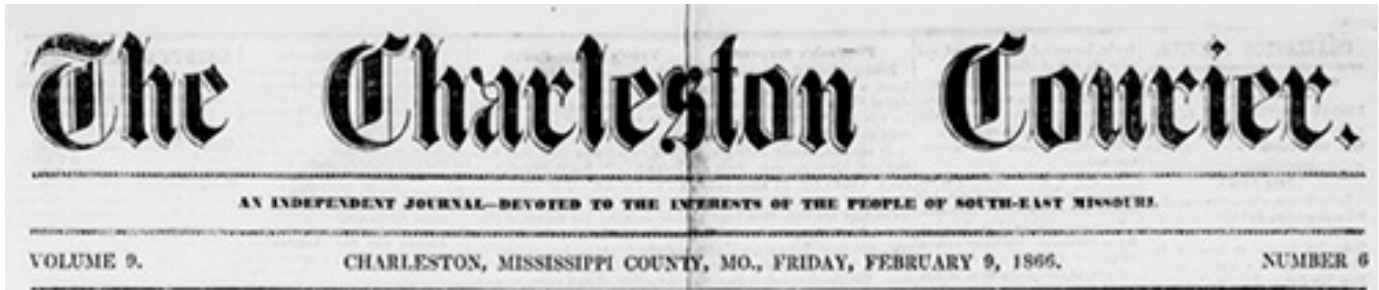
Prior to the beginning of the day, when children wake up, they can expect to find Smoo bags sitting outside their bedroom doors filled with chocolate-covered slices of ham or bacon and rock candy in the shape of the Stone of Forbearance. And, as a special surprise, deep down at the bottom of the bag, lucky children may find a gold or silver-plated pair of toenail clippers.

For the morning meal, families sit down to a breakfast of Spam, including Spam loaf, maple Spam croquettes, and tall glasses of chilled buttermilk.

It is a curiosity to note that before 1973, breakfast consisted of whatever families prepared on hand. However, in the spring of 1973, the Hormel Company – makers of Spam – created an ad campaign that single-handedly changed how people breakfasted for Madame Groong’s Annual Séance. Nostalgically, many adults still fondly remember the Spam commercial featuring Leonard “Bucky” Sinclair (famous child star of the television series *The Left Hand of Mr. Snurdly*) sitting in the dining room in front of an empty plate. From the kitchen, “mom” can be heard asking, “Hast thou seen the Spam?” And, winking at the camera, Bucky replies with a grin, “For sooth, twas right here.”



Studio photo: Bucky Sinclair (1973) Courtesy of Hanson Studios, Burbank, CA



Developed by Dr. Bernard Penobscott in 1953 at the College of the Americas in Zimbabwe, the Scale of Taste Grade Ickiness level is determined by the amount of time professional taste testers are able to hold a substance in their mouths without regurgitating, blanching, or passing out.



WWII. Underwood Deviled Ham was used to defeat the German Nazi régime, gastro intestinally. Unfortunately, the opposite occurred.

THE FESTIVAL

Nationwide, many cities have developed séance festivals with quite spectacular themes. For example, in Cleveland, Ohio, they have the Row of Madames. Along Carmichael Street, Cleveland boasts the longest, continuous row of séance booths in the United States. Several years ago, there was a petition to have the name, Row of Madames, changed to something less controversial; however, that measure did not pass in the state legislature.

As another example, in Tombstone, Arizona, they have the hourly gunfight between Madame Groong and the Right Reverend Carmichael.

Whatever the flair and production cities create for their celebrations, families can look forward to a day of séance fun, of fried ham hocks on a stick, and frolicking games like Find the Ham.

All of this leading up to the first big event of the day, The Pelting of the Reverends.

History shows that this ritual first originated in Charleston, Missouri, in 1803. While unsubstantiated, the accepted story is that Pastor Eugene Carmichael, a direct descendant to the Right Reverend Carmichael, was walking down the street one evening on April 2, when several neighborhood boys threw leftovers from their morning breakfast at him, shouting, "Here's the ham, Reverend!" There was a brief write-up of this event in the Charleston Courier, penned by Robert C. Duncan:

"...and had this happened on any other evening, why those ragamuffins would surely have been reprimanded to the fullest extent of the law. As such, considering the day, April 2 being Madame Groong's Annual Séance, who could possibly see that any harm was meant? In fact, it all seemed to be in rather good fun and humor."

Pastor Eugene Carmichael was not interviewed.

Traditionally, as the Pelting of the Reverends is now practiced, all of the fathers of families gather to whatever a town or city would consider its center and they put on clerical collars. These collars, usually waterproof and with Velcro attachments, are meant to represent the Right Reverend Carmichael and can be purchased at any séance store.

While the fathers are preparing for their roles, all other family members gather around, circling the fathers. In a large town, this gathering can become quite enormous, spanning several blocks.

In the hands of everyone (who is not a father) are open cans of Underwood Deviled Ham. Developed in 1868 by the William Underwood Company, this canned meat spread has been scientifically proven to be the most repulsive of sandwich spreads.



Rare, color image of Adolph Hitler eating Deviled Ham sandwiches with his personal physician Prof. Theodor Morell and the wife of Gauleiter Albert Forster at the Bergof, Hitler's private residence in Berchtesgaden, Bavaria.

Using the Penobscott Scale of Taste Grade Ickiness, Deviled Ham scored a rating of 1.89, three points higher than Vegemite (4.32) and five points higher than the phlegm from a hyperactive, asthmatic four-year-old with bronchitis (7.62).

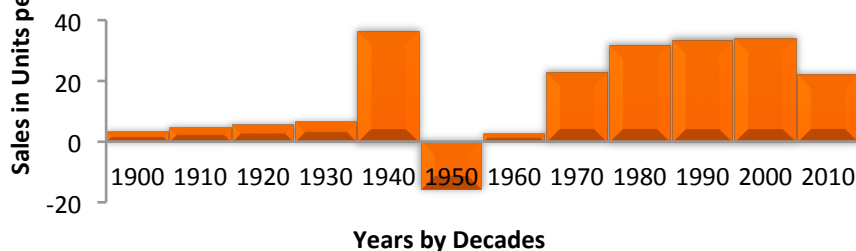
At the appointed time, all the fathers duck and hide their faces as the rest of the crowd pelt them with the Deviled Ham spread. It as been a long-standing tradition that, once a father is covered in Deviled Ham sandwich spread, he is allowed to throw the spread back at the crowd. It is great fun for fathers to try and pelt their own family.

Obviously, once the pelting is over, everyone goes home to clean up and get ready for the final activity of Madame Groong's Annual Séance: the Cavalcade of Old Ladies.

At its most basic, the Cavalcade of Old Ladies is where the grandmothers of the community are brought to the center of the town, given a soothing and relaxing liquid of specific vintage, and then the children rub their feet. This is often great fun for children because they now get to use their new toenail clippers they received earlier in the day.

Obviously, since this activity is the most revered and anticipated of the day, certain accommodations must be made. If it is prohibitive to bring old ladies to the community center, families will often take their children to nearby nursing homes who will extend their visiting hours for this very special day.

Deviled Ham Purchases over the Past 110 Years



This graph represents the influence Madame Groong's Annual Séance (April 2) had on the sale of Underwood Deviled Ham for the past 110 years. One special occurrence is noted: During World War II, the United States Government conducted a secret operation to defeat the Germans, known as Operation Old Spice. Unfortunately, the U.S. Government did not take into account Adolph Hitler's fanatical adoration of deviled ham. He had confiscated all shipments of deviled ham for himself and the Reichsmarch, thereby extending the war a further seven months.

Celebration of The Cavalcade of Old Ladies in Muncie, Indiana.

In this photo, Mrs. Eunice Abernathy (yellow hat) is celebrating her 102 birthday, and is awaiting her toenails to be cut by gleeful children.



"...the hell you say, Bob! I adore the Smoo. Why, every April, Pat, the kids and I settle down to watch A Delicate Sound of Smoo. We just love it! I don't know what the hell a Smoo is, but I just can't sit here and listen to you say incorrigible things about him."

--Excerpt from a conversation between President Richard M. Nixon and Robert S. McNamara (The Nixon Tapes).

FEAST OF SMOO'S GROONG

Although it occurs more than a month after the initial celebration, May 6 is the natural conclusion to Madame Groong's Annual Séance. It is a simple observance, but an important one because it celebrates the miracle resurrection of the ham.

In the evening, when all the family is together, they sit down to a meal of ham, little smoke sausages in Séance Sauce (a mixture of mustard, cumin, alum, and white wine), small, unleavened cakes called Reverend's Knees because of their crescent shape, and for dessert, minced ham sweetened with maple syrup and pressed into the shape of little Smoos.

It is sad to note that one custom in celebrating the Feast of Smoo's Groong is all but lost for today's families.

In 1802, Lewis Snarggl published his *Smoo Tales*, to great popularity. Soon after, the telling of his stories became a regular custom with families across the nation, signifying the end of the evening and of the Feast of Smoo Groong. It is hard to explain why the telling of Smoo Tales went out of fashion. Some scholars contend it was the advent of television with, especially, the Sid and Marty Krofft animated specials: *A Delicate Sound of Smoo* and

Here Comes Smoo, Again. Others argue that the *Smoo Tales*, similar to the tales told by the Brothers Grimm, were really veiled stories about the political corruption and debauchery that ran rife throughout the American government and, therefore, became less interesting as tastes changed. Alas, the true cause for the change will remain obscure.



[Above] Studio Image. Still from the children's classic: *Here Comes Smoo, Again*. Courtesy of SMK Studios, Studio City, CA (1975).

Archeologists have confirmed this location, now called Ansbehry Park, as being the original location of the Plymouth Colony's community square. The Stone of Forbearance can be seen to the left.

“The American culture, indeed, celebrates a great many holidays, and it can be said that not all holidays are celebrated with equal importance or adherence. However, there are a few holidays that hold special significance in America’s heart because of what they represent to the American public and because of their connections to other holidays. So, it is clearly understandable why April 2, Madame Groong’s Annual Séance, is so greatly revered in the American psyche.”

-- Dr. Martin Spleenacker, The Encyclopedia of World Holidays and Their Irrelevancies.

HOLIDAY SIMILARTIES



Madame Groong’s Annual Séance shares a similarity with Easter on two, rather obvious, levels. First, there is the celebration of the resurrection of the ham, the most solemn and pivotal part of the holiday. Then, there is the similarity between Easter baskets and Smoo bags, both creating a light-hearted and memorable addition to both holidays.



While the holiday of El Chupacabra Round-Up and Grooming Day is, more often, celebrated in the Southwest region of the United States, the similarities of rounding up the old ladies and of the deadly Chupacabra, and of allowing children to perform the grooming cannot be denied. It should be noted, however, that on Madame Groong’s Annual Séance, much less emergency medical attention and fewer insurance waivers are needed.



No holiday, other than Thanksgiving, does so much in bringing the family together than Madame’s Groong’s Annual Séance. During time of war, Americans often feel the sting of absence as they send their young sons and daughters off to fight and protect the American way of life. The holidays of April 2 (Madame Groong’s Annual Séance) and May 6 (The Feast of Smoo’s Groong) serve as strong connections to family, even when some family members cannot be with loved ones.

To maintain that sense of family togetherness, especially during war, families will often send care packages, called Smoo Packs, to their soldiers over seas. These packs will contain personal items and sundries, as well as a small sausage effigy and a pair of toe nail clippers, so even in foreign lands, American service people can feel that warm sense of home.



In this photo, Lt. Geoffrey Anderson (standing; left) of Billings, Montana, shares his Feast of Smoo’s Groong meal with British soldiers during the Battle of the Lys (1918).

April 2 & May 6

