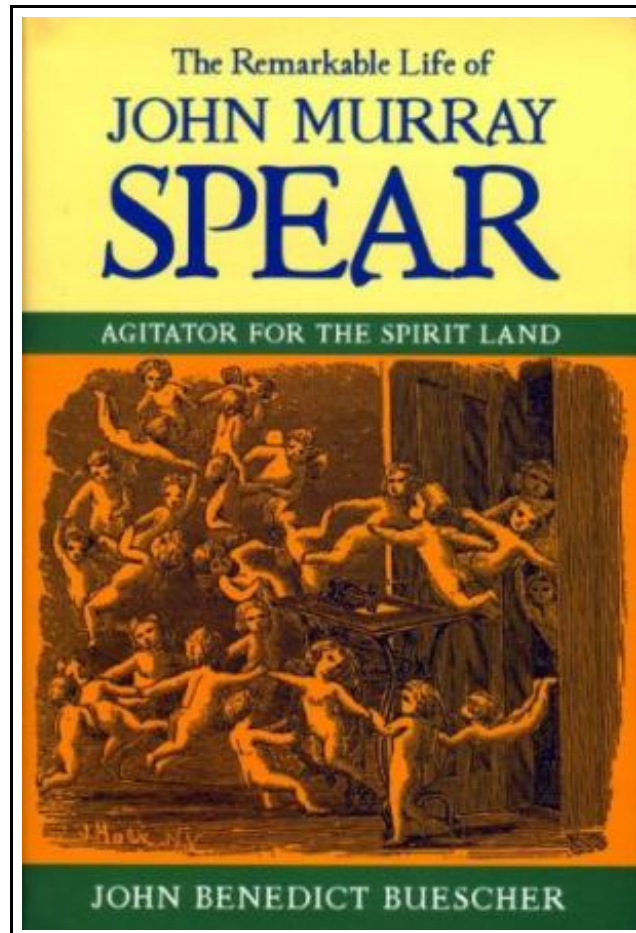


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University of Notre Dame Press, United States, 2006. Hardback. Condition: New. Language: English . Brand New Book. John Murray Spear was one of nineteenth-century America s most interesting characters. A leading social agitator against slavery and capital punishment, Spear also became the nation s most flamboyant spiritualist, inventor of spirit machines, and advocate of free love. In his captivating biography, John Buescher brings to life Spear s superlatively odd story. Born in 1804, John Murray Spear began his career as a Universalist minister. Later he was a colleague of William Lloyd Garrison and Theodore Parker in the abolitionist movement and worked as an activist among the New England reformers and Transcendentalists such as Bronson Alcott, Lydia Maria Child, and Dorothea Dix. In mid-life, Spear turned to the new revelation of spiritualism and came under the thrall of what he believed were spirit messages. Spear s spirits dictated that he and a small group of associates embark on plans for a perpetual motion machine, an electric ship propelled by psychic batteries, a vehicle that would levitate in the air, and a sewing machine that would work with no hands. As Buescher documents, Spear s spirit-guided efforts to harness technology to human liberation - sexual and otherwise - were far stranger than anyone outside his closest associates imagined, and were aimed at the eventual manufacturing of human beings and the improvement of the race. In the last years of his life, retired by the spirits and regarded by fellow Gilded Age progressives as a visitor from another age, if not another planet, Spear helped organize support for anarchist, socialist, peace, and labor causes. Spear s life, an odd mixture of comic absurdity and serious foreshadowing of the future, provides us with a unique perspective on nineteenth-century American religious and social life.



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