



FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

# FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

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Dorothy Rave Shaw and John Bennett Shaw

## *Sherlock Holmes and John Bennett Shaw: The Detective and The Collector*

*The dedication of the John Bennett Shaw Library of Sherlock Holmes*

**J**ohn Bennett Shaw (1914-1994) was one of the great book collectors of our time. His marvelous library of Sherlockiana, which is by far the greatest in the world, was transferred from his home in Santa Fe, in more than 300 large boxes, to the University of Minnesota Library nearly a year before his death on October 2, 1994.

As a young man in Tulsa, his hometown, Shaw began collecting certain

notable authors, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Eventually, he focused all his energy on the world's first and greatest consulting detective, and he vigorously collected Sherlockiana from around the world. It is amazing to behold his achievement, which is now housed in Wilson Library on the West Bank of the University of Minnesota campus. Perhaps it was the impossible challenge of trying to collect everything about Sherlock

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Holmes—the single most important new myth created in the industrial/Post-industrial epoch—as much as it was for his love of the stories.

The great Shaw Library did not come to Minnesota by chance. Prior developments in the University Library brought it here. In 1948 Dean Theodore Blegen and Dean E. W. McDiarmid formed The Norwegian Explorers, a scion society of The Baker Street Irregulars, the national organization. This Minnesota group, whose membership today numbers more than 200, has been essential for the development of a special collection on Sherlock Holmes in the University Library.

In 1974 the Library purchased a small but distinguished collection of James Iraldi. This acquisition was made possible by a grant of \$5,000 from

Walter Trenerry, head of The McKnight Foundation, and author of the classic *Murder in Minnesota* (1962).

In 1978 the remarkable collection of

Philip Hench was given to the University. Hench was a nobelist at the Mayo Clinic and also a Norwegian Explorer. The collection consists of about 1,800 books and 1,500 periodicals, as well as some unique material of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, William Gillette, the famous portrayer of Holmes on

stage, and Frederic Dorr Steel, the



Magazine cover (1904) illustrated by Frederic Dorr Steele.



Illustration by Sidney Paget in *The Strand Magazine* (1892).

preeminent American illustrator of the adventures. The Hench Collection was the largest of its kind in an American research library.

In 1983 an agreement was made

with Mr. Shaw for the University of Minnesota Library to acquire his library at some future, unspecified time. When word got around that the Shaw Library would be coming to Minnesota, other opportunities arose. In 1986 the Frederic Dorr Steel Memorial Collection was

given to the University by his heirs. In 1987 Edith Meiser donated her scripts and broadcast recordings. She was the actress and writer who first adapted the adventures for radio, beginning in 1930. Many institutions sought her collections, but she wished to have her treasured material with the Shaw Library.

In 1988 the library and papers of Vincent Starret were purchased with the help of the John E. Andrus III Charitable Trust. Starret was a prolific author, a notable bibliophile, and the celebrated Sherlockian who wrote the famous sonnet "221B" and *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1933), the first and best biography of the master detective. In 1992 the working library and papers of Howard Haycraft came to the Library by bequest. Haycraft wrote the classic *Murder for Pleasure* (1941), the first comprehensive history of the detective story. He also received the University's Outstanding Achievement Award in 1954. Several notable collections of Sherlockiana have been given recently, others are to be willed, and several scion societies have donated their archives.

Austin McLean,  
Curator

Rare Books and Special Collections Library



John Bennett Shaw in his library in Santa Fe reading to a young neighbor

# Sherlock Holmes and John Bennett Shaw: The Detective and The Collector

**T**he purpose of this event is to honor the late John Bennett Shaw (1913-1994)—the man and his incomparable achievement—and to celebrate the establishment of his personal library of Sherlock Holmes as a major source for research at the University of Minnesota.

Most of the world is acquainted with Sherlock Holmes. His amazing popularity is evidenced by his appearance in fifty-two foreign languages, publications about him by hundreds of societies around the world, and innumerable adaptations of the stories for the media, to cite only a few sections of the immense Shaw Library.

Most Sherlockians were acquainted with John Bennett Shaw, and a great number were his friends. He was a tireless advocate for the study of Sherlock Holmes. Through his writings, lectures, and seminars, he demonstrated his espousal of the cause for a great many years, and was beloved for his scholarship, and his singular wit and humor.

A steady stream of admirers visited his home in Santa Fe, where he gladly received them to show and discuss the remarkable holdings in his library. He built a monumental library, but he did not need or want a monument. He could have sold his library. It could have been dispersed around the world, in lots of large and small, through numerous auctions in the years ahead, but he wanted people to be able to use it for research. About a year before his death, he commenced the great task of getting his library packed and shipped to Minnesota, where it is preserved and accessible to all who need to use it.

This memorial conference consists of two parts: Aspects of the Victorian World includes late twentieth century examinations and reassessments of

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## The Victorian World and the Master Detective A Memorial Conference

October 13-15, 1995

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Victorian themes which illuminate certain cultural concerns of today. Aspects of the Sherlockian World includes Victorian studies as well as others, such as Holmes in the media, which bring his activities up to the present. This event is offered for the university community, for the general public, and for Sherlockians here and abroad. Among the expected consequences for conferees, one anticipated result can be found in the words of the eminent Peter E. Blau: "I like to divide the world into two groups: Those who have read the Sherlock Holmes stories, and those who will."