

# THE SPIRITS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES



## Through The Eyes of an Enthusiast - The Allen Mackler Collection

Wilson Library  
T. R. Anderson Gallery

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The Spirits of Sherlock Holmes:  
Through the Eyes of an Enthusiast —  
The Allen Mackler Collection

I met Allen Mackler for the first time in January 1998. I was about to make a public presentation, a part of the interview process for the position I eventually obtained- Curator of Special Collections & Rare Books at the University of Minnesota. Allen was seated in the front row. He was there because of his love of nineteenth century literature and his enthusiasm for Sherlock Holmes. The presentation was a bit unnerving, in part because it was the middle of the afternoon, I had just returned from the Middle East (still suffering from jet lag), and because Allen fell asleep during my talk. (I don't think he would mind me telling the story.) It was, I found out, part of his charm. From that time onwards our paths crossed, often at Holmesian gatherings, or else during his wanderings through the library. Occasionally, he

sought my advice on a specific book repair or to point out a particular volume (or to talk about the best place to find a hamburger). More than once we travelled to New York together, to attend the annual gathering of the Baker Street Irregulars. There was always something interesting that drew Allen's attention (and which drew our attention to Allen).



Photo: Julie McKuras

Allen's interests in Sherlock Holmes and Victorian literature are apparent in this exhibit. We are delighted to share a bit of his life through the contents of these cases and in the replica of the sitting room from that most famous London address, 221B Baker Street, found in the adjacent room. A separate booklet describes the sitting room and its fascination with Sherlockians.

We lost Allen five years ago, on December 29, 2005. His presence lives on through his collection, the sitting room, and his generous spirit. It also lives on through his writings and past reports of his activities within the Holmesian world.

The first hint of Allen that I find in the literature is from a 1975 article that appeared in *Baker Street Miscellanea (BSM)*, “Carina: An Identification.” In this piece we are pointed to another interest of Allen’s – classical music. As his obituary noted, “his first interest was in classical music. Recognizing that his talent at the piano wouldn’t be adequate to achieve the goal he envisioned, he became the host of programs at Public Broadcasting Station WETA in Washington, DC focusing on the broadcast of rare recordings of classical music.” Allen’s article on Carina begins:

It will be recalled in the account Watson recorded under the title of *The Adventure of the Retired Colourman* - dated summer, 1898 - that Sherlock Holmes invites the good doctor to hear Carina sing at Albert Hall. This reference has always troubled me because no mention of a singer with that name is made in *Grove’s Dictionary* or any other musical reference work which I have consulted.

Allen goes on to solve the mystery and ends his piece with a poetic salute to musicians in the Sherlockian Canon.

The next time we see Allen, again on the pages of the *BSM*, is in a review of Rosenblatt and Sonnenschmidt’s book *Dining with Sherlock Holmes: A Baker Street Cookbook*. Here is a different pointer to another of Allen’s abiding interests: good food. He wrote:

...when Holmes states that Mrs. Hudson’s idea of breakfast is as good as a Scotchwoman’s, he implies that not only will it be hearty, but that it will be sensible and maybe even utilitarian as well. All of this and much more about the gastronomic Holmes and about cooking and dining in

Victorian Britain is explicated in the delightful, authoritative, and above all hunger-provoking commentary which appears before each group of recipes.

Allen, an avid member of many societies associated with Holmes, appeared in a *Baker Street Journal (BSJ)* report on the activities of The Red Circle of Washington D.C., which revealed yet another indication of his interests and depth of knowledge. This time it involved a quiz on “Canonical Courtship and Marriage.” Allen was the winner. (Francine Morris and Wayne Swift, soon to be married, tied for second place.)

A later article from 1981 entitled “Collecting the Uncollectible” gives us a glimpse into the world of the collector, from Allen’s perspective. In this case the items to be collected were phonograph records.

The impecunious collector . . . is always at the mercy of the factor of price, no matter what his field of interest. But in almost every field, not even a ready supply of cash will necessarily flush out a desired item, especially if it happens to be one never intended to serve as a collectible and is therefore not generally available to the public at large. Take for example the area of record collecting, in which I indulge myself in a small way. Here the affluent Sherlockian can with relative ease accumulate just about everything ever released commercially, and even perhaps lay his hands on what are referred to in the trade as “bootleg” items. But it requires considerable perseverance and no small amount of good fortune, rather than a prodigious bank account, to add to one’s holdings certain legitimate recordings of more than marginal interest not likely to appear on the market under any circumstances, let alone for the delectation of avid collectors.

For Allen, it was his good fortune “to acquire for my own collection a full run of the series of Sherlock Holmes radio broadcasts

featuring Carleton Hobbs as Holmes and Norman Shelley as Watson.”

A year later Allen was writing more about food in another article for *BSM* entitled “Knowledge of Gastronomy - Immense,” a report on the Third Quinquennial Sherlock Holmes Alimentary Festival held at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. His account covered the full weekend, complete with side trips to local bookstores and museums, and a running commentary on the various foods encountered (and enjoyed) along the way. “The weekend was something I would not have missed for worlds, for it was definitely *not* one of those unwelcome social summonses which call upon a man either to be bored or to lie. And unlike the experience of the hapless John Scott Eccles, all our meals, indeed, were well prepared and well served.”



Allen’s library at his home in Osseo

Allen’s involvement with various Sherlockian societies continued. In early April 1984 Allen attended “the first public meeting of the

Clients of Sherlock Holmes” held at the Faculty Club of the University of Pennsylvania. Here Allen’s love of classical music came to the fore. The event, reported in the *BSJ*, noted that “[a]fter dinner, Allan Mackler presented a comprehensive talk on music in the Canon, and played extremely rare recordings of Sarasate, Norman-Neruda, Paganini, and others, just as Holmes had heard them.” In early December 1985 Allen was again with the Red Circle of Washington, displaying both his culinary interests and knowledge of the Canon. “‘We still have the feathers, legs, crop, and so on,’ was the call to table for The Red Circle’s ‘Blue Carbuncle Dinner’ at the Piccadilly Restaurant . . . The menu, carefully selected by Allen Mackler, featured mock turtle soup, shrimp in cream with lettuce, roast goose, and plum pudding with brandy sauce . . . Sheldon Wesson’s ‘Sherlockian IQ Test’ produced four winners: Allen Mackler, Marina Stajic, Melissa Ennis, and Jim Smith.” It was one of many quizzes won by Allen.

Allen continued writing and reviewing. *Baker Street Miscellanea* seemed a favorite venue for his pen. In 1986 he appraised Robert Goldsborough’s *Murder in E Minor* and John Lescroart’s *Son of Holmes*. “In the case of the two volumes under discussion, we can *almost* say, as Sherlock Holmes did to Watson about the nature of his violin-playing, ‘Oh, that’s all right,’ replete with an equally merry laugh.” A year later Allen reported on the fourth Quinquennial Sherlock Holmes Alimentary Festival at the Culinary Institute of America (“the *true* CIA”) in “A Study in Sump-tuousness.” “Holmes once said of Watson that the latter never recognized his merits as housekeeper. Be that as it may, the merits of all responsible for making this weekend what it was were well applauded.” This was followed by a brief report of quotations by the actor Jeremy Brett under the title “Is Jeremy Brett’s Interpretation of Sherlock Holmes Changing?” and a review, in 1990, of *The Standard Doyle Company: Christopher Morley on Sherlock Holmes*, edited by Steven Rothman. “Morley wrote about Holmes in so many different ways and contexts that even Sherlockians well up on their ‘kinspritship’ (or maybe it should be kinsprits well up on their writings about the Writings) will find

many things new to them, or at any rate refreshing.” A year later Allen was back at the CIA and offered “A Reichenbach Repast.”

Over the course of the years during which I have been privileged to attend the irregular celebrations given in honor of Mr. Sherlock Holmes at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, it has been a source of never ending wonder as to how each succeeding event can possibly be better than that which came before. But, happily, such is the case; and no exception to the rule can be invoked in regard to the most recent in the ongoing series, held on May 4 of this year.

Allen was present on the pages of the *Baker Street Journal* as well. Perhaps the most interesting (and humorous) experience, reported by his co-investigator Sheldon Wesson, involved an event from “The Adventure of the Red Circle.”

The very crux of The Adventure of the Red Circle — the signaling by means of a candle waved across a window — has been subjected to the most rigorous scientific scrutiny. The results of that exercise, by Allen Mackler, scientist, and Sheldon Wesson, laboratory assistant, are described below. The starting point was the lengthy marginal note in Baring-Gould’s Annotated Sherlock Holmes. S. F. Blake is quoted therein as reporting that the full message — AT-TENTA ATTENTA ATTENTA PERICOLO PERI — would require 477 waves of the candle across the window and would take about 4 3/4 minutes to deliver.

Those figures have proved to be incorrect. The message requires 384 passes, not 477. We surmise that Mr. Blake may have counted two PERICOLOs, thus accounting for the difference of 93 counts, whereas the Canon describes only one. We determined, too, that sufficient pauses must be allowed between letters and words to promote com-

prehension: three “beats” between letters, six between words.

The Mackler – Wesson experiments (replicated in part at a meeting of the Red Circle of Washington, D.C.) showed the effects of three different speeds upon the intelligibility of the message....

Based on their close reading of the Canon, the authors concluded: “Factoring in all of these conditions yields a total elapsed time of 7 minutes and 14 seconds – which we now adopt as ‘official.’ We forebear from comment on the questions of language variations raised in Baring-Gould: i.e., the language employed in the signals, Italian, English, or Italian in the English alphabet. This consideration could affect our total elapsed time by at most a few seconds.”

1990 marked a number of transitions in Allen’s life. By this time he had left the East Coast and his work with public radio and moved to Osseo, Minnesota. Here he found Sherlockian company and friendship through the Norwegian Explorers of Minnesota. At the beginning of the year, at the annual dinner of the Baker Street Irregulars, Allen was honored with an Irregular Shilling and the Investiture of “Sarasate.” It was at this same time that Allen began co-hosting a Morley walk around Manhattan. A later report from the *BSJ* gives a sense of the stroll.

Guides Mackler and Shields are masters at finding these sights, and those who join them are the beneficiaries. We were told that Morley was fond of strolling around the top of the Woolworth Building in order to find inspiration for his columns. From this perch, he could see the Brooklyn Bridge, the sun glistening off the Manhattan mountains, St. Paul’s churchyard, and Vesey Street. Therefore, we approached the lobby of the Woolworth Building with great anticipation.



May found him in Chicago celebrating Christopher Morley's one-hundredth birthday at a Morley symposium with members of The Hounds of the Baskerville (sic) and Hugo's Companions. Allen spoke on Morley's devotion to New York. By the end of the year Allen had been elected membership director of the Norwegian Explorers and was editing their newsletter, *Explorations*. The following February Allen presented an evening program on "Sherlock Holmes and Music" at the Hennepin County Government Center in Minneapolis.

Allen continued to edit and write for *Explorations* along with other Sherlockian publications. He deepened his Minnesota roots while still being an active member of the Irregulars and other societies. In 1993 Allen was part of the planning and program for the Norwegian Explorers' conference "Sherlock Holmes' Rogues, Rascals, and Ruffians" held in Minneapolis. Two years later he became president of the Explorers, serving for two years. At the end of his term it was reported that "[a]ll members of the Norwegian Explorers would like to thank Allen for his efforts and leadership, and we all look forward to his continued involvement." A note in *The Moriarty Principle* indicates another of Allen's endeavors at this time. "He founded the scion, 'The Fowl Fanciers,' in Minnesota in 1990 with the blessing of John Bennett Shaw. He is an expert on the violinist Pablo Sarasate . . . and classical music." Food, music, Morley, and Holmes - life was good.

On the cusp of the millennium Allen continued to be active with the Irregulars. He was also a member of an exclusive group, the Sherlockians By Invitation Only Society (SBIOS). I'm not sure when he may have been invited, but it is clear from their 1999 report that Allen was in New York for the annual BSI weekend (my first time at this august gathering) and then headed to London "for the Sherlock Holmes January 16th birthday party sponsored by the Sherlock Holmes Society of London held in the distinguished House of Commons Meeting Room, Parliament." I'm sure Allen travelled to London many times. Roger Johnson, editor of the *District Messenger* (the newsletter of the Sherlock

Holmes Society of London) noted a final visit. “The last time we met him in England Jean and I were able to direct him to a nice gasogene for his collection.” That gasogene now sits in the sitting room adjacent to this exhibit.

In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, at the first meeting of Holmes and James Mortimer, Holmes remarked “You are an enthusiast in your line of thought, I perceive...” Allen was an enthusiast and a good friend to many. Enjoy a few fruits of that enthusiasm and friendship.

Tim Johnson

*E. W. McDiarmid Curator of the Sherlock Holmes Collections  
& Curator of Special Collections & Rare Books*

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- — — . "Collecting the Uncollectible," *BSM*, No. 26 (Summer 1981), 16-17
- — — . *Compliments of the Season.* The Seventeen Steps Press, 1993. Limited to 150 numbered copies. Features photographs of Mackler's Holmesian rooms.
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# A CHECKLIST FOR THE EXHIBIT

Cases moving clockwise from left of door

## Case 1 (Left of Door) THE GREAT ILLUSTRATORS

1. F.D. Steele drawing for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Limited Editions Club
2. F.D. Steele drawing for 1939 film, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*
3. S. Paget drawing for *The Strand Magazine*, No. 8, "all afternoon...stalls"
4. Charles Schulz cartoon strip, 12/30/93

## Case 2 (Left Wall) SOME OF ALLEN'S OTHER LITERARY INTERESTS

5. Small portrait of A.C. Doyle by Hutchins
6. *The Solitary Summer* by Elizabeth (1866-1941)
7. *The Abbess*, 3 volumes, by Frances Trollope
8. *Father Eustace: A Tale of the Jesuits* by Frances Trollope
9. *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysterious Mother* by Horace Walpole
10. Laurance Oliphant
11. *Brownlows* by Mrs. Oliphant
12. *The Book Hunter* by John Hill Burton
13. *Love and Jealousy* by Mrs. Trollope (note the library stickers on this and other volumes in the case)
14. *The Sacristan's Household* by Frances Trollope
15. *The Widow Barnaby* by Frances Trollope
16. *The Life and Adventures of a Clever Woman* by Frances Trollope
17. *The Mother's Manual* by Frances Trollope
18. *Belgium and Western Germany in 1833* by Mrs. Trollope
19. *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whittlaw* by Frances Trollope, with Trollope autograph
20. *Lady Car: The Sequel of Life* by Mrs. Oliphant
21. *Green Ginger* by Arthur Morrison
22. Framed quote from "The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge"

## Case 3 (Back Wall, Left) SHERLOCK HOLMES IN PAINT, PRINT AND PHOTOGRAPH

23. Oil painting of Sherlock Holmes
24. Print, "Sherlock Holmes, Master Detective, circa 1903"
25. F.D. Steele drawing for V. Starrett of Holmes profile
26. Photograph of William Gillette

## Case 4 (Back Wall, Center) MORE GREAT ILLUSTRATIONS AND ALLEN AS BOOKMAN

27. F.D. Steele drawing from Thor Bridge, Limited Edition Club
28. F.D. Steele drawing, His Last Bow, Collier's Magazine, 1917

29. *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books* by Nicholas Basbanes
30. *The Scholar Adventurers* by Richard Altick
31. *A Living Memory: Hodder and Stoughton Publishers, 1868-1975* by John Attenborough
32. *Victorian Publishers Bindings* by Douglas Ball
33. *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* by Nicholson Baker
34. *Ventures in Book Collecting* by William Arnold
35. *Taste and Technique in Book Collecting* by John Carter
36. *Victorian Fiction: An Exhibition of Original Editions* by John Carter
37. *The Bookman Literary Year-Book, 1898*

Case 5 (Back Wall, Right) ALLEN MACKLER, BAKER STREET IRREGULAR

38. Allen Mackler's Baker Street Irregulars investiture as Sarasate
39. Sarasate by Spy
40. Autograph and photograph of Sarasate, 11-12-29
41. Text from Spy Caricature

Case 6 (Right of Door) A SAMPLE OF ALLEN'S FILM COLLECTION, WITH OTHER SHERLOCKIANA

42. Hound of the Baskervilles movie poster
43. Videotape, *House of Fear*
44. Videotape, *The Woman in Green*
45. Videotape, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*
46. Selected *Baker Street Miscellanea* issues containing articles by Allen Mackler
47. *The Man Who Was Sherlock Holmes* by Michael and Mollie Hardwick
48. *Sherlock Holmes: The Major Stories with Contemporary Critical Essays* edited by John A. Hodgson
49. *The Man Who Hated Sherlock Holmes* by James Playsted Wood
50. Selection of videotapes from Allen Mackler's collection

Case 7 (Center, Left) ART, DOYLE AND HOLMES

51. Watercolor painting by Augustus Hare, Tylden House (?)
52. Framed text and photos of Groombridge Place, Catherine Cooke photographer, table mats for Founder's Footprints conference, 1998
53. *The Quest for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Thirteen Biographers in Search of a Life* by Jon Lellenberg
54. *Richard Doyle and His Family*, exhibit catalog
55. *Richard Doyle* by Daria Hambourg
56. *A Maypole in the Strand* by Reginald Pound
57. *Arthur Conan Doyle* by Jacqueline Jaffe

58. *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism and Values* by Alvin E. Rodin, Jack D. Key and others
59. *Welcome to America, Mr. Sherlock Holmes* by Chris Redmond

#### Case 8 (Center) SHERLOCKIANA, DOYLE AND HOLMES

##### Top Shelf

60. Cross-stitch of Sherlock Holmes stories by Allen Mackler. This cross-stitch represents all 60 Holmes stories. Can you solve the puzzle?
61. *New Paths in Book Collecting*, edited by John Carter
62. *How to Read and Why* by Harold Bloom
63. *Among the Gently Mad* by Nicholas Basbanes
64. *An Illustrated Guide to Old and Rare Books*, edited by Reginald Horrox
65. *Sherlock Slept Here* by Howard Lachtman

##### Middle Shelf

66. Gaylord Schanilec poster of 1995 Holmes conference
67. *Conan Doyle: A Biographical Solution* by Ronald Pearsall
68. *Waterloo: A Case-book on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's historical play* by David Skene Melvin
69. *Conan Doyle: Portrait of an Artist* by Julian Symons
70. *Mirror of the Century: The Strand Magazine* by Reginald Pound
71. *The Adventures of Conan Doyle* by Charles Higham

##### Bottom Shelf

72. Rogues, Rascals, and Ruffians poster autographed by Scott Bond
73. Rogues, Rascals, and Ruffians certificate for Allen Mackler
74. *Principles of Bibliographic Description* by Fredson Bowers
75. *The Englishman and His Books in the Early Nineteenth Century* by Amy Cruse
76. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: Detecting Social Order* by Rosemary Jann
77. *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Interviews and Recollections* edited by Harold Orel

#### Case 9 (Center, Right) ART, DOYLE AND SPIRITUALISM

78. *Sherlock Holmes Among the Pirates* by Donald Redmond
79. *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* by Harold Orel
80. *The Case For and Against Psychological Belief* by Carl Murchison
81. *Final Séance: The Strange Friendship Between Houdini and Conan Doyle* by Massimo Polidoro
82. *Fairies*
83. *Conan Doyle* by Pierre Nordon
84. *Houdini and Conan Doyle* by Bernard Ernst

85. *Arthur Conan Doyle: a memoir* by John Lamond
86. *The Case of the Cottingley Fairies* by Joe Cooper
87. *A Regimental Scandal* by Arthur Conan Doyle
88. *The Blood-stone Tragedy* by Arthur Conan Doyle
89. *Conan Doyle: His Life and Art* by Hesketh Pearson
90. *Conan Doyle And the Spirits* by Kelvin Jones
91. Oil painting, "Spring Gold," Jean Gennard(?)
92. Oil painting, untitled, Yannie Yebe
93. *Medical Casebook of Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle* by Alvin E Rodin and Jack D. Key
94. *A Study in Southsea* by Geoffrey Stavert
95. *Arthur Conan Doyle: Beyond Baker Street* by Janet B. Pascal
96. *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* by Pierre Nordon
97. *Teller of Tales* by Daniel Stashower
98. *Dr. Joe Bell: Model for Sherlock Holmes* by Ely Liebow

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