“Your merits should be publicly recognized” (STUD)

Mr. Holmes Goes to Savannah
By Timothy Johnson

For the book-reading public, when one mentions “Savannah,” John Berendt’s Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil probably springs to mind. For residents of Savannah, Georgia, this Southern gothic novel is referred to simply as “The Book.” Most everyone in Savannah seems to know something about “The Book.” However, there is another book associated with this wonderful southern city, one that is still in the making, and one not as widely known. This book is being written by the good people connected with the Live Oak Public Libraries and its Foundation. It was our privilege, representing the Holmes Collections and the University of Minnesota, to play a part in writing the latest chapter. Most of the action in this little mystery took place at the Bull Street Library, home of the Foundation.

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David McCallister, Robert and Myrtle Robinson in Savannah's Bull Street Library
Boxing and prizefighting are mentioned several times throughout the Canon. Prizefighters appear at various points and Holmes himself was considered a skilled pugilist, as we learn from Sholto’s bodyguard in The Sign of the Four. Outside of the Sacred Writings, boxing is also a prominent feature of Conan Doyle’s personal and literary life. Doyle was known to put up his fists from time to time, particularly while serving on an arctic whaler, and apparently gave a good account of himself. He also wrote about the ring, with the novel Rodney Stone perhaps the best known of his stories about prizefighting.

However, another excellent example of Doyle’s interest in fisticuffs is the short story, The Croxley Master. The story first appeared in The Strand Magazine in 1899 and was published in book form in 1907. In an age when prizefighting has fallen into some disrepute, with ear biting garnering more publicity than crosses and uppercuts, this publishing centennial is a good time to revisit an interesting piece of non-canonical Doyle.

The Croxley Master is the story of an impoverished medical student who participates in a prizefight, as the underdog, in order to earn the money he needs to finish his degree. The student reminds one of the young Conan Doyle, who undertook some dangerous jobs while completing his studies. I will refrain from providing much more about the plot, as the story is well worth the brief time it would take to read the work in its entirety. However, the tale shows Doyle at his best as a storyteller. Like so many of the Holmes stories, The Croxley Master is vividly written and fast-paced. The characters are carefully drawn and come alive in print, as is the case with so many canonical participants. The great ring battle that forms the finale of the story is exciting and realistic. Simply put, I had a lot of fun rereading it after at least a forty year hiatus.

Of particular note to the Sherlockian reader, however, are so many of the names and expressions used in the story. I will mention only a few as finding these gems is one of the hidden pleasures of studying Doyle’s non-Sherlockian writings. The young medical student is employed by a Dr. Oldacre, who is as miserly and unpleasant as his namesake in The Norwood Builder. As Jon Lellenberg comments, Oldacre is probably drawn from two of the physicians Doyle served early in his career. The referee at the big event is none other than a Mr. Stapleton, who needs no further introduction. Finally, the backer of The Croxley Master, an experienced and powerful fighter, is a Mr. Armitage. Remarkably, Trevor Senior of Gloria Scott fame, was not only James Armitage in his previous life but had done some boxing. These are but three tantalizing Sherlockian allusions and references that can be found throughout The Croxley Master. There are others and the reader is left the enjoyment of finding them.

Given the references to boxing both in and out of the Canon, it is not surprising that at least one renowned boxer became interested in Sherlock Holmes. Gene Tunney, one of the greatest of heavyweight champions (after all, he defeated Jack Dempsey twice), was a highly intelligent and self-educated man. A lover of the classics, Tunney, profiled in a recent biography written by Jack Cavanaugh, even once lectured a Yale class about Shakespeare. After he retired from the ring, Tunney traveled in literary circles and was friends with such men of letters as Christopher Morley, founder of the Baker Street Irregulars. Elmer Davis, one of the early Irregulars, covered Tunney’s fights with Dempsey for The New York Times. As a result of these relationships, Gene Tunney was one of those present at the first dinner of The Baker Street Irregulars (BSI) in 1934. Jon Lellenberg’s BSI historical series can be consulted for further details of Tunney’s BSI presence. In light of Tunney’s vast reading background, I suspect that he held his own in Canonical knowledge along with Morley, Davis, Woollcott, and the other remarkable diners at that first Irregular event.

The Sherlock Holmes Collections contains John Bennett Shaw’s copy of The Croxley Master, complete with his bookplate. The book was published in 1907 by McClure, Phillips and Company of New York. (Ed. Note: This was the publishing company headed by S. S. “Sam” McClure in which Conan Doyle invested all of his proceeds from his 1894 American lecture tour at its end, forming a lifelong relationship with the McClures and the company.)

One of the joys of reading the non-Sherlockian Doyle is the opportunity to search for links to the Holmes stories. The Croxley Master provides ample opportunity for the Sherlockian reader to seekCanonical references and similarities while enjoying an exciting and well-written story that stands alone on its own merits.

Robert Katz, MD, BSI
1957 was a year of accomplishments for the Norwegian Explorers of Minnesota. In addition to the Explorers’ normal business, 1957 saw the culmination of a four-year project to place a memorial plaque at Reichenbach Falls as well as the publication of Exploring Sherlock Holmes. Both serve as monuments to the men who participated in the related projects.

During a 1953 trip to Meiringen, Switzerland, Dr. Philip S. Hench (1896 – 1965) was shocked to learn the deadly struggle between Holmes and Moriarty at Reichenbach Falls was virtually unknown to area residents. Hench, a physician at Minnesota’s Mayo Clinic, shared the 1950 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine for his research on cortisone and ACTH in the treatment of arthritis. A member of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London and a tireless collector of Sherlockian rarities, Hench, once home in Minnesota, contacted the London society to determine if a memorial could be installed in Reichenbach and was referred by them to the Norwegian Explorers in Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Letters, meetings and a fact-finding trip to the Falls followed during the next few years. The Norwegian Explorers met on November 1, 1956, with the following agenda:

Dr. P. S. Hench: Growth and development of the project

R. C. Moore and Bryce L. Crawford: Technical problems

E.W. McDiarmid: Implementing the project, plans and prospects

Discussion

All interested Sherlockians are cordially invited to attend this fall meeting to discuss the most imaginative and world-shaking project since ‘The Napoleon of Crime’ saw his dreams crash.

At this meeting, E.W. “Mac” McDiarmid, University of Minnesota Librarian and Sigerson of The Norwegian Explorers, indicated that the Explorers’ “depleted bank account” (CARD) required creative thinking to pay for the memorial. A donation by Dr. Hench and sales of a proposed book of essays titled Exploring Sherlock Holmes, edited by McDiarmid and Theodore C. Blegen, one of the five founders of the Norwegian Explorers and the Dean of the Graduate School at the University, would cover the $450 cost of the bronze plaque and installation.

Despite a delay in publication of the book, the plaque was dedicated on June 24, 1957. Professor and Mrs. Theodore C. Blegen, entertained in London by fellow Sherlockians, went on to represent the group in Switzerland. Dr. Bryce L. Crawford, fellow Norwegian Explorer co-founder, wrote the wording of the plaque, which carries Holmes’s profile:

Across this “dreadful cauldron” occurred the culminating event in the career of Sherlock Holmes, the world’s greatest detective, when on May 4, 1891 he vanquished Prof. Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime. Erected by The Norwegian Explorers of Minnesota and The Sherlock Holmes Society of London. 25 June 1957.

“Sigerson” McDiarmid announced on October 21, 1957 that publication was set for November 15th, and the cost per book would be $5. “To our faithful members, however, we are setting a pre-publication sale price of $3.75. We believe that this is the biggest bargain for less than four dollars since Mr. Sandeford, of Lower Grove Road, Reading bought the famous black pearl of the Borgias for fifteen shillings.”

400 copies of Exploring Sherlock Holmes were printed by Emerson G. Wulling’s Sumac Press. The “Salute” states “The Minnesota Baker Street Irregulars, perversely known as the Norwegian Explorers because many of the group are Celts, meet regularly and augustly to eat, talk, write, travel, and erect plaques…The proceeds of this book will be used to pay some of the costs, low-priced though the book is when considered in its scarcity and extent of value.”

The essays were:

“These Were Hidden Fires, Indeed!” by Theodore C. Blegen

“Professor Sherlock Holmes, Ph.D.” by E.W. McDiarmid

“The Master and the Mass Media” by E.W. Ziebarth

“Another Incubus in the Saddle” by John B. Wolf

“The Final Problem – Where?” by Bryce Crawford, Jr., and R.C. Moore

“The Battered Tin Dispatch Box” by Thomas L. Daniels

“Of Violence at Meiringen” by Philip S. Hench

The friendship among the authors is apparent when one reads their articles. A number of footnotes scattered throughout the book refer to gains and losses suffered on the golf course, and how those sums might be used more appropriately. These men might not have “learned to play heavily at cards and to squander money on the turf” (BERY) but to them, golf was another story. Mary McDiarmid related that her father and his Sherlockian cronies often played golf at the University of Minnesota golf course. Other notes refer to Dr. Blegen’s businessman neighbor Charlie, a man who could not be stereotyped by one trait. Zeibarth responds later in the book that “Charlie is one of my neighbors. Which one I am not quite certain, but that he is my neighbor, I do know by means of the most elementary deduction. Theodore C. Blegen, on page 10 of this volume, identifies Charles as his neighbor. Since my home is next door to that of Dr. Blegen it is clear

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Acquisitions


Meredith Granger donated his copy of the Limited Edition Collector’s Edition of “Sherlockian Myth Busters! The Engineer's Thumb.” Meredith won this DVD, which was produced and directed by Steven Doyle, BSI. He presented it to the Collections at the Illustrious Client’s Dinner in Indianapolis on Dec. 9, 2006.


Musings

I would like to welcome a new contributor to this newsletter. Robert Katz, MD, BSI, has had a life-long interest in prizefighting and was a natural choice to write our 100 Years Ago feature about *The Croxley Master*. When he submitted his article, Bob wrote an accompanying note which will resonate with a number of readers as so many of us date our interest in Sherlock Holmes, and Conan Doyle, to an event or time in our early years. Bob wrote:

When I was thirteen, my parents gave me a copy of the Canon for my Bar Mitzvah. My mother jokingly comments that she has grown to regret that gift. While I have told that part of the story many times, what I don’t usually mention is the other gift. My father, a very quiet, reserved and mild mannered man, who was nonetheless a decorated army lieutenant colonel, took me for a big steak dinner at Jack Dempsey’s restaurant in Manhattan. We then saw a prize fight at the Garden. The Canon and a prizefight made learning all that Hebrew seem worthwhile.

Looking back at *The Croxley Master* was a chance to remember two very pleasant...and important...moments in my childhood. Thank you for giving me the chance to savor the reminiscences.

As prizefighting figured in Conan Doyle’s work, so prizefighters played a role in the early days of the Baker Street Irregulars. Jon Lellenberg noted that “Alexander Woollcott mentions [1926-28 Heavyweight champion Gene] Tunney’s presence at the first BSI annual dinner in his piece ‘The Baker Street Irregulars,’ originally in his NEW YORKER ‘Shouts and Murmurs’ column for December 29, 1934, later in his posthumous collection LONG, LONG AGO (1943). His reference to Tunney suggests that he was a nai in that setting, but Woollcott is not a reliable guide to the sophistication of others.”

Our 1957 article focuses on two items, but only one is held in The Sherlock Holmes Collections. Thanks to Mary McDiarmid for sharing her memories of her father and his Sherlockian golfing excursions, an exercise that figures prominently in *Exploring Sherlock Holmes*.

Tim Johnson has once again proven himself an excellent ambassador for The Sherlock Holmes Collections. His report on his trip to Savannah provides our readers with an idea of Tim’s work on behalf of the Collections that goes on both outside the University and normal working hours. Dick Sveum reminds us that July 6 is set for the Annual Meeting of the Friends of The Sherlock Holmes Collection, and Tim gives us all an idea of what we have to look forward to with the items on display during the Explorers conference.

Please contact me directly if you have any questions regarding the July 6 – 8 conference.
An Update from the Collections

The excitement is building for our upcoming conference and other activities. At the moment, I’m busy planning the exhibit with the help of our new exhibit designer, Darren Terpstra. Darren brings wonderful creativity and skills to exhibit design and together we think that the final product will be delightful. A major part of the exhibit will include a re-staging of Allen Mackler’s 221B sitting room that was received as part of Allen’s generous bequest to the Libraries.

I’ve also been busy with folks from the University’s Theater Arts department who are involved with this summer’s Showboat production of “Sherlock’s Last Case” by Charles Marowitz. The Minnesota Centennial Showboat is located on Harriet Island in St. Paul and is a wonderful venue for these summer productions. Guests are sent back in time by the Showboat’s Victorian-era décor and grand central staircase. But the Showboat’s richest feature is its intimate 225-seat jewel-box theater. “Sherlock’s Last Case” is directed by Stephen Kanee with olio by Vern Sutton. Vern was very pleased to discover a piece of music from the Collections, “The Ghost of Sherlock Holmes” that will be used as a part of the production. The Showboat acts as the primary performance spot for the University of Minnesota Showboat Players, a unique troupe of talented performers cast exclusively with University students. “Sherlock’s Last Case” runs from June 15 to August 25. See the web site at (http://www.showboat.umn.edu/sherlock.html) for more information.

Meanwhile, we are busy working on a number of other projects. The Libraries’ Digital Collection Unit has scanned 225 pieces of Frederic Dorr Steele’s art, and by the time you read this I’m hoping to have finished the metadata that is attached to each of these images. Once completed, these artistic works will be available online through the Libraries’ Images database. Lucy Brusic has nearly completed an inventory of additional material from the John Bennett Shaw Collection. Affectionately given the working title of the “Lumber-room Collection,” this inventory will be put into an online finding aid on our website. This collection includes over 3,500 items. Also, we’re planning another “Curiosity Camp” with the College of Continuing Education for this summer. I look forward to this opportunity to share the Collections with adult learners who are truly interested in the world of Sherlock Holmes. Thank you for your continued support of the Collections through your gifts of materials and money. Those gifts help continue our important work. I hope to see many of you at the conference in July.

Tim Johnson

From the President

The Annual Membership Meeting of The Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections will be held at 5 pm on Friday July 6, 2007. It will be held in conjunction with “Victorian Secrets and Edwardian Enigmas,” July 6-8, 2007 at the Elmer L. Andersen Library. The conference is sponsored by The Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections, Special Collections and Rare Books, University of Minnesota Libraries and the Norwegian Explorers of Minnesota.

Leslie Klinger will deliver the Keynote Address at the Annual Membership Meeting and Curator Timothy Johnson will give The State of the Collections Address. We also plan to hold a business meeting, present the Bryce L. Crawford, Jr. Award and conduct an auction.

The annual appeal for donations has gone out, and we appreciate those who have donated so generously. It is my hope that you have already sent in your donation and remain a member in good standing. The Sigerson Society is always looking for new members who make a donation or pledge of ten thousand dollars.

Richard J. Sveum, MD, BSI
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The title of this book—if one was called for—would be The Annual Literary Gala and Luncheon of the Live Oak Public Libraries Foundation. That's not a very imaginative title and disguises the immensely imaginative and creative folks behind that label. For the past six years the Foundation's Gala event has raised funds to help support library programs and services in Chatham, Effingham, and Liberty counties in Georgia. In doing so, the Foundation seeks to develop community awareness and support for the understanding of the true value of a quality library system. This year, Gala organizers called on Mr. Sherlock Holmes and the Holmes Collections at the University of Minnesota to assist in the endeavor. Both Mr. Holmes and the University were happy to answer the call.

Mr. Holmes’s appearance was arranged by his American scheduler, Mr. John C. Sherwood of West Grove, Pennsylvania. Mr. Sherwood, an editor for the Wilmington, Delaware News Journal, has served the Consulting Detective in this role for approximately the past two decades. The Holmes Collections visit, represented by its curator, was facilitated by founding president of the Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections, George Hubbs (now a Savannah resident), Christy Divine, director of marketing and development for the Live Oak Public Libraries, and Christian Kruse, the library director. Items from the Holmes Collections—two leaves from the Hound manuscript, two drawings by Frederic Dorr Steele, the Czarina Alexandra’s copy of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, and the Jerome Kern copy of Beeton’s Christmas Annual—were exhibited during the Gala. In addition, the Collections provided four items from its duplicate collection for the silent auction, with proceeds shared between the two libraries.

This year’s event—the seventh installment in this story—was divided into two chapters. Chapter One, entitled “A Mysterious Evening,” occurred on Thursday, January 18th at the Bull Street Library in Savannah. Chapter Two, “A History of the Mystery,” followed the next day at the Chatham Club. Mr. Hubbs, ever the gracious host and guide, met us at the Savannah airport and after a visit to Bull Street to drop off the exhibit treasures, provided a tour of the city and environs. We took in the various “Midnight” sites, along with an additional treat—a Sherlockian site. It seems that both Holmes and Watson contributed to the building of The Village Library of Savannah as evidenced by donors bricks placed in front of the library. After our tour we returned to the Planters Inn to prepare for the evening’s events and to meet Mr. Holmes. Mr. Sherwood retired for the night.

After introductions in the hotel lobby, Mr. Holmes and the curator were brought to the Bull Street Library to inspect the exhibit, meet Mr. Nicholas Kilmer (the guest speaker at the next day’s luncheon), and station ourselves in the receiving line to greet some three hundred guests who began arriving shortly before six in the evening. While we welcomed guests (many overcome by the chance to meet the great detective and not quite sure how to address him), others made their way to the second floor of the library to view the Holmes and Doyle materials on display (guarded by a member of the Savannah police department), enjoy their cocktails and hors d’oeuvres—Angels on Horseback Revisited, Fried Oysters, Baker St. Steak Tonga Tartar on Buttered Rye, Irene Adler’s Cucumber & Stilton Sandwiches—and bid on the many items of the silent auction. A buffet dinner— Moriarty’s Mixed Endive Salad, Mrs. St. Clair’s Potato Salad, Mrs. Hudson’s Herb & Cheddar Scones with Baskerville Butter, Mystery Rice Pilaf, Bruce Partington’s Braised Peas, Mycroft’s Chicken Breasts Murillo, Ned Hunter’s Curried Lamb (sans Opium)—was served about an hour later, with guests seated among the library’s book stacks. During dinner we had the chance to visit with David McCallister (from the Pleasant Places of Florida), along with Robert and Myrtle Robinson (The Hansom Wheels of Columbia, South Carolina). David traveled north for the gala and the Robinsons came south. It was a happy meeting. Following dessert and coffee—A Mere Trifle, Watson’s Walnut Tartlettes, Sherlock’s Shortbread, Devil’s Foot Fruit Cake, Rookie Cookies (Watson’s Favorite), Sussex Strawberries & Whipped Cream—the silent auction concluded and the live auction commenced, conducted by Mr. Sonny Dixon, the news anchor at the local CBS affiliate, with the assistance of Mr. Holmes. Following the live auction Mr. Holmes and the curator bid those remaining a good night and returned to their hotel. Highlights from the gala found their way onto the late evening news.

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50 Years Ago...Continued from Page 3

that Charles must, therefore, be neighbor to us both. There is just one other possibility; it is that Charles may, in fact, be I. I should remind those unkind enough to suggest it, that Charles, in this volume, is identified as a businessman. My first-tee negotiations with his distinguished creator are quite inept enough to establish me as only an amateur mendicant and no businessman."

Tucked away in Mac McDiarmed's copy of Exploring Sherlock Holmes, Al Miller's tongue in cheek review printed in "Ivory Tower" noted that "What is shocking, to this reviewer, is the complete disregard of the Deans and their fellow contributors for truth. The whole book is fabricated around the assumption that the fictional detective really lived and halted evil-doers of Victorian England...Fortunately only 400 copies of Exploring Sherlock Holmes were printed (about 100 copies yet remain unsold and if they remain unsold, will proportionately reduce the damage) and the Orwellian 1984-like rewriting of history may yet have become reversible."

McDiarmid was forced to reply, suggesting that Mr. Miller do penance, perhaps by contributing an essay to the next Norwegian Explorers volume on the subject, "The Laurels of Sherlock Holmes."

The 100 remaining books sold. An April 7, 1958 letter from Sigerson McDiarmid indicated that Exploring Sherlock Holmes was out of print. A quick review of internet sites shows the book can be purchased for a price of $125 - $225. Many potential readers of the book might feel cheated out of the future opportunity to enjoy these essays, but opportunity exists. Attendees at the July conference "Victorian Secrets and Edwardian Enigmas" will receive a newly published omnibus edition of all four of The Norwegian Explorers' books, including Exploring Sherlock Holmes. It will be the greatest bargain since "Mr. Sandeford, of Lower Grove Road, Reading bought the famous black pearl of the Borgias for fifteen shillings."

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Sigerson

Mr. Holmes Goes to Savannah... Continued from Page 6

The following morning, Friday, saw additional gala coverage in the Savannah Morning News, complete with a photograph of Mr. Holmes. At midday, George Hubbs once again provided transport, this time to the Hilton Savannah Desoto. Mssrs. Holmes and Hubbs made their way to the sixteenth floor of the hotel for a joint meeting of two local Rotary Clubs—Mr. Holmes was the guest speaker—while we stopped off at the floor below, home of the Chatham Club. Here we enjoyed the further company of David McCallister and the Robinsons. The luncheon’s guest speaker was painter and mystery writer Nicholas Kilmer. Kilmer is best known for his “Fred Taylor” mysteries which take place in the Boston art world. Following lunch it was back to the Bull Street Library to pick up the exhibit items, then to the hotel and a farewell to Mr. Holmes, and finally to the airport for the trip home.

Our Savannah adventure provided a remarkable opportunity to promote the Collections, to make new connections and strengthen old relationships, and to help with a worthwhile event. Copies of the Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections newsletter were available during the gala dinner, as were advertising flyers for our summer conference, “Victorian Secrets and Edwardian Enigmas.” Most of the flyers and newsletters disappeared during the course of the evening, with the remainder left with Christy Divine for further distribution. In an e-mail following the gala, Christy wrote: “Thanks so much for coming down and adding so much to our events. I’m just so sorry that I was so busy while you were here. I wanted to hear more about the collection and your role. My husband would love to immerse himself in Holmes... Continued on page 8
Mr. Holmes Goes to Savannah...

Continued from Page 7

24/7. I sometimes think we were born in the wrong century! ... Again, many thanks for your time and expertise. It was truly a thrill to both see and hold the Holmes and Doyle materials!

The Collections received media coverage both on the late evening local news and in the morning newspaper. We were delighted to make the acquaintance of David McCallister and the Robinsons. The Robinsons have been especially helpful in the past with donations to the Collections. For the past four years their scion society, The Hansom Wheels, has sponsored an eighth grade school project involving nearly one hundred students a year. Many of the final projects, all with a Sherlockian theme, have found their way into the Collections.

Our special thanks, again, to George Hubbs, Christy Divine, and Christian Kruse for making this visit possible. Also, we would note our delight in meeting Mr. Holmes’s scheduler, John C. Sherwood, and thank him for all his help with Mr. Holmes’s visit (not to mention his own magical skills). Our paths crossed in New York, but we did not have the pleasure of meeting until we made our way south, and I hope our paths cross again. And, finally, what can one say when one has come face to face with the great detective himself, and enjoyed such a wonderful few days together? Mr. Holmes, it was a pleasure and an honor. Thank you for your confidence as we seek to keep forever green the memory of the Master. It was, truly, a memorable time in Savannah.

Remembrances

In supporting the Sherlock Holmes Collections, many donors have made contributions either in honor or in memory of special persons.

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Rosalyn Caplan
Paul Galbo
John Michael Gibson
Julie McKuras
Julie McKuras
Pleasant Places of Florida
Joel Senter
Phil Sherman
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In Memory Of

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