however, Conan Doyle never wavered. To the end of his life he insisted that Margery had been the victim of a “very deadly plot” to discredit her. Annoyed over Houdini’s role in the drama, he sounded off on the subject of “Houdini’s,” a syndrome based on twin fallacies. “The first is that Spiritualism depends upon physical phenomena for its proofs,” he wrote, while the “second is that manual dexterity bears some relation to brain capacity.” Nearly 100 years later, Margery’s many paradoxes remain unresolved. It is uniquely fitting, in the circumstances, that the most intriguing of the Tietze documents is a note sent to Dr. Prince from Margery herself. Written in a fine, clear hand on Lime Street letterhead, it shows Margery to have been a woman of rare character—and, one might add, audacity—as she complains of having been misquoted by Houdini in a recent newspaper account. “I detest publicity,” she insists, “and do everything I can to avoid it.”

Mediums, it would seem, are never to be entirely trusted — not the best of them.

Remembrances

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

In Honor Of
Peter Blau
Patrick Shaw

In Memory Of
Charles E. Henry
Rolland Matson
E-W. McDermid
Dr. James G. Melear

From
Jule McKotas
Mary Flo Hatcher
Raymond L. Betzner
Andrew Kochling
The Baker Street Irregulars
Kerry B. Melear

TURNING THE TABLES Continued from Page 10

TURNING THE TABLES
Letters Acquired by the Minnesota Collections Shed New Light on Margery the Medium
by Daniel Stashower

“I think they are two very wonderful people,” Conan Doyle wrote emphatically to Dr. Walter Franklin Prince of the American Society for Psychical Research, “and that Boston should be very proud of them – perhaps the two most remarkable people – and the most useful – now living in America. However if we differ upon this we may at least find much upon which we agree.”

These extraordinary remarks reflect Conan Doyle’s concern over growing criticism of a pair of rising stars in the world of psychic research: Dr. Le Ros Crandon, a former instructor of surgery at the Harvard Medical School, and his vivacious young wife,8 Mina. At the time, Mrs. Crandon was becoming better known to the world at large as ‘Margery the medium,” the celebrated ‘witch of Lime Street,’ whose colorful displays of what appeared to be psychic phenomena were thought to offer proof of the validity of spiritualism, the belief that it is possible for the dead to communicate with the living.

Continued on page 9
50 YEARS AGO

So much for shop talk, here is the data. You know His methods, use them.


In 1961, Wilmer T. Rabe produced the first edition of Who's Who & What's What for a Sherlockian world prepared for and in need of this. It was a decade into a remarkable, roughly five-decade career as a Sherlockian and Baker Street Irregular that encompassed ten times the activity of the average irregular. For the average Who & What's What was not: he was unconventional, made the most of it, and to those of us who knew him, is unforgettable.

Rabe was born in 1921, and hove into Sherlockian view in 1951 while serving in the U.S. Army's psychological operations service in Germany, work for which his future affairs would show he was eminently suited. After returning to civilian life, he made a career at the University of Detroit as an "academic publicist." Eventually he retired to Sainte Marie on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, at the Canadian border, and soon had a new life there as the official island historian of nearby Mackinac Island, dubbed by him "the Miami Beach of the North," and as press agent for its historic and majestic Grand Hotel.

Rabe was imaginative, and had a talent for making madness respectable, like serving as chief telephone book critic for the Detroit newspapers, and Detroit Hachteman of The Friends of Lizzie Borden. At Lake Superior State University later on, he was a founder of The Unicorn Hunters: preferring Unicorn Questors because, he claimed, you shouldn't hunt what you can find—but that did not stop him from issuing tens of thousands of unicorn hunting licenses. Up on Mackinac Island he invented and also saw gleefully to the publicizing of an International Stone-Slapping Tournament, a World Sauntering Day, and other annual events of like madcap nature, including the custom of ceremonially burning a snowman on the first day of Spring.

Caring about culture's struggle with noise, he created Hush Records whose big hit was an original cast recording of "An Evening with Marcel Marceau." Caring about language, he launched an annual List of Words Banished from the Queen's English for Mis-Use, Over-Use, and General Uselessness, still issued on New Year's Day by Lake Superior State U. (This year's banished words: viral and Facebook). He scorned bureaucracy, claiming to have once filed an income tax return filled out entirely in Roman numerals. He liked laughter, and was an enthusiastic member of The Sons of the Desert, the Laurel & Hardy fan club. And he loved Sherlock Holmes, so he became a Baker Street Irregular. Not surprisingly, he began by creating his own society while in the Army, The Old Soldiers of Baker Street, or Old SOBs. He was in fact still young at the time; the photo below was taken when he visited the brand-new Sherlock Holmes Klubben in Copenhagen, entering Klubben legend by showing up with the first bottle of Scotch the thirsty Danes had seen since before the war. When he returned home from the Army to Detroit, he joined the Amateur Mendicant Society there, founded by Russell McLaughlin a few years earlier. Edgar W. Smith, a good judge of character, invented Rabe in the BSI in 1955 as "Colonel Warburton's Madness."

Over the years, Rabe's contributions to Sherlockiana were legion. Among other things, he installed the first Sherlockian plaque at the Englisher Hof in Meiringen. He put out The Commonplace Book, a periodic compilation of newspaper and magazine articles about Sherlock Holmes and his followers. He tape-recorded memorable moments at BSI dinners and other events, issuing them on a set of records called Voxes from Baker Street, now available on compact disc from Wessex Press. He became interested in James Montgomery's extraconsonantal poem "Aunt Clara," waiting to be asked to draw caricatures of their distinguished associates. But in the second place, he was already looking ahead as he sent the volume to press, adding: "It is hoped that all these matters will be set right in the 1962 WW&WW, known in abbreviated military terminology as "GW^2." That did come out the following year, and after a while he planned for a third edition come 1968. But it was not realized. He had acknowledged his reliance upon the technical resources of his university employer: "Text typed by a charming, patient and understanding young lady, Miss Nancy Kelly, on a Royal Electric Typewriter which adds considerable status to the correspondence of the University of Detroit Public Information Dept., as does Miss Kelly. Display type and assorted illustrations stolen from wherever we could find them. Printed on a University of Detroit imported (a good, though not a great year) offset press under the personal supervision of Dick Masseran," and so on. When Rabe retired in 1967 he lost those resources, the PC-based era of self-publishing was not yet at hand, and four crammed jumbo three-ring binders in which he had been collecting data for the '68 edition went into a cardboard box stored in the attic of his new home in remote Sault Ste. Marie.

There they gathered dust some twenty years. But it is an old maxim of mine (Lellenberg speaking here) that no research ever goes unutilized. When the BSI Archival History got started, Bill swept upon its first two volumes eagerly, reviewing the second enthusiastically for the Summer 1991 BSI. Then he went up to his attic, found the old carton with those four jumbo binders containing the raw material for the 1968 Who's Who & What's What, and shipped them to me. The data they contain facilitated the Archival History volumes that followed, and those shabby and precious binders continue to sit on a bookshelf in my study where I consult them frequently today. Bill Rabe's Sherlockian Who's Who & What's What was and remains a great accomplishment of permanent value.

Jon Lellenberg & Peter Blau

50 Years Ago Continued from Page 4

Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections

The Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections is a quarterly newsletter published by the Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections which seeks to promote the activities, interests and needs of the Special Collections and Rare Books Department, University of Minnesota Libraries

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Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections

2 Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections

Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections
further damage as the Scientific American investigation progressed. Conan Doyle expressed outrage at the ‘capital error’ of bringing an avowed enemy of spiritualism into the proceedings. ‘The Commission is, in my opinion, a farce,’ he declared. Houdini, for his part, claimed to be open-minded. ‘I am willing to be convinced,’ he said of his work as a psychic investigator, ‘but the proof must be such as to leave no vestige of doubt that what is claimed to be done is accomplished only through or by supernatural power.’ In his view, Margery fell short of this standard. Houdini saw no evidence of genuine psychic phenomena on Lime Street, but admitted to being greatly impressed with Margery’s skill and cunning — so much so that he devised fresh methods of detecting and preventing deception. For one sitting, he prepared by rendering his leg ‘swollen and painfully tender’ with a rubber bandage, so as to be able to detect subtle movements of Margery’s feet beneath the table. For another, he prepared a special ‘fraud-preventer’ cabinet, a slant-topped crate with openings for the medium’s ‘preventer’ cabinet, a slant-topped crate with openings for the medium’s movements — and the opportunities otherwise could scarcely be identified at this late stage whenever their names pop up in some old BSJ or scoops publication. Bill Rabe has indeed solved many a nagging mystery, and its usefulness is far from exhausted. The BSJ in its ‘Who’s Who & What’s Who’ column, for the first time anywhere, ‘Everywhere About Everybody Who Is Anybody’s Aunt?’ or ‘Everything That Is Even Remotely Ffun, However Far Removed.’ In its 122 softbound pages, Part I listed and described Sherlockian sites, plaques, periodicals, and other topics. Part II covered the Sherlockian societies, and Part III ‘The Followers,’ with half a continued on page 12

50 Years Ago Continued from Page 2

tracks its multiple versions and long-lost origins to a songwriter’s alcoholic Christmas haces in 1936, and set forth its history and folklore in a splendidly and profusely illustrated volume entitled We Always Mention Aunt Clara.

This last, the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days, is generally taken as Bill Rabe’s magnum opus, but rivaling it for that honor is something else: the book which we let him have rent free before you have all the evidence,” as he famously observed. “It biases the judgment.”

Holmes might also have had a word of useful advice for Margery herself. In time, the fingerprint evidence that Conan Doyle mentioned so favorably to Dr. Prince would contribute to her undoing, it was discovered to be a thumbprint belonging to her dentist, who had supplied wax for the experiment. One recalls that Jonas Oldacre was extremely helpful fifty years ago to those who wanted to know about Sherlockian societies, its singularity—which in the case of The Norwegian Explorers read as follows:

SINGULARITY: Coord and “etc.”
(ED. NOTE: ?)

Less ‘just-the-facts-m’am’ examples include some puckish entries like Doyle, Adrian Malcolm Conan (1910- ) — Founder of A.D. Protective Assn., or the confused and confusing ones for Helene Yakusova and Lenore Glen Oxford, the first of said ladies erroneously described as a one-time pen-name for the late Edgar W Smith, the second as having been ‘struck from the rolls,’ so alleged on the authority of S. Trump Bigelow of Toronto (‘The Five Orange Pips,’ BSJ). This hideous label, in the next edition, to an appendix containing an entire trate from well-known science-fiction writer and Scoerer Poul Anderson, ‘The Dreadful Aberrity Business,’ BSJ, who had witnessed Mr. Olford’s investiture at the hands of Edgar W Smith himself, plus an exchange of letters between Anderson and Bigelow with the latter blaming the error on shippod BSJ record-keeping and promising to be careful in the future.

For the historically minded, one of the book’s particular usefulness lies in the many ‘small ‘i’ irregulars’ included by Rabe, men and women not invested by the BSJ but keeping the Memory Green in their own ways: people who otherwise could scarcely be identified at this late stage whenever their names pop up in some old BSJ or scoops publication. What Bill Rabe has indeed solved many a nagging mystery, and its usefulness is far from exhausted.

But as intended, Who’s Who & What’s What is extremely helpful fifty years ago to those who wanted to know about the Sherlockian world in an era

Continued on page 4
when there were only two journals with any significant circulation, and no Internet. To cite but one example, Rabe was the first to try to compile a comprehensive list of Investiture Irregulars, as well as an informative survey of Sherlockian societies, something (Blau speaking here) no one since him has seriously attempted, let alone accomplished: my lists are fairly comprehensive, but hardly informative. And Rabe’s Commonplace Book was the first attempt to give wider circulation to what was appearing in the general press.

The Internet makes this all too easy today, but in those days just about the only other information came from squibs by the editors in the BSJ and SHJ. The Sherlockian world of the 1960s was quite different from today—in many ways quite parochial, as it wasn’t easy to participate in meetings of far-flung societies, and quite difficult to know much if anything about Sherlockian one hadn’t met other than in the BSJ’s Whodunit section. It was grand in 1961 to be able to learn about the people in the Who, and about the societies in an era when very few not members of local societies received the newsletters published by some of them.

People did not talk about the importance of Who’s Who & What’s What. That was pretty much taken for granted by those who acquired it and valued it, with rather little attention paid to it in the Sherlockian press—not that there was much Sherlockiana before 1961. Julian Wolff barely mentioned it in the BSJ, essentially just announcing that it was available, and it is unknown how many copies were sold. Let alone survived, and it’s difficult to find copies in pristine condition, because Who’s Who & What’s What wasn’t something to be carefully shelved, but consulted frequently instead.

Yet it’s hard to overstate about how different the early 1960s were from today. Those who’ve grown up in the era of Xerox, inexpensive long-distance telephone service, computer word processing, email, and Google can scarcely imagine what it took to research and bring out a work like this in 1961. It wasn’t easy to obtain informations of all sorts in those distant days, and Who’s Who & What’s What, for many, was a new and wonderful way to get information about the Sherlockian world.

It was in fact to foster a sense of community, more than anything else, that prompted Bill Rabe to undertake this project. Edgar W. Smith, who had been so much for so long not only to the BSJ, but Sherlockians broadly, had died in 1960, and Who’s Who & What’s What was undertaken because of that. When it appeared the following year it was dedicated to Smith, with a touching dedicatory essay by Russell McLauchlin saying in part:

What shall a lonesome friend say about a man who, with a matchless pen in his hand and an unquenchable joy in his bosom, did more to make sound and perpetual our Sherlockian fellowship than all the members of that fellowship, gathered and combined? He would have loved this book and hailed its author. And those two verbs might be interchanged, with unaltered accuracy.

There was much fear, when Edgar died, that our communion’s single, indispensable factor had departed, that all Sherlockian fellowship, with the animating spirit now grown still, might swiftly falter and soon expire. Probably the best word to be said about this volume is that it quite extingesuch fear.

Not that Rabe was now content. In the first place, he believed in an expanding Sherlockian universe, and was the first of the book’s incompleteness: “The majority of the entries have been either written by, or drawn directly from Forms 22B & 2 completed by the S’ians concerned,” he explained in his Forward and, “I have a feeling that I have overlooked many distinguished deceased S’ians, as well as their more lively colleagues; that I have asterisked scores into inactivity which are very active, and that there are probably itchy-fingered artists who were just new and wonderful way to get information about the Sherlockian world.

Continued on Page 11

TURNING THE TABLES Continued on Page 1

Conan Doyle, who believed “beyond all question” that Mrs. Crandon’s powers were genuine, was writing to take Dr. Prinsep of the BSJ’s recent criticisms of the medium. “I think, if I may say so, that you have sometimes been unreasona-ble in your dealing with physical phenomena, and especially so in the case of the Crandons,” he insisted. Referring to a recent demonstration in which Mrs. Crandon appeared to produce a dead man’s fingerprint from across the psychic void, Conan Doyle suggested that an apology was due: “It would be a fine thing if now when they have actually confirmed their position by fingerprints, and when such a stiff scientist as Tilbury has accepted it, you were to admit publicly that you have done them less than justice.”

The comments appear in a group of four remarkable documents purchased for the Minnesota Collections from the estate of Thomas R. Tietze, whose 1973 book Mysterious Atlantic City séance, would suffer from the shadows. Even the table itself became an active participant in the proceedings, moving on two legs or rising slowly toward the ceiling. At one especially lively sitting, it pursued a visitor from the room and knocked him off his feet.

Soon, Margery’s flamboyant demonstration and personal charm propelled her to international fame, resulting in a European tour to build up a consensus of favorable opinion from fast-flux experts. One of these, inevitably, was Conan Doyle. “I sat with her here,” he wrote in one of the letters acquired from the Tietze collection. “She is wonderful.”

Not everyone agreed. In December of 1922, Scientific American magazine launched an investiga- tion into the paranormal, with a cash prize totaling $5,000 — “$2,500 to the first person who produces a psychic photograph under its test conditions” and “$2,500 to the first person who produces a visible psychic manifestation of other character to the full satisfaction of these judges.” One of the judges mentioned was none other than Harry Houdini, the celebrated magician and escape artist — and self-described “scourge of the spirit mediums.”

The fragile alliance between Conan Doyle and Houdini, already strained in the wake of their famously conten- tion Atlantic City stent, would suffer bumps and raps rang out. Strange flashes of light pierced the darkness. Sometimes a wind-up Victrola would stop and start at its own accord, or disembodied voices would call out from the shadows. Even the table itself became an active participant in the proceedings, moving on two legs or rising slowly toward the ceiling. At one especially lively sitting, it pursued a visitor from the room and knocked him off his feet.

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From the President

T he Adventure of the Endowed Curatorship

"Mrs. Hudson may be the Holmes caretaker at 221B Baker Street, but it’s Tim Johnson in that role at 222 21st Avenue South in Minneapolis. Johnson, who has served as curator of special collections and rare books for the Libraries since 1998, was recently named the first E.W. McDermid Curator of the Sherlock Holmes Collections. From his office in Andersen Library, Johnson tends to the world’s largest collection of material related to Sherlock Holmes and its creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The Collections contains over 60,000 items and has been consulted by scholars and screenwriters alike. The curatorship was created by the Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections and the McDermid family in honor of E.W. ‘Mac’ McDermid, former University Librarian and a Holmes enthusiast since boyhood."

I was very happy to see this article and photo in the latest issue of Contenuum, the magazine of the University of Minnesota Libraries. The entire issue is available online at www.lib.umn.edu/contenuum. University Librarian Wendy Pradt Lougee had a column titled “Seeds of Change” where she explains the knowledge lifecycle, from discovery and use of information through creation and dissemination of new knowledge. I am always happy to see researchers using the Sherlock Holmes Collections to discover and create new insights.

We are thankful for all our collection researchers and the Friends that make it possible. Please consider making a donation of money or material. With your help we will make The Sherlock Holmes Collections a World Center for research and study of all things Sherlockian.

Richard J. Struem, M.D., B.S.I.

An Update from the Collections

including the Vincent Starrett papers, Norwegian Explorers records, and additional material from the collection of John Bennett Shaw. We’ve also continued to load more material into the U Media Archive; there are now over 700 items from the Holmes Collections in this online database.

I hope that your summer was both restful and productive and that you sense the excitement of the autumn season.

Thank you for your continued support of the Sherlock Holmes Collections! Timothy Johnson

An Update from the Collections

Summer has gone by much too quickly. This week the State Fair opens, running until Labor Day and the traditional end of the season. I guess the saying is true, “time flies when you’re having fun.” And we’ve been having fun this summer.

One of the highlights for me was a trip to the west coast and a visit with Jerry Margolin and his lovely wife Judy. The purpose of my visit was to look at Jerry’s immense art collection. Jerry’s been after me for a number of years to come west for a visit and the stars finally aligned to make it possible. So in mid-June I headed to Portland for a weekend visit.

I think it’s fair to say that my jaw dropped a number of times during the weekend. Jerry’s collection is quite amazing. We started on Friday afternoon, after my arrival, with our survey of the art. Many, if not all, of the walls of the Margolin home are covered with pieces depicting the great detective by a number of different artists. Some of the works fit into the comic book genre, some from the world of animation, and others by cartoonists or more “classical” works. Here I saw pen and ink, watercolor, over there oils and pastels. Many of the pieces were personalized with inscriptions to Jerry from the artist. But this was just the beginning.

We had to come up for breath now and then for a little refreshment. Judy and Jerry were the perfect hosts and I will always remember my very pleasant visit to see a most eye-opening collection. My thanks, again, to the Margolins for a delightful weekend.

Three volunteers, Yale Stenzler, Anjanette Schussler, and the ever-faithful Lucy Brusic, along with our new centralized processing staff helped get more material processed and ready for research use. A number of finding aids from this work are in preparation and should appear shortly for your use.

Summer also brings a number of visitors to Minneapolis and it has been my joy to show folks items from the Collections, tour them through the caverns, and bring them to the Mackrell replica of the 221B sitting room. Everyone comes away impressed. We’ve also had a number of researchers taking advantage of summer travel and coming to use the Collections, including an editor from Wired magazine who is working on aspects of Doyle and medicine. He promised to return this fall to continue research and perhaps we’ll be able to provide an update in a later newsletter.

It was a real pleasure to meet our new first lady," Karen Kaler, wife of new U of M President Eric Kaler and new Board of Regents chair Linda Cohen. Mrs. Kaler and Mrs. Cohen were guests at Andersen Library in August for a special tour and luncheon arranged by Friends of the Library board member Susan Hill Grosz. And, of course, the world’s greatest detective was mentioned during our time together! University Librarian Wendy Lougee was very kind in pointing out the establishment of the E.W. McDermid curatorship and the wonderful support of our Friends with the Collections.

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Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections
Using the Collections

Janice Weiner and Karen Kozlow, both from Chicago toured the Collections as well as Allen Mackler’s 221B room.

Musings

As Tim Johnson noted in his update, summer has come and (will be) gone much too quickly. It’s been a busy few months at the Collections with visitors and volunteers.

Many of our readers will be tempted to don “a flimsy dressing gown, bedroom slippers and silk stockings” to read Daniel Stashower’s lead article on the newly acquired Tom Tietze collection which includes the letters that Dan discusses. Nearly 100 years later, Margery the medium’s ability to “lie with charm, threaten with innocence, cajole with felicity, and scheme with charity” would serve her well in any number of fields, and she would probably continue to have publicity and controversy follow her. Mr. Tietze, according to Andrew Malec, was an authority on the history of parapsychology in the U.S. and Britain as well as on Jack London, serving as the president of the Jack London Society at one time. He was a presenter at the Norwegian Explorers 2004 conference and contributed the essay “Rationalism and Imagination in Conan Doyle’s The Horror of the Heights” to the facsimile edition of “The Horror of the Heights.” (Calabash Press, 2004)

Jon Lellenberg and Peter Blau have covered Bill Rabe’s 1961 Who’s Who and What’s What in our 50 Years Ago column. It’s an award winning book; Rabe noted on the cover, in good humor, that the book received “The ‘61 Acme Platinum Good Book Medal. Awarded each year to the publishers of the book that is least apt to fall apart in one’s bath.” It hasn’t fallen apart 50 years and who knows how many baths later, and Jon and Peter have turned an appreciative and fond eye toward their friend Bill Rabe. In Vol. 1, Number 4 of this newsletter we had an article about Rabe, but he is deserving of another rememberance at least every 14 years.

We’ve skipped our normal 100 Years Ago column so that we can include these two lengthy articles as well as a number of photographs accompanying those articles and of some recent visitors. It’s been an enthusiastic group of visitors from far and near, from the University President’s wife to Max McKuras, who happily accompanied his grandmother to the library with promises that he would be quiet (he was) and would later go toy shopping (we did).

We hope that you will continue to support the Sherlock Holmes Collections with your financial and material donations. Our annual letter and remittance envelope are enclosed.

Julie McKuras, ASH, BSI

Acquisitions

Among the newly received publications are the latest issues of Foolscap Documentary, the newsletter of The Three Garridebs; The Sound of the Baskervilles newsletter; Prescott’s Press; The Camden House Journal; The Pleasant Places of Florida’s newsletter; and Peter Blau’s Notes from the Spermacetti Press.

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Continued from Page 5

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Richard J. Sveum, M.D., B.S.I.

Summer has gone by much too quickly. This week the State Fair opens, running until Labor Day and the traditional end of the season. I guess the saying is true, “time flies when you’re having fun.” And we’ve been having fun this summer.

One of the highlights for me was a trip to the west coast and a visit with Jerry Margolin and his lovely wife Judy. The purpose of my visit was to look at Jerry’s immense art collection. Jerry’s been after me for a number of years to come west for a visit and the stars finally aligned to make it possible. So in mid-June I headed to Portland for a weekend visit. I think it’s fair to say that my jaw dropped a number of times during the weekend. Jerry’s collection is quite amazing. We started on Friday afternoon until Sunday morning, after my arrival, with our survey of the art. Many, if not all, of the walls of the Margolin home are covered with pieces depicting the great detective by a number of different artists. Some of the works fit into the comic book genre, some from the world of animation, and others by cartoonists or more “classical” works. Here I saw pen and ink, watercolor, over there oils and pastels. Many of the pieces were personalized with inscriptions to Jerry from the artist. But this was just the beginning. We had to come up for breath now and then for a little refreshment. Judy and Jerry were the perfect hosts and I will always remember my very pleasant visit to see a most eye-opening collection. My thanks, again, to the Margolins for a delightful weekend.

Over the next two days we sat together at the dining room table or in Jerry’s special library room poring over more drawings, prints, and portfolios. It truly took my breath away. By the time Sunday came and my departure to the Midwest my head was fairly exploding with all the images I’d seen. Jerry guessed that I’d probably looked at two thousand or so pieces of art from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning. Throughout our time Jerry offered a running commentary on the different pieces and artists; he is quite a fount of information and a collector in the true sense of the word. Collecting is in his genes. Of course we didn’t spend the entire time looking at Jerry’s collection. It was a real pleasure to meet our new “first lady,” Karen Kaler, wife of new U of M President Eric Kaler and new Board of Regents chair Linda Cohen. Mrs. Kaler and Mrs. Cohen were guests at Andersen Library in August for a special tour and luncheon arranged by Friends of the Library board member Susan Hill Gross. And, of course, the world’s greatest detective was mentioned during our time together!

University Librarian Wendy Lougee was very kind in pointing out the establishment of the E.W. McDermid curatorship and the wonderful support of our Friends with the Collections.

Three volunteers, Yale Stenzler, Anjanette Schussler, and the ever-faithful Lucy Brusic along with our new centralized processing staff helped get more material processed and ready for research use. A number of new finding aids from this work are in preparation and should appear shortly for your use.

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when there were only two journals with any significant circulation, and no Internet. To cite but one example, Rabe was the first to try to compile a comprehensive list of Invested Sherlockians, as well as an informative survey of Sherlockian societies, something (Blau spoofing here) no one since him has seriously attempted, let alone accomplished: my lists are fairly comprehensive, but hardly informative. And Rabe’s Commonplace Book was the first attempt to give wider circulation to what was appearing in the general press.

The Internet makes this all too easy today, but in those days just about the only other information came from squibs by the editors in the BSJ and SHJ. The Sherlockian world of the 1960s was quite different from today—in many ways quite parochial, as it wasn’t easy to participate in meetings of far-flung societies, and quite difficult to know much about Sherlockians in meetings of far-flung societies, essentially just announcing that it was available, and it is unknown how many copies were sold. Let alone that it was acquired and valued it, with rather grand in 1961 to be able to learn anything about Sherlockians if anything about Sherlockians from squibs by the editors in the BSJ and SHJ. It was easy to obtain information of all sorts in those distant days, and Who’s Who’s What, for many, was a project. Edgar W. Smith, who had been so much for so long not only to the BSJ, but Sherlockians broadly, had died in 1960, and Who’s Who’s What was undertaken because of that. When it appeared the following year it was dedicated to Smith, with a touching dedicatory essay by Russell McLean saying in part:

What shall a lonesome friend say about a man who, with a matchless pen in his hand and an unquenchable joy in his bosom, did more to make sound and perennial our Sherlockian fellowship than all the members of that fellowship, gathered and combined? He would have loved this book and hailed its author. And those two verbs might be interchanged, with unaltered accuracy.

There was much fear, when Edgar died, that our communion’s single, indispensable factor had departed, that all Sherlockian fellowship, with the animating spirit now grown still, might swiftly falter and soon expire.

Probably the best word to be said about this volume is that it quite extinguishes such fear.

Not that Rabe was now content. In the first place, he believed in an expanding Sherlockian universe, and was conscious of the book’s incompleteness: “The majority of the entries have been either written by, or drawn directly from Forms 221B 2 completed by the S’ians concerned,” he explained in his Forward. I have a feeling that I have overlooked many distinguished deceased S’ians, as well as their more lively colleagues; that I have asterisked scores into inactivity which are very active, and that there are probably a few* lingering spirits who are just new and wonderful way to get information about the Sherlockian world.

It was in fact to foster a sense of community, more than anything else, that prompted Bill Rabe to undertake this...
further damage as the Scientific American investigation progressed. Conan Doyle expressed outrage at the "capital error" of bringing an avowed enemy of spiritualism into the proceedings. "The Commission is, in my opinion, a farce," he declared. Houdini, for his part, claimed to be open-minded. "I am willing to be convinced," he said of his work as a psychic investigator, "but the proof must be such as to leave no vestige of doubt that what is claimed to be done is accomplished only through or by supernatural power." In his view, Margery fell short of this standard.

Houdini saw no evidence of genuine psychic phenomena on Lime Street, but admitted to being greatly impressed with the so-called "Crewe Circle," drawing several comments on the Margery case and giving candid assessments of other psychic researchers—many of whom, in his view, demonstrated an unhealthy skepticism. In his letter to Dr. Prince, Conan Doyle furnishes an especially blunt assessment of Harry Price, founder of Britain's "National Laboratory"—for the name of 'National Laboratory'—for the room which we let him have rent free of any kind to justify it. His taking the leader to guide them. We are agreed, I think, that the presses are always on the line against other, more skeptical officers of the organization. One of the Tietze letters is a note of congratulation to Edwards. "I am so pleased that the progressives won so well capable a leader to guide them. We are agreed, I am sure, that every precaution must be taken, but we are out to look for positives and not for negatives, like every other science." One can only imagine what Sherlock Holmes might have made of this plea for investigative partiality. "It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence," as he famously observed. "It biases the judgment."

Holmes might also have had a word of useful advice for Margery herself. In time, the fingerprint evidence that Conan Doyle mentioned so favorably to Dr. Prince would contribute to her undoing, it was discovered to be a thumbprint belonging to her dentist, who had supplied wax for the experiment. One recalls that John Oldacre came to a similarly unhappy end over an initially-promising thumbprint in "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder," where Margery was concerned.

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in our Spiritualistic headquarters is in itself an absurdity."

Evven some of the movement's leading lights come in for harsh treatment in the Tietze material: "I saw Sir Wil- liam and said what I could to keep him straight," Conan Doyle reports in another of the letters. This is almost certainly Sir William Barrett, one of the founders of Britain's Society for Psychical Research. Though Barrett is mentioned in Conan Doyle's The History of Spiritualism as one of the Society's "great men," the author is dismissive in the Tietze letter. "He is old and rather timid but I honor his past work."

Conan Doyle was delighted when Fred- erick Edwards, a Margery supporter, was elected president of the American Society for Psychical Research. Holding the line against other, more skeptical officers of the organization. One of the Tietze letters is a note of congratulation to Edwards: "I am so pleased that the progressives won so capable a leader to guide them. We are agreed, I am sure, that every precaution must be taken, but we are out to look for positives and not for negatives, like every other science." One can only imagine what Sherlock Holmes might have made of this plea for investigative partiality. "It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence," as he famously observed. "It biases the judgment."

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50 Years Ago

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wanting to be able to draw caricatures of their distinguished associates. "But in the second place, he was already looking ahead as he sent the volume to press, adding: "It is hoped that all these matters will be set right in the 1962 WW&WW, known in abbreviated military terminology as GW4." That did come out the following year, and after a while he planned for a third edition come 1968. But it was not realized. He had acknowledged his reliance upon the technical resources of his university employer: "Text typed by a charming, patient and understanding young lady, Miss Nancy Kelly, on a Royal Electric Typewriter which adds considerable status to the correspondence of the University of Detroit Public Information Dept., as does Miss Kelly. Display type and assorted illustrations stolen from wherever we could find them. Printed on a University of Detroit imported (a good, though not a great year) offset press under the personal supervision of Dick Masseran," and so on. When Rabe retired in 1967 he lost those resources, the PC-based era of self-publishing was not yet at hand, and four crammed jumbo three-ring binders in which he had been collecting data for the '68 edition went into a cardboard box stored in the attic of his new home in remote Sault Ste. Marie. There they gathered dust some twenty years. But it is an old maxim of mine (Lellegberg speaking here) that no research ever goes unutilized. When the BSI Archival History got started, Bill swooped upon its first two volumes eagerly, reviewing the second enthusiastically for the Summer 1991 BSI. Then he went up to his attic, found the old carton with those four jumbo binders containing the raw material for the 1968 Who’s Who & What’s What, and shipped them to me. The data they contain facilitated the Archival History volumes that followed, and those shabby and precious binders continue to sit on a bookshelf in my study where I consult them frequently today. Bill Rabe’s Sherlockian Who’s Who & What’s What was and remains a great accomplishment of permanent value. ☮

Jon Lellegberg & Peter Blau

50 YEARS AGO

So much for shop talk, here is the data.

You know his methods, use them.


In 1961, Wilmer T. Rabe produced the first edition of Who’s Who & What’s What for a Sherlockian world prepared and in need of it. This was a decade into a remarkable, roughly five-decade career as a Sherlockian and Baker Street irregular that encompassed ten times the activity of the average irregular. For “average” Bill Rabe was not: he was unconventional, made the most of it, and to those of us who knew him, is unforgettable.

Rabe was born in 1921, and hove into Sherlockian view in 1953 while serving in the U.S. Army’s psychological operations service in Germany, work for which his future affairs would show he was eminently suited. After returning to civilian life, he made a career at the University of Detroit as an “academic publicist.” Eventually he retired to Sault Ste. Marie on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, at the Canadian border, and soon had a new life there as the official island historian of nearby Mackinac Island, dubbed by him “the Miami Beach of the North,” and as press agent for its historic and majestic Grand Hotel.

Rabe was imaginative, and had a talent for making madness respectable, like serving as chief telephone book critic for the Detroit newspapers, and Detroit Hachetman of The Friends of Livio Borden. At Lake Superior State University later on, he was a founder of The Unicorn Hunters: preferring Unicorn Questors because, he claimed, you shouldn’t hunt what you can’t find—but that did not stop him from issuing tens of thousands of unicorn hunting licenses. Up on Mackinac Island he invented and also saw gleefully to the publicizing of an International Stone-Skipping Tournament, a World Samurrying Day, and other annual events of like madcap nature, including the custom of ceremonially burning a snowman on the first day of Spring.

Caring about culture’s struggle with itself, he created Hursh Records whose big hit was an original cast recording of “An Evening with Marcel Marceau.” Caring about language, he launched an annual List of Words Banished from the Queen’s English for Mis-Use, Over-Use, and General Uselessness, still issued on New Year’s Day by Lake Superior State U. (This year’s banished words: viral and Facebook/Google used as verbs.) He scorned bureaucracy, claiming to have once filed an income tax return filled out entirely in Roman numerals. He liked laughter, and was an enthusiastic member of The Sons of the Desert, the Laurel & Hardy fan club. And he loved Sherlock Holmes, so he became a Baker Street Irregular. Not surprisingly, he began by creating his own society while in the Army: The Old Soldiers of Baker Street, or Old SOBs. He was in fact still young at the time; the photo below was taken when he visited the brand-new Sherlock Holmes Klubben in Copenhagen, entering Klubben legend by showing up with the first bottle of Scotch the thirsty Danes had seen since before the war. When he returned home from the Army to Detroit, he joined The Amateur Mendicant Society there, founded by Russell McLauchlin a few years earlier. Edgar W. Smith, a good judge of character, invested Rabe in the BSI in 1935 as “Colonel Warburton’s Madness.”

Over the years, Rabe’s contributions to Sherlockiana were legion. Among other things, he installed the first Sherlockian plaques at the Englisher Hof in Meiringen. He put out The Commonplace Book: a periodic compilation of newspaper and magazine articles about Sherlock Holmes and his followers. He tape-recorded memorable moments at BSI dinners and other events, issuing them on a set of records called Voices from Baker Street, now available on compact disc from Wexseus Press. He became interested in James Montgomery’s extracanonical song “Aunt Clara,” which he had written.

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however, Conan Doyle never wavered. To the end of his life he insisted that Margery had been the victim of a ‘very deadly plot’ to discredit her. Annoyed over Houdini’s role in the drama, he sounded off on the subject of “Houdini-nitis,” a syndrome based on twin fallacies. “The first is that Spiritualism depends upon physical phenomena for its proofs,” he wrote, while the “second is that manual dexterity bears some relation to brain capacity.”

Nearly 100 years later, Margery’s many paradoxes remain unresolved. It is uniquely fitting, in the circumstances, that the most intriguing of the Tietze documents is a note sent to Dr. Prince from Margery herself. Written in a fine, clear hand on Lime Street letterhead, it shows Margery to have been a woman of rare character—and, one might add, audacity—as she complains of having been misquoted by Houdini in a recent newspaper account. “I detest publicity,” she insists, “and do everything I can to avoid it.”

Mediums, it would seem, are never to be entirely trusted — not the best of them.