50 Years Ago Continued from Page 3

The history recorded gleefully the founders’ original impulses, Shaw’s frolics (he had found it distressingly hard to get a drink at his first several meetings, something he cared for good at one held at his Tulsa home), Milt Perry’s creation of a local Sherlock Holmes legend for Kansas City, the late Logan Clendenning M.D. as local hero/volunteer, the growth of the Sherlock Holmes philology of a scion society overlapping the Kansas/Missouri border where the Civil War raged for ten years before Fort Sumter, the all too related rise of a Jesse James faction inside the scion, joint expeditions with Jason Rouby’s Arkasas Valley Investors and Stafford Davis’s Afghanis Fenceners when they arose in Little Rock and Tulsa, the personal archives and memories of Davis’s Afghanistan Perceivers when they arose in Little Rock and Tulsa, joint expeditions with Jason Rouby’s Fort Sumter, the all too related rise of the scion’s archives from oblivion, the January 1989 BSI weekend in New York, a half dozen or so of us were discussing this threat, and I can still hear my voice suddenly muttering “I could do something about it.” I would not have thought so or said so had I not already done the Plainsmen’s 25th-anniversary history the year before. As before, I was naïve. I intended to do 1930 through 1960, concluding with Edgar W. Smith’s death and Julian Wolff’s selection as the new Commissioner, and thought I could find enough primary source material for a decent 250 pp. book. Things worked out differently. I’ve so far done eight volumes of BSI Archival History, for a total of about 1,750 pp. (plus an historical novel about the 1930s/40s BSI with a “sources & methods” companion volume on its way), and haven’t gotten to the 1960s yet. And I’m still finding primary source material about the BSI’s first three decades, as others have.

“Contention,” as a verb and as a noun, is a word that has gained importance in our digital age. It is used to describe a situation where two or more parties are in conflict over a particular issue. Contentions can occur in various contexts, such as politics, business, law, and personal relationships.

The Adventure of the eBay Auction

Dr. Richard Sturtz William Sturtz

John Bergquist, BSI

For any inquiries contact:

Timothy J. Johnson, Curator
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Sherlock Holmes Collections
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Mailing last corrections requested—

Because of the high cost of returned newsletters, we would appreciate being informed of changes of address or other corrections

Timothy J. Johnson, Curator

50 Years Ago

2 From the President

4 Acquisitions

4 Musings

5 An Update from the Collections

5 Remembrances

The Adventure of the eBay Auction

By Timothy Johnson, E.W. McDermid Curator of the Sherlock Holmes Collections

The short letter quoted above, dated September 14, 1923, came to my attention in late February. A Sherlockian collector on the East coast — and a Friend of our Sherlock Holmes Collections — Robert Hess, alerted us to its existence and the fact that it was being auctioned on eBay. A link to the item was provided by our collector-friend and so I looked at the description and images on the eBay site. Along with the letter was the original envelope, addressed to “The Chief Librarian, Public Library, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.” The reactions of a couple of our local Friends of the Holmes Collections were unanimous — we had to have this item for the Library. And so began “The Adventure of the eBay Auction.”

My initial reaction was the same. Doyle’s letter, with its local connection to Minneapolis, was too good to pass up. But I had no idea about proper library procedure in acquiring items through online auctions. I knew that we could — and did — purchase items through traditional auctions. But online auctions are slightly different animals. After conferring with colleagues in the acquisitions department it was determined that the best approach was for me to purchase the item and then seek reimbursement for my expenditure.

Unfortunately, this scenario presented a set of problems. I did not have an eBay account, a PayPal account (used by most sellers on eBay to facilitate purchases), no experience with bidding in such an auction, and perhaps not enough money of my own to cover the purchase. Also, the clock was ticking. It was now the last day of the auction, which ended at 3:58 pm. I spent the latter part of the morning and early afternoon attacking each of the problems. In short order I established my eBay account, set up and linked a PayPal account with my bank and eBay accounts, received financial backing from our Friends, and received valuable tips from my colleague, Linda Vecchi, who is an old hand on eBay. Her final admonition was to settle on my maximum bid and to use a figure that was a bit unusual (so that I would not lose out on an item by a few pennies or dollars). About ninety minutes before the auction ended I settled on a maximum bid and submitted it to eBay. All that remained was the waiting.

The waiting was excruciating. The Doyle letter had been online for five days and yet, when I posted my bid, I was the sole bidder. No one else had expressed an interest with another bid. The time remaining on an auction is posted above the description of the item. When the timer hits one hour remaining the numbers turn red and count down...
Nothing has been the same since. I returned to the Canon with a will, discovering the Baker Street Irregulars for the first time in the process. After I removed to Washington D.C. in 1971, I got involved in organized Sherlockiana for the first time, in the BSJ’s Red Circle scion society that Peter Blau had revived the previous year upon his own arrival in the nation’s capital.

In late 1972, home for Christmas again, I pressed the now-dormant scions last known point of contact for a dinner of some kind. On December 27th, Ernest Wilfer and his son Robert, two of the three original founders, and Milt Perry, met me at a restaurant whose name evoked old London mob ties, which seemed appropriate enough. The third founder was out of town, but to my astonishment I found I knew all three. The Willers’ home was a block or so from mine, while Bob and I had gone to different schools, we had played together occasionally as boys. The third founder, John (Stephelemon) Altman, had been in the class behind mine in prep school.

I want to say a word about Ernest Wilfer, who impressed me that night in a lasting way. He was an accountant, strongly resembling Professor Moriarty in appearance, but with an attractive sense of irregolar fun that was infectious. He had been infected with Sherlock Holmes himself in 1920, as a high school student turns up reading “The Engineer’s Thumb” in geometry class. He had been a faithful reader of the Baker Street Journal in August 1963, and over a thousand miles away when The Great Alkali Plaasmens was founded October 20th, 1963. I was at home at Christmas but hadn’t seen the plug for it in an October 28th Kansas City Times “About Town” column, and so had no idea that their first dinner meeting was taking place December 28th. But of course the pioneers were there, including Milt, then Curator of the Museum at the Harry Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Mo.

During college I fell out of the habit of rereading the Canon every year. But then one day in graduate school in 1968, I spotted William S. Bar- ing-Gould’s Annotated Sherlock Holmes at the Pickwick Bookshop of blessed memory on Hollywood Boulevard.

One can’t help but notice the influence of the Baker Street Irregulars on the BSJ tonight, when I returned to Santa Fe, N.M., in 1969, it took the wind out of the scions’ sails for several years. His move put Shaw and the Plaasmens at opposite ends of the Santa Fe Trail, but with a far greater distance to overcome. One thing led to another, though, and The Great Alkali Plaasmens revived, with me running it at long distance from 1973 to 1982. That proved easy to do because each meeting a call was made, four or five times a year, some local party in a once-a-gang growing membership would take responsibility for its arrangements and theme, and carry it off splendidly. I missed the majority of those. I’m sorry to say for instance, the Darmoor Evening on the Bakerstreetian grounds of the Kansas City Museum in September 1977 the history says “Lemmings forever afterwards grabbed his teeth over missing this meeting,” and how true is that to this day.

But the moon with its mysteries and its strange immigrants remains as infectious as ever” in the Canon’s own words, and the Evening’s chief plotter, John Altman (a “smiling face and a murderous heart”), kept it so. After a canonical repast of bread, tinned tongue, and preserved peaches, the Plaasmens were subjected to a something Hunt—a scavenger census around the museum grounds based on The Hound of the Baskervilles and then treated to a pantomimed reenactment of the adventure by the Altman, Carl Helmstetter, Tim Kirk, Vikki Marshall, Mary Nelson, and Ernest Wilfer.

I kept Morley in mind after that. Two or three years later, I wrote him a letter saying that I had a copy of that wonderful book he gave me. His Countryman’s honnour, printed to the Amperands Club, and I would love to have it inscribed by him. I told him that I appreciated his work and had a number of his books in my library. I offered to send him the volume and provide postage and a suitable container for its return. I explained the case he would have in complying with my request. And I enclosed a postcard for him to send back if I could be permitted to send it to him.

The postcard came back with three words on it: “Send it on.” He did not even sign it. The card just said, “Send it on.” I did, and he put in a nice inscription and sent it back. That is the kind of thing that warms the heart of a book lover: You have the book. You have the copy of the letter saying why he will not sign it. But your copy is signed.

As to Coventry Street, the focus of Doyle’s query, no such name appears in early street directories. Nor does she appear on any early maps of the city. A map of Minneapolis published in 1916 by the Minneapolis Directory Company lists Cooper Street and Cromwell Drive but nothing under Coventry Likewise, a 1921 map produced by the Hudson Publishing Company jumps from Cooper Street to Crystal Lake Avenue. Cromwell Drive, apparently unprocted by civic planners.

In the same way, little if anything exists for an architect named Philip Jackson. He does not appear in the American Institute of Architects Historical Directory. The Minnesota State Census Index (which includes data from 1865, 1875, 1885, 1895 and 1905) lists five individuals of that name. Three of these appear in the 1865 census, two in the 1865 census. None are resident in Minneapolis. The online Biography and Genealogy Master Index indexes no entries for such an individual. The only mention of a Philip Jackson in the Minneapolis Tribune newspaper between 1867 and 1922 is an article about one such Jackson, an executive in New York, who waged war with his neighbors over the height of his split-level fence.

The letter conjures other mysteries and connections, such as the fact the Miss Countryman was related to a famous architectural act in the Twin Cities, L.S. Buffing who was the architect of the museum and other major buildings in the architectural community with the invention of the skyscraper. Or the fact that the house is within a short distance of the site of the Union Depot, and on the same street, as our current head of the Norwegian Explorers, Gary Thaden, once told me. He writes that the site “is a wonderful talk he had given in Miss Christy Allen and Julie McKuras. Other mysteries I’ll leave to my readers and other interested parties, Doe it but it is my impression that EB was engaged Doyle at this time? Did he ever publish his findings? What was the source of his information about Minneapolis and the architect? Such are the joys a new acquisition brings to the Collections.

My thanks to Bob Hess for alerting us to the letter’s existence on eBay. For Lisa Vello’s help in learning the title and outs and ins of online auctions, and for Gary Thaden in his attempts to track down more information on the architect Philip Jackson. More mysteries await, and the adventure of the eBay auction continues.
Most of what you’ve just read was posted to my blog, "Primary Sources," that I maintain regularly and to which I added the image of the Conan Doyle letter.

I surged out of my chair with a whoop, a holler, and fist pumps through the air. Those in the office knew what was up. I recalibrated a new maximum bid, just in case I needed to go higher. 3 seconds, 4, 3, 2. There were no last-second bidders. I’d won the auction! The seconds continued to roll by. Under a minute the countdown continued second by second. 40 seconds, 30, 20, 10. I’d been told that some bidders act in the last seconds. I was fortunate that the bidding had stopped in the last few seconds. 10 seconds, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. There were no last-second bidders. I’d won the auction! The letter was mine (with an ultimate home in the Sherlock Holmes Collections).

The Adventure of the eBay Auction

Continued from Page 1

“Dartmoor. The Sun sets. The moon. The drinkers of Altrum are exalted,” one specimen gleefully reported, and The Hound was certainly restless, as only someone whose middle name is Stapleton would dare do it. Mrs. Hudson was more than usually perturbed by the fact that the Hound was using more than usual, Watson a trifle denser. Sir Hugo was more wasteful toward his maidly victim than ever, but alas for him, she was “not into knoky relationships.” (She swooped down on Tom Gee, a very married Kansas City Policeman joining the caravan for the first time, and turned him red as a tomato with a sudden kiss as she fled from Hugo and his friends into the distance.) Dr. Mortimer showed a sinister interest in adding Holmes’s skull to his anthropological museum without further delay. Miss Stapleton bloated bubble gum. Sir Henry was nifty enough for the squirrels to pick up and carry off. The Barrymores bore an uncanny resemblance to “African Gods.” And when Holmes, disguised as a tramp, tried to approach Watson and Sir Henry surreptitiously, he was rewarded with a severe thrashing for his impudence.

But the Master solved the case, and Stapleton got his consequences with a steaming “Sir, semper bastards!” from the narrator, with much cheering and bucking and a “ dBubs up.” I did exactly that. Exactly. Her class had engaged in some activity that didn’t require her immediate attention before she left for class, I told her that I’d be going off to college in the autumn. Chris now recalls: “The bus trip home from Kansas City to Lawrence after the Plainsmen meeting at which I was asked to address the group on my favorite case late that night, past exhaustion for a young ten-ager; I fell asleep the moment the bus lights were turned off, and woke up upon arrival, not at all sure where I’d been.”

From the President

After a long, snowy winter, summer is just around the corner. Our conference is just around the corner and we soon will be gathering for our triennial conference. “Sherlock Holmes Through Time and Place.” As many of you might have heard, the hotel initially contracted for our guests is currently undergoing renovations which will not be completed by August, and therefore we have changed our conference venue. Details for the conference and our new hotel are available at http://www.norwegianexplorers.org/2013veyboctimcr.pdf

Acquisitions

Long time friend of the Sherlock Holmes Collections Charlie Press sent a package to Norwegian Explorer President Gary Thaden. In his accompanying notes, Charlie E.W. McDiarmid indicates that he was a University of Minnesota graduate student between January and August 1954 and had an opportunity to attend meetings of the Norwegian Explorers. He recalled meeting several of the founders of the scion; Bryce Crawford, Theodore Eglen and E.W. McDermid. He recalled those meetings and the topics such as Bryce Crawford’s trip to London. In his package, he included numerous newspaper clipping from both the Minneapolis newspaper as well as the University of Minnesota Daily which featured news of the Explorers.

Founding Chair of the newly formed John W. Watson Society, Donald A. Yancey, PhD, BSI “The Greek Interpreter,” has recently sent in materials to the Collections regarding the society as well as information regarding 221b Cells (http://www.221bcells.com). Plans are underway for the sale of their art with a portion of profits to be donated to “the University of Minnesota Sherlock Holmes Collections and to The Napa Valley Nolopos of S.H. for educational purposes.” Their society website is www.johnwatsonsociety.org

Louise Nicholson sent materials pertaining to the planned 2014 excavations of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London. “In India with Sherlock Holmes” will take place February 17 – March 2, 2014. Information on the trip is available by contacting Louise at indiacholson@nyc.rr.com.

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Our lead article this issue focuses on the recent acquisition of a letter written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It appears that Conan Doyle was following in the footsteps of Sherlock Holmes as he attempted to solve a mystery about a Minneapolis addressee and a man who lived there. Curator Tim John- son, with the able assistance of Friends of the Libraries Bob Hess and Gary Thaden, was able to determine that the question posed by Conan Doyle could only be answered in the negative, but in the process of obtaining the letter Tim had his own mystery of “how do I set up an account to buy the letter” Case solved.

In this issue we’ve skipped our normal 100 Years Ago column in order to devote more space to not only our lead article but also to our 50 Years Ago article written by Jon Leibeng. Jon has given us all a look at The Great Allah Planners and Architects and his history of that item. We’d like to thank not only those who contributed their memories of that experience but even more to the vast and powerful group that put into maintaining the materials that document the life of the Planners. It’s a good reminder that it’s too late to make sure that scion societies do not collect and preserve those memories and therefore newspaper clippings that tell the history of a group.

Charles Press’s recent donation of materials to the Sherlock Holmes Collections have added some unique items to the Norwegian Explorers Archives, held at the Elmer L. Andersen Library. No one at the library who watched at the newspaper clipping of E.W. McDermid and Elmer Davis had ever seen it before. Was it a record of a Norwegian Explorer’s event? Not really, but it definitely gives testimony to the relationships among those with a common interest in Sherlock Holmes and Minnesota. Charlie has also donated a page from the Collections: a page from the Hound magazine, containing a poem, and a copy of the Beeton’s Christmas Annual from 1887. Feedback following the event indicated that our station was one of the more popular stops during the evening.

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

In Memory Of

Zachary James LeFave
From
Mike and Julie McKuras

In Honor Of

Living kimball
From
Mickey Fromkin

An Update from the Collections

The snow and icicles seem to be giving Minnesota a break on the weather (did Holmes?), but this was a long winter. As I write, spaces are full, class dates complete, and graduation ceremonies nearing their end. Summer is just around the corner.

This time of year marks intersections and changes at many of our work in. In early March I lobbed at the state capitol on behalf of the Minne- sota Library Association. Along the way I bumped into fellow Norwegian Explorer and Friends board member Gary Thaden (who is also a member of the Hennepin County Library Board) Together we advocated for continued public library funding and for agencies supporting library activities across the state. I don’t lob Holmes ever lobbying government officials (with the possible exception of his brother, who lobbied the great detective in return, e.g. “The Bruce Partington Plans”). Now, with the legislative session complete, it appears our lobbying made a difference.

Also in March I participated in another “speed dating” session, this time with members of the Loft Literary Center and Friends of the Libraries. These evening events – dubbed “Taste of the Treasures” – are part of our outreach effort and designed to give allied organizations a sense of the breadth and depth of our collections. At my station, one of eleven, I displayed items from the Collections: a page from the Hound magazine, containing a poem, and a copy of the Beeton’s Christmas Annual from 1887. Feedback following the event indicated that our station was one of the more popular stops during the evening.

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There is a highlight of early spring was an extended visit from Derham Groves, one of our resident Sherlockian friends in Australia and a faculty member at the University of Mel- bourne. It was a delight to see Derham again, as he was one of the very first members of the Holmesian community I met during my postgrad. Together, in those early days, we collaborated on exhibitions featuring the work of our architectural students and the home designs they created based on characters in the Canon. Over the years he has also donated items to the Collections. Now, in these latter days, we renewed our conversation. It was great to have him here for two weeks. In the same way it was wonderful to see another returning scholar, Rose- mary Erickson Johnsen from Gover- nors State University near Chicago. Rosemary enjoyed an extended stay in April, using materials from a number of our archival collections for future publication.

Rosemary’s and Derham’s visits bring to mind our Elmer L. Andersen Research Scholars Program. This program supports scholars for projects that require use of one or more of the collections in Andersen Library. The deadline for the next round of applications will occur sometime this fall. More information will be available on our website sometime later this summer.

A substantial part of my time in April was spent in a number of all-day work- shops on electronic records offered by the Society of American Archivists and funded by the University Libraries. My thanks to the Libraries for allowing me the opportunity to participate in these workshops. As more archival material is created digitally, repositories like ours need to create processes, procedures, and infrastructure to handle the influx of “born digital” materials. The Archives and Special Collections De- partment is preparing for this new era through training sessions such as these and the development of a new program for acquiring, preserving, and making accessible these digital materials. While we are still in the early stages of this program, we are confident in our abilities to create and administer this new kind of archive. I will attempt to keep you informed of new developments and answer any questions you might have about digital items.

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Tim Johnson

4 Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections

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Charlies gift will help complete the Norwegian Explorers’ Archives held in the Sherlock Holmes Collections.

I hope to see many of our friends here in Minneapolis in August for “Sherlock Holmes Through Time and Place.”

From the President

On Friday August 9, 2013 we will have our Conference registration, opening sessions, and Annual Membership Meeting of the Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections at the Elmer L. Andersen Library on the west bank of the University of Minnesota campus. Tim Johnson has put together an exhibit of items from the Collections, and during the meeting we will honor Sherlock Holmes Collections friend J Randolph Cox as well as highlight our guest speaker. On Saturday and Sunday we will meet in The Commons Hotel on the east bank of the University of Minnesota. I hope that everyone will be able to attend our Annual Membership Meeting and renew their connection with the Friends. Together we can make the Sherlock Holmes Collections the World Center for the Study and Appreciation of Sherlock Holmes.

Richard J. Sveyum, MD, BSI

An Update from the Collections

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From
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In Memory Of

Jravm Kent
From
Mickey Froehkin

Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections
The Adventure of the eBay Auction

Continued from Page 1

by minutes and seconds. Somewhere around 95 minutes remaining I needed to leave my chair and attend to some other business. When I returned, the timer was under 30 minutes. No other bids appeared. I nervously sat in my chair, tapping my fingers, bouncing my foot, and all the while got up and went to another end. With about 10 minutes remaining I stayed glued to my chair, muttering “Come on, come on…” to myself, hoping that no one would swoop in at the last moment and bid the item higher. The red numbers continued their countdown: 5 minutes, 4, 3, 2. At ninety seconds I was locked in on the monitor, tapping, tapping, and then bidding, and I was still the sole bidder. The seconds continued to roll by. Under a minute the countdown continued second by second: 40 seconds, 39, 30. I’d been told that no other bidders act in the last seconds. I recalibrated a new maximum bid, just in case I needed to go higher. 3 seconds, 2, 1. There were no last second bidders. I’d won the auction! The letter was mine (with an ultimate home in the Sherlock Holmes Collections).

I surged out of my chair with a whoop, a bolter, and fists pumping through the air. Those in the office knew what was up and shared in the excitement. Lisa was down the hall, teaching a class. Earlier, before she left for class, I told her that I would be going off to teach a class. With about 10 minutes remaining I was locked in on the monitor, tapping, tapping, and then bidding, and I was still the sole bidder. The seconds continued to roll by. Under a minute the countdown continued second by second: 40 seconds, 39, 30. I’d been told that no other bidders act in the last seconds. I recalibrated a new maximum bid, just in case I needed to go higher. 3 seconds, 2, 1. There were no last second bidders. I’d won the auction! The letter was mine (with an ultimate home in the Sherlock Holmes Collections).

Most of what you’ve just read was posted to my blog, “Primary Source,” that was blog developed by the Archives and Special Collections Department of the University Libraries, shortly after the Doyle letter was acquired. This new avenue for outreach allows all units in the department an opportunity to announce new acquisitions, publicize events and exhibits, and generally open a new window for sharing what we do. Recent postings include insights on new stuff, book signings, lectures, our current perform- arts exhibits, and even the challenges of learning to operate our stock pickers in the caverns.

Acquisition of the Doyle letter came with a few more mysteries and interesting relationships. The recipient of the lettre, Granta Countryman, directed the Minneapolis Public Library from 1904 to 1936. During the celebration of the library’s 100th anniversary in 1940 and deliver the featured Countryman… When he began his address, he said, “Friends, Romans,” and then he bowed to Miss Countryman. I thought it was so clever. The speech was beautifully written and delivered, and the Ampersand Club printed a facsimile of it in a small bound volume. Club

‘Dartmoor The Sun sets. The Moorlanders and friends of Allan are exalted,’ one spectator gleefully reported, and The Hound was certainly riotous as only someone whose middle name is Stapleton would dare do it. Mrs. Hudson was more heartful toward the fairness that is Stapleton than usual. Watson a trifle denser. Sir Hugo was more heartful toward his madly victim than ever. But alas for him, she was “not into little relationships.” (She swooped down on Tom Gee, a very married Kansas City Policeman joining the caravan for the first time, and turned him red as a tomato with a sudden kiss as she fled from Hugo and his wrecked companions.) Dr. Mortimer showed a sinister interest in adding Holmes’s skill to his anthropolo- gical museum without further delay. Miss Stapleton blew bubble gum. Sir Henry was其实 enough for the squirrels to pick up and carry off. The Barrymores bore an uncanny resemblance to “American Gods.” And when Holmes, disguised as a tramp, tried to approach Watson and Sir Henry surreptitiously, he was rewarded with a severe thrashing for his impudence.

But the Master solved the case, and Stapleton got his consequence with a sneering, “Sir, semper botamatus” from the narrator, with much cheer- ing and bugling, and his California seal, to be (from his point of view) “Primary Sourcery,” the most of it in a small bound volume. Club

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The next day, with all accounts now for a few more moments of work before another errand. With about 10 minutes remaining I stayed glued to my chair, muttering “Come on, come on…” to myself, hoping that no one would swoop in at the last moment and bid the item higher. The red numbers continued their countdown: 5 minutes, 4, 3, 2. At ninety seconds I was locked in on the monitor, tapping, tapping, and then bidding, and I was still the sole bidder. The seconds continued to roll by. Under a minute the countdown continued second by second: 40 seconds, 39, 30. I’d been told that no other bidders act in the last seconds. I recalibrated a new maximum bid, just in case I needed to go higher. 3 seconds, 2, 1. There were no last second bidders. I’d won the auction! The letter was mine (with an ultimate home in the Sherlock Holmes Collections).

50 Years Ago

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the bus trip home from Kansas City to Lawrence after the Plains- man meeting at which I was asked if I would come to Lawrence at night, past exhaustion for a young teen-ager; I fell asleep the moment the bus lights were turned off, and did not wake up until arrival, not at all sure where I was. The fiftieth anniversary of the Plainsman’s meeting, and whether I had re- ally seen on these awesome responsi- bilities at his feet. It turned out to be true, and my frame of mind in pursuing the secretary- ship was a good deal more energetic, as I sprayed typewritten letters in all directions over the country, on Tom Gee, a very married Kansas City Policeman joining the caravan for the first time, and turned him red as a tomato with a sudden kiss as she fled from Hugo and his wrecked companions.) Dr. Mortimer showed a sinister interest in adding Holmes’s skill to his anthropolo- gical museum without further delay. Miss Stapleton blew bubble gum. Sir Henry was actually enough for the squirrels to pick up and carry off. The Barrymores bore an uncanny resemblance to “American Gods.” And when Holmes, disguised as a tramp, tried to approach Watson and Sir Henry surreptitiously, he was rewarded with a severe thrashing for his impudence.

But the Master solved the case, and Stapleton got his consequence with a sneering, “Sir, semper botamatus” from the narrator, with much cheer- ing and bugling, and his California seal, to be (from his point of view) “Primary Sourcery,” the most...
he is how the Author’s Note described the archives of The Great Alkali Plannem of Greater Kansas City, from which I wrote my 25th-anniversary history of my hometown’s BSJ society in 1988.

Today those archives are in the Sher- holms Collections, sent there in 1969 by the late Milton Perry (“Nathan Garrine,” BSJ after that history of mine was done. Milton had been a Plannem since 1963, the first to respond to the initial notice of its founding by three others. For me the 25th-anniver tertiary history has been a vicarious labor of love, because I’d missed the early years. I’d left for college in Califor- iny in August 1963, and was over a thousand miles away when The Great Alkali Plannem was founded. October 20th, 1963 was my last day. But he had been a Plannem since October 29th Kansas Times’ ‘About Town’ column, and so had no idea that their first dinner meeting was taking place in December 28th. But none of the editors were there, including Milton, then Curator of the Museum at the Harry Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Mo.

During college I fell out of the habit of relaying the Canon year by year. But then one day in graduate school in 1968, I spotted William S. Bar- ing-Gould’s Annotated Sherlock Holmes at the Pickwick Bookshop of blessed memory on Hollywood Boulevard.

Nothing has been the same since. I returned to the Canon with a will, discovering the Baker Street Irregulars for the first time in the process. After I removed to Washington D.C. in 1971, I got involved in organized Sherlockiana for the first time, in the BSJ’s Red Circle scion society that Peter Blau had revived the previous year upon his own arrival in the nation’s capital.

In late 1972, home for Christmas agin, I’d presided the now-dormant society’s last known point of contact for a dinner of some kind. On De- cember 27th, Ernest Willer and his son Robert, two of the three original founders, and Milton Perry, met me at a restaurant whose name evoked old familiar inn, and which seemed appr opriate enough. The third founder was out of town, but to my astonishment I found I knew all three. The Willers’ home was a block or so from mine, while Bob and I had gone to different schools, we had played together oc casionally as boys. The third founder, John (Stapleton) Ahman, had been in the class behind mine in prep school.

I want to say a word about Ernest Willer, who impressed me that night in a way. He was an accountant, strongly resembling Professor Moriarty in appearance, but with an attrac tive sense of irregu lar fun that was infectious. He had been infected with Sherlock Holmes himself in 1920, as an avid high school student turning up “The Engineer’s Thumb” in geometry class. He had been a faithful reader of the Baker Street Journal in his youth, and was over a thousand miles away when The Great Alkali Plannem was founded. October 20th, 1963 was his last day. But he had been an avid Plannem since 1963, and had amassed an ency clopedia knowledge of the Canon. He loved it so and infected his son Bob in turn, and also John Ahman, son of the owner of the insurance agency where Ernest worked. It was a fine time to launch a BSJ scion society.

That evening I learned that The Great Alkali Plannem had gotten off to a very good start, quickly attracting the attention of John Bennett Shaw in his own hometown, Iola. Okla. Shaw knew no one who shared his ma nia, and was delighted to see the BSJ’s news of the new Kansas City scion society, a few hours away by car. He proceeded to make himself such a cen ter of the Great Alkali Plannemians over the next five years, that when he retired to Santa Fe, N.M., in 1969, it took the wind out of the society’s sails for several years. His move put Shaw and the Plannemians at opposite ends of the Santa Fe Trail, but with a far greater distance to overcome.

One thing led to another, though, and The Great Alkali Plannem reinvigorated, with me running it at long distance from 1973 to 1983. That proved easy to do, because each time a meeting was called, four or five times a year, some local party in a once-a-gang growing membership would take responsibility for its arrangements and theme, and carry it off splendidly. I missed the majority of these. I’m sorry to say for, instance, the Darmoor Evening on the Barellsveen grounds of the Kansas City Museum in September 1977; the history says “Lellenberg forever afterwardwards grabbed his teeth over missing this meeting,” and how true that is to this day.

But the moon with its mysteries and its strange inhabitants remains as inscrutable as ever,” the Canon says, and the Evening’s chief plotter, John Ahman ("a smiling face and a murderous heart"), kept it so. After a canonic repast of bread, tinned tongue, and preserved peaches, the Plannemians were subjected to a Some thing Hunt – a scavenger contest around the museum grounds based on The Hound of the Baskervilles – and then treated to a paen for the publication of the adventure by the BSJ’s Mournings.

As to Centenary Street, the focus of Doyle’s query, no such name appears in early street directories. Nor does it appear on a street appear on early maps of the city. A map of Minneapolis published in 1867 by the Minneapolis Directory Company lists Cooper Street and Cromwell Drive but nothing under Coventry. Likewise, a 1921 map produced by the Hudson Publishing Company jumps from Cooper Street to Crystal Lake Avenue. Cromwell Drive, apparently unpetented by civic planners, may never have been.

In the same way, little if anything ex ists for an architect named Philip Jack son. He does not appear in the Ameri can Institute of Architects Historical Directory. The Minnesota State Census Index (which includes data from 1865, 1873, 1885, 1895 and 1905) lists five individuals of that name. Three of these appear in the 1865 census, two in the 1865 census. None are resident in Minneapolis. The online Biography and Genealogy Master Index indexes no entries for such an individual. The only mention of a Philip Jackson in the Minneapolis Tribune newspaper between 1867 and 1922 is an article about one such Jackson, an executive in New York, who waged war with his neighbors over the height of his splitrail fence.

The letter conjures other mysteries and connections, such as the fact the Miss Countryman was related to a famous architect active in the Twin Cities, L.S. Balfour. Balfour in turn was related to the architectural community with the invention of the skyscraper. Or the fact that the Sherlockian Society of Minnesota Libraries.

Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections
The history recorded gleefully the founders’ original impulses, Shaw's frolics (he had found it distractingly hard to get a drink at his first several meetings, something he cared for good at one held at his Tulsa home), Milt Perry’s creation of a local Sherlock Holmes League for Kansas City, the late Logan Clendening M.D. as local hero/role model, the cultural anthropology of a scion society overlapping the Kansas/Missouri border where the Civil War raged for ten years before Fort Sumter, the all too related rise of a Jesse James faction inside the scion, joint expeditions with Jason Kozlowski’s Arkansas Valley Investors and Stafford Davis’s Afghanian Fencers when they arose in Little Rock and Tulsa, The Plainsmen’s archives, “something he cured for good frolics (he had found it distressingly spoken eloquently and movingly, more detailed than its naïve author).” I wish I could turn the clock back and do it all over again, this time from the very start in 1963.

This history, my Author's Note conceded, had “turned out longer and more detailed than its naive author originally conceived — made possible, perhaps unavoidable, by the preservations of the scions’ archives from oblivion. (And supplemented, I added, by 'the personal archives and memories of the Baker Street Irregulars, past and present’) and I also confessed that “where the archives were incomplete, or memories were vague, I had to try to turn on the side of fantasy.” This was something I’d occasionally suspected of other Alcanine archivists — not Chris R. persuading the thought — but Margaret W., I noticed, had gone on to author a successful fantasy-novel series which includes a tribe of rollicking barbarians called the Plainsmen.

That May, 1988, James Bliss Austin of Pittsburgh, Pa., one of the greatest of Baker Street Irregulars, died at the age of eighty-three. In 1984, at the BSJ's 50th-anniversary dinner, he had spoken eloquently and movingly, more from memory than from his thin sheaf of notes, about the BSJ's golden age at the Murray Hill Hotel in the 1940s. He had first attended the BSJ annual dinner in 1944, and been one of the first fifteen to receive a Titular Investiture the following year. To most of his audience that night, including me, he was an unassuming and entrancing tale. Many imploled Bliss to write it up and publish it, and he said he would. But he died with that undone, and some of us realized the BSJ was in danger of losing its institutional memory. During the January 1989 BSJ weekend in New York, a half dozen or so of us were discussing this threat, and I can still hear my voice suddenly muttering “I could do something about it.” I would not have thought so or said so had I not already done the Plainsmen’s 25th-anniversary history the year before. As before, I was naïve. I intended to do 1930 through 1960, concluding with Edgar W. Smith’s death and Julian Wolff’s selection as the new Commissionnaire, and thought I could find enough primary source material for a decent 250 pp. book. Things worked out differently. I’ve so far done eight volumes of BSJ Archival History, for a total of about 1,750 pp. (plus an historical novel about the 1930s/40s BSJ, with a “sources & methods” companion volume on its way), and haven’t gotten to the 1960s yet. And I’m still finding primary source material about the BSJ’s first three decades, as others.

“The University of Minnesota Libraries’ Andersen Library has proven to be a good facility for the Great Alkali Plainsmen archives,” says Bob Willer, “but it appears they have a long-term home elsewhere.” For any inquiries contact: Timothy J. Johnson, Curator 612-624-3552 or johnot7@tc.umn.edu

The Adventure of the eBay Auction

The short letter quoted above, dated September 14, 1923, came to my attention in late February. A Sherlockian collector on the East coast — and a Friend of our Sherlock Holmes Collections — Robert Hess, alerted us to its existence and the fact that it was being auctioned on eBay. A link to the item was provided by our collector-friend and so I looked at the description and images on the eBay site. Along with the letter was the original envelope, addressed to “The Chief Librarian, Public Library, Minneapolis, Minne-
sota, USA.” The reactions of a couple of our local Friends of the Holmes Collections were unanimous — we had to have this item for the Library. And so began “The Adventure of the eBay Auction.”

My initial reaction was the same. Doyle’s letter, with its local connection to Minneapolis, was too good to pass up. But I had no idea about proper library procedure in acquiring items through online auctions. I knew that we could — and do — purchase items through traditional auctions. But online auctions are slightly different animals. After conferring with colleagues in the acquisitions department it was determined that the best approach was for me to purchase the item and then seek reimbursement from my Friends. Unfortunately, this scenario presented a set of problems. I did not have an eBay account, a PayPal account (used by most sellers on eBay to facilitate purchases), no experience with bidding in such an auction, and perhaps not enough money of my own to cover the purchase. Also, the clock was ticking. It was now the last day of the auction, which ended at 3:58 pm. I spent the latter part of the morning and early afternoon attacking each one of the problems. In short order I established my eBay account, set up and linked a PayPal account with my bank and eBay accounts, received financial backing from one of our Friends, and received valuable tips from my colleague, Lisa Vecoli, who is an old hand on eBay. Her final admonition was to settle on my maximum bid and to use a figure that was a bit unusual (so that I would not lose out on an item by a few pennies or dollars). About ninety minutes before the auction ended I settled on a maximum bid and submitted it to eBay. All that remained was the waiting.

The waiting was excruciating. The Doyle letter had been online for five days and yet, when I posted my bid, I was the sole bidder. No one else had expressed an interest with another bid. The time remaining on an auction is posted above the description of the item. When the timer hits one hour remaining the numbers turn red and count down.