



Sherlock Holmes

C O L L E C T I O N S



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"Your merits should be publicly recognized" (STUD)

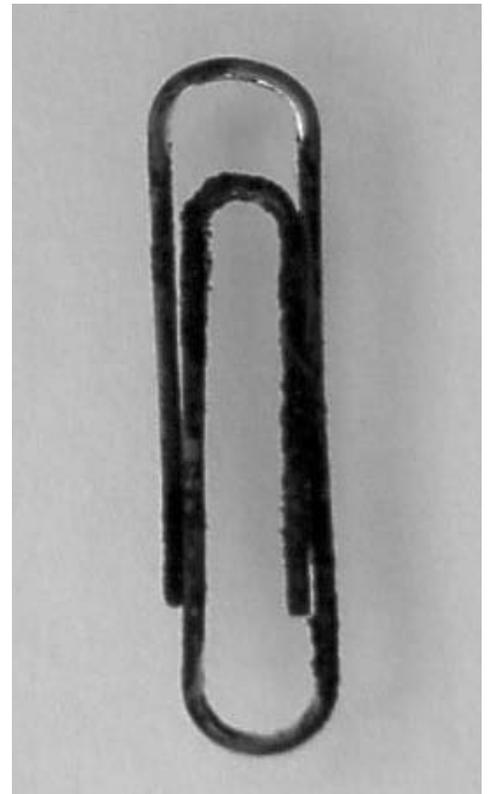
From One Collector to Another

By Peter E. Blau, A.S.H., B.S.I.

It always is interesting to visit collectors, and their collections, and it can be especially interesting to see what book collectors have in addition to their books. John Bennett Shaw, who happily claimed to collect with all the selectivity of a vacuum cleaner, was always delighted to add to his collection objects that were odd and unusual and extraordinary. They can also be confusing, if one does not know the stories that John could tell about the objects in his collection, and I'm happy now to tell one of those stories for him.

"Careful consideration, Sherlockian deduction, and inspired guesswork --after examination of the contents of this Cardboard Box -- should enable you to figure out the full significance of the modest present which is contained herein," I wrote to John Bennett Shaw in December 1972, adding that "As you read this, I am in Pittsfield, chuckling gleefully."

As can easily be seen in the accompanying photograph, the cardboard box did not contain severed ears, but rather a plastic paperweight, in which was encased one rusty paper clip. Puzzled, as one can imagine, John called me in Pittsfield, and of course I was happy to offer him a hint: there is no mention of a paper clip in the Sherlock Holmes stories. And I promised that if he had not guessed the significance of the gift in the meantime, all would be explained when we were at the birthday festivities in New York in January 1973.



A "modest present" from Peter E. Blau to John Bennett Shaw

And when we met in New York, John had not guessed the significance of the gift, so I explained that I had been in Philadelphia in October 1972, and had visited Ben Wolf, who was both a fine Sherlockian and the proprietor of a used-book shop. Ben had somewhat earlier found Constance Holland, who had been Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's last secretary, and who was called "Tiny" by Sir Arthur (and

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photo by Julie McKuras

100

YEARS AGO

"The return of Sherlock Holmes to The Strand Magazine some years after his death, put a finishing touch to the almost heroic popularity of a figure whose reality was like a universally admitted reality of some old hero of medieval fable. Just as Arthur and Barbarossa were to return again, some felt that this preposterous detective must return again. He had emerged out of the unreality of literature into the glowing reality of legend, and in proof of this he has inherited the most widespread and pathetic of the characteristics of legendary heroes; that characteristic which makes men incredulous of their death. A slight and fantastic figure in a fugitive and ironical type of romance, he may seem too insignificant a subject for such a description. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Mr. Conan Doyle's hero is probably the only literary creation since the creations of Dickens which has really passed into the life and language of the people, and become a being like John Bull or Father Christmas..."

So wrote Gilbert Keith Chesterton, a young journalist and future author of detective fiction. The passage is typical Chesterton paradox. Holmes is simultaneously heroic, preposterous, legendary, slight, fantastic and unique in his reality as a literary icon; all this in just the first paragraph of an essay

published in 1901. A key to understanding Chesterton on Sherlock Holmes and other matters is to remember that his use of such provocative words is not intended to show disdain but to provoke thought. In a time when "sophisticated" commentators looked down their noses at popular literature, Chesterton extolled detective stories, farce, melodrama and comic song. Chesterton's quarrel was with literati who believed that only profound psychological and philosophical works were worth reading, and that detective stories were



G.K. Chesterton

Photo by Julie McKinnis

trash. He understood that ordinary readers like detective stories, and although they may be forced to read bad detective fiction for lack of anything better, readers really want good detective stories, and Sherlock Holmes stories are the best. As Chesterton observes in this same article:

"The fact that Sherlock Holmes alone has succeeded in familiarising himself at once with the cultured and uncultured and turned his name into almost as descriptive a word as Dr. Guillotin or Captain Boycott, involves certain conclusions, which are for the most part worthy and reassuring. The phenomenon corrects finally, for example, much of the foolish and foppish talk about the public preferring books because they are bad. The stories of Sherlock Holmes are very good stories: they are perfectly graceful and conscientious works of art. The thread of irony which runs through all the solemn impossibilities of the narrative gives it the position of a really brilliant addition to the great literature of nonsense. The notion of the greatness of an intellect, proved by its occupation with small things instead of with great, is an original departure; it constitutes a kind of wild poetry of the commonplace..."

As such comments foreshadow, Chesterton's chief criticism of Holmes is that the great detective needs more of the qualities of a philosopher, a poet and a lover. According to him, a man who had been in love would not have been fooled by Irene Adler. This may be unfair to Holmes who at least by "The Sign of the Four" can quote and discuss poetry and philosophy. The detective who would soon brave a cheetah, baboon, Dr. Grimesby Roylott and the mysteriously fatal speckled band is not deficient in romantic chivalry.

G. K. Chesterton was born into a middle class family in London on May 29, 1874. In 1893, in a spiritual crisis, he left University College without a degree, and went to work for a

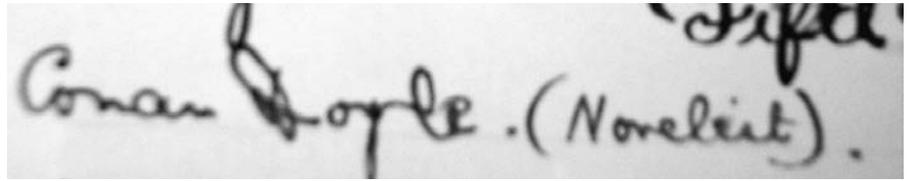
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50

YEARS AGO

For many readers, Shrewsbury, the county town of Shropshire, England, conjures up images of the Brother Cadfael mysteries. Cadfael, a former crusader who had seen the world, retired to the presumed peace of a monastic life in Shrewsbury, but his intelligence and powers of observation were not limited to his herbarium. The medieval monk solved crimes in more than twenty stories written by life-long Shropshire resident Edith Pargeter, under the name of Ellis Peters. Others may know Shrewsbury as the birthplace in 1809 of Charles Darwin, who sought to investigate the mysteries of evolutionary change, natural selection and the origin of the species.

But another mystery took place in Shrewsbury in 1915 and apparently went unnoticed until 1951. The account of that mystery was labeled as "The Conan Doyle Signature Hoax at St. Alkmund Church, Harlescott, Shrewsbury 1951" by the late John Bennett Shaw. The Reverend Sidney Austerberry, rector of St. Alkmund's Church, found the 1915 visitors' book. In an entry dated July 13 of that year is the signature "Conan Doyle (Novelist)" and the note "Have thought out a Sherlock Holmes story here." The August, 1951 St. Alkmund's church bulletin carried a brief note about this signature and remark, and ended with, "Was it genuine? We cannot be sure. If it was genuine one would be interested to know what story it was." It was, as *The Times* (London) noted in an August 13, 1951

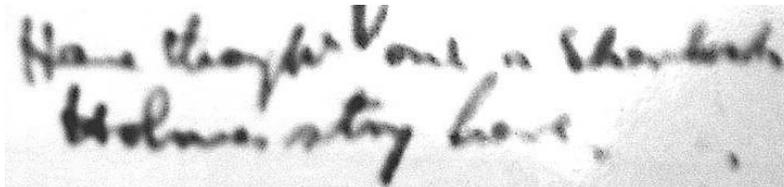


The Signature

Photo by Julie McKuras

article titled "A New Holmes Mystery" "...indeed the stuff to give the troops of the Baker Street Irregulars, who confine their investigations to microscopic scrutiny of the text of the stories...the only trouble with the clue to the story CONAN DOYLE thought out is that it seems as barren as the bowler-hat in the case of the Blue Carbuncle seemed to the dull and undiscerning eye of Watson."

Mr. J. L. Hobbs, the Shrewsbury librarian, cast a discerning eye to the signature. In an August 15, 1951 newspaper article from *The Birmingham Post*, which is reproduced in Peter Haining's *The Sherlock Holmes Scrapbook*, it is noted that "... (Hobbs) turned up newspaper files in an attempt to discover whether the novelist was in Shrewsbury at this time. He was unable to do so – but Miss A. E. Corbett, of Coton Crescent, Shrewsbury, was able to confirm that on March 13 the same year she was taken



The Note

Photo by Julie McKuras

to a literary society meeting in the town to hear the novelist speak. Afterwards, she asked for – and was given – his autograph, which she still preserves. After comparing the autograph with the signature in the visitors' book, Mr. Hobbs is satisfied that they were not written by the same person. The two specimens are 'quite different', and the signature Sir Arthur gave Corbett reads: 'Arthur Conan Doyle'."

One Baker Street Irregular who found this mystery intriguing was Nathan Bengis. Although the Sherlock Holmes Collections lacks his correspondence to the rector, John Bennett Shaw had the original letter written by Rev. S. D. Austerberry in reply to Bengis. Rev. Austerberry wrote on October 5, 1951;

"Dear Mr. Bengis,
In reply to your letter of Sept. 13, 1951, I enclose the photostat copy you required. It is fairly certain now as I said before that it is not genuine. Perhaps you would be so kind as to let me have two dollars (or English money 15 shillings) to reimburse me."

In John Bennett Shaw's small file labeled "The Conan Doyle Signature Hoax" are the church bulletin, the October 5, 1951 letter to Bengis, the photocopy of the page from the visitors' book, and the original August 13, 1951 article from *The Times*. It is interesting to note that

The Times concluded this article with "Yet there is one story – and that the best – which does suggest that it might have been thought on in a churchyard; the sense of vigil in it is strong. It may be that as

CONAN DOYLE pondered among the quiet of the graves a vision came to him of another quiet, the quiet of a night when two men waited about a bed for a shutter to open and the band, the speckled band, to creep down the dummy bell-rope about its deadly business." ❧

Julie McKuras

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Haining, Peter, ed. *The Sherlock Holmes Scrapbook*. New York; Crescent Books, 1986.

From the President

I hope that all Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections are planning to attend the "2001: A Sherlockian Odyssey - A Journey Among the Shaw 100", to be held June 29 to July 1, 2001. The Norwegian Explorers of Minnesota have planned an exciting program that pays tribute to the memory of John Bennett Shaw and his Basic Holmesian Library. The conference

is for the novice as well as the experienced Sherlockian and will explore the books most important to the Sherlock Holmes Cult.

The Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections will hold our Annual Meeting on Saturday June 30, 2001 at 5 PM in the Elmer L. Andersen Library. We are also planning an Opening

Reception for "The Basic Holmesian Library – An Exhibit from the Sherlock Holmes Collection" on Friday June 29, 2001. For information about either the conference or the Friends meeting, please feel free to contact me. ♥

Richard J. Sveum, M.D.
sveum001@tc.umn.edu

Musings

It is with great pleasure, and I use that term for several reasons, that this issue features a lead article written by Peter E. Blau, A.S.H., B.S.I. Peter has written fondly about his friend John Bennett Shaw, B.S.I. and the fun they had with this small paper clip. Secondly, I believe that it is this type of remembrance that enables us to write the history of the items that now reside in the Sherlock Holmes Collections. Shaw kept this solitary rusting paper clip ensconced within a small block of plastic in his own collection of paperweights but we would never know the provenance of such items if it were not for writers and friends such as Peter Blau (who also might be described as a collector of odd and unusual and extraordinary Sherlockian items).

It is appropriate that our 100 Years Ago article features an author who appealed to the collecting spirit of John Bennett Shaw. Shaw, undoubtedly best known to our readers as a collector of Sherlockiana, also collected Chesterton. In "Collecting Sherlockiana: An Essay", published in

1991 by the Opuscula Press, Shaw noted he "...delivered to the University of Notre Dame, where I was once a student and where for many years I was Chairperson of the Library Advisory Council, some 21,000 books which included my libraries devoted to G. K. Chesterton..." and others. In this issue, we welcome a new writer to the newsletter who shares two of Shaw's passions. Steve Miller is a native of Bemidji, Minnesota and resident of the Twin Cities. A graduate of Duke University's Law School, Steve practices labor and employment law. He joined the American Chesterton Society in 1996 and the Norwegian Explorers in 1998. Steve represented Father Brown at the June 1999 Chesterton Conference in St. Paul, debating Pat Accardo who represented Sherlock Holmes. The content of that debate is included in *Sherlock Holmes Meets Father Brown and His Creator*. Steve describes himself as living with his "exemplary wife, Cherie, in Shoreview in a home dominated by a despotic pug dog and visiting grandchildren."

Our 50 Year Article looks at the "The Conan Doyle Signature Hoax" and the coverage given to it in 1951. It was never determined who signed the name of the literary agent in St. Alkmund's visitors' book in 1915. In checking the website for a virtual tour of Shrewsbury, (<http://www.virtual-Shropshire.co.uk/shrewsbury-tour>) it is noted that "Shrewsbury is sometimes described as the most haunted town in England." If we accept that, perhaps we can believe that the watery ghost of Moriarty committed this act of forgery.

I hope that we will see many of you at the Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections Meeting scheduled for June 30, in conjunction with The Norwegian Explorers' "2001: A Sherlockian Odyssey" Conference. ♥

Julie McKuras, A.S.H., B.S.I.

An Update From the Collections

It seems, as the academic calendar goes, that this is the conference season. Not only is it the height of the tourist season, it is also one of those high points during the scholastic year when we inhabitants of our various ivory towers climb down from the airy mists and wander to some neighboring abode to chat about everything from surviving the winter to one's latest project. It is a good thing to get out of one's tower. And so, before I write another word, I want to welcome those of our Friends who make it to this northern realm for the conference organized by the Norwegian Explorers-- "2001: A Sherlockian Odyssey, A Journey Among the Shaw 100." We hope you enjoy your time in the Twin Cities, the chance to visit and hear companions in the Holmesian universe, and (for those who have not yet had the pleasure) the chance to see the Sherlock Holmes Collections in their new home, the Elmer L. Andersen Library.

Now, having welcomed you to the conference and the Twin Cities, allow me the chance to apologize for not being there in person at the beginning of the conference to give you a greeting and take you on a tour of the fabled caverns of Andersen. You will see me in due course, sometime around late Friday night or early Saturday morning, but as I said, it's conference time. At the moment (assuming you're reading this sometime near the 29th of June) I'm in Rhode Island, at Brown University, taking part in a multi-day working symposium on the future of Special Collections in Research Libraries. This symposium, organized under the auspices of the Committee on Research Collections of the Association of Research Libraries,

brings 100 participants together "to discuss timely issues concerning the potential of special collections." According to the organizers, "the goals are to call attention to the unique role of special collections within research institutions, and to find ways to use information technology more effectively to explore and expand the value to research and teaching of these important resources. There is also a strong interest in identifying the factors that facilitate or impede the full realization of this potential in an electronic age."

I'm writing this a month before the ARL meeting, and I hope the symposium lives up to its potential (I'm excited for the opportunity to participate and represent Minnesota). However, for me the conference season started in March when I attended the Association of College and Research Libraries meeting in Denver. There was a slight respite in April and early May, at which time I took the opportunities to attend an all-day session (hosted by the University Libraries) on electronic texts, move a major part of our general collection from Wilson Library to the Andersen caverns, enjoy the annual Minnesota book awards, host the 24th Festival of Greek Letters (I also take care of a substantial Modern Greek Collection), speak to a group of government documents librarians, and celebrate various end-of-school-year accomplishments. For me, the major celebration was prompted by receiving word in April that I had been granted continuous appointment and promotion to Associate Librarian.

Now, in mid-May, its time to gear up for conference time again. In early June I'll venture first to Washington, D.C. for a

meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress. Speaker Hastert re-appointed me to another two-year term and the honor of serving my country in this manner.

Immediately after my Capitol sojourn I head west, to San Francisco and the annual pre-conference of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the American Library Association (ALA) followed by the ALA annual conference. Somewhere in there, if my schedule and the high hotel costs allow, I hope to join the Sub-Librarians for their annual gathering. A week later, back in Minnesota, I'll be helping put any final touches on preparations for the Holmes conference. After saying goodbye to you, our dear Friends, I'll have a few weeks of 'regular' work before leaving for four weeks of intensive language study in Greece (again, to support my work with the Laourdas Modern Greek Collection). Back from Greece for a few days, I then go back to the District of Columbia for the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists. Somewhere in there I might squeeze a day or two of vacation, a chance to go fishing with my father or sons, and acquaint myself with the rest of my family. Knowing what Holmes was like when he was bored, I'd much rather settle for the alternative. Wherever this finds you, I hope your summer is both pleasant and productive. ♣

Timothy Johnson

From One Collector to Another

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compared to him she certainly was). She also assisted Lady Doyle after Sir Arthur's death, and owned some interesting manuscript material, most of it letters and notes dealing with Spiritualist matters.

The manuscript material was organized with paper clips, which after more than four decades were seriously oxidized, and the oxidation had begun to eat away at the sheets of paper. "Look at that," I said to Ben, suggesting that he needed to remove the paper clips to protect the letters. "The new owners can do that," Ben replied, noting that a few more weeks, after all those years, wouldn't make much difference."

"You really need to remove those paper clips," I urged. "You want one of those paper clips, don't you," Ben suggested. And I replied, "No. I want two of them." Ben kindly allowed me to remove two of the paper clips, and I had them set into paperweights. And that's how John Bennett Shaw and I each wound up with a paperweight containing one of Sir Arthur's very own paper clips. Of course John's paperweight now is part of the Special Collections, as is the note I sent to him, on which John wrote, "A clip from A.C.D.'s own papers—from Ben Wolf, BSI, Philadelphia, to Blau to Shaw, 12-1972." And now you know the rest of the story.

Perhaps some day the world will be prepared for stories about the Canonical toilet seat, and the Sherlockian chocolate Easter bunnies . . . ♡

100 Years

Continued from Page 2

London publisher. His first book of poems, *Greybeards at Play*, was published in 1910, and he married Frances Blogg the following year. Chesterton's most famous detective creation was the Catholic priest, Father Brown, who debuted in 1910. The first collection of Father Brown stories, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, was published one year later. He eventually wrote fifty stories featuring his clerical detective, whose mission was to identify the culprit of a crime in order that they could repent and save their souls. In 1914, Chesterton suffered a physical and mental breakdown. He converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism in 1922. A recipient of honorary degrees from Edinburgh and Dublin Universities as well as Notre Dame, Chesterton was a friend of H. G. Wells and Hilaire Belloc. He was a popular radio lecturer and debated his friend George Bernard Shaw, who called him a "colossal genius." In addition to his detective stories, Chesterton also wrote biographies of Charles Dickens, Robert Browning, Robert Louis Stevenson, Chaucer, William Blake, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Francis of Assisi. He died on June 14, 1936 in Beaconsfield, England.

Other detective creations penned by Chesterton include Gabriel Gale, a poet who can understand the crimes of lunatics because he is so like them (*The Poet and the Lunatics*); Horne Fisher, a man who discovers criminals who can never be brought to justice (*The Man Who Knew Too Much*); and Gabriel Syme, a detective seeking anarchists who pursues a criminal

mastermind who may actually be God (*The Man Who Was Thursday*). A quality common to Chesterton's detective fiction is the use of paradox to make a point, often philosophical and religious. He believed one of the best means of discussing religion was to put it in a detective story. Therefore, in this 1901 article we see not only an affectionate appreciation and homage albeit in terms that may cause a puzzled reaction on occasion, but a hint of Chesterton's own subversive designs for detective fiction. ♡

Steve Miller

¹The quotations are from a collection of Chesterton's articles. They were compiled by his secretary, Dorothy Collins, and entitled *A Handful of Authors* (Sheed & Ward, 1953). The Sherlock Holmes Collections contains John Bennett Shaw's copy. Although the book claims the "Sherlock Holmes" entry was first published in the *Daily News*, I am assured by American Chesterton Society President, Dale Ahlquist, that it did not appear in that publication. He believes it was published elsewhere. Appropriately, Chesterton's article in itself is a bit of a mystery.

²Chesterton was also adapted into the detective sleuth, Dr. Gideon Fell, by John Dickson Carr, an author well known on Baker Street.

Eve Titus Update

The following note was received recently;

Dear Editor,
I noted in your last volume that you had failed to include the investiture of my Literary Agent Eve Titus as a full member of the Baker Street Irregulars. I am enclosing several photographs obtained from Bill Vande Water, and hope they help refresh your memory.

I remain, dear lady
Respectfully yours
David Q. Dawson, MD

Eve Titus received her investiture of "Young Master Rucastle" in 1993. Ms. Titus continues her recovery and her visits from family members, according to her niece Ginny Saltzman. ♡



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

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Photograph courtesy of *The Baker Street Journal*, Vol. 43, Number 1



Joseph Eckrich, Jean-Pierre Cagnat, Eve Titus, and Yuichi Hirayama



Photograph courtesy of Bill Vande Water, B.S.I.

Eve Titus at the 1993 B.S. I. Dinner,
seated with George McCormack

Using the Sherlock Holmes Collections

Dr. William A. S. Sarjeant, M.Bt., of Saskatoon was in St. Paul in late April for the J. R. R. Tolkien Seminar and Bree Moot, held at the University of St. Thomas. Although he was busy speaking at both events, he included time in his schedule for a tour of the Sherlock Holmes Collections. ♡



Photo by Julie McKuras

Dr. William A. S. Sarjeant, M. Bt., holding *Beeton's Christmas Annual*

Acquisitions

Christopher and Barbara Roden sent a copy of their latest publication to the Sherlock Holmes collections. *The Haunted Grange of Goresthorpe* is inscribed "with compliments of the Arthur Conan Doyle Society."

Dale Ahlquist, President of the American Chesterton Society, donated a copy of *Sherlock Holmes Meets Father Brown and His Creator*. Edited by Pasquale Accardo, M.D., John Peterson and Geir Hasnes, the book is described as a "Miscellany of Scholarship, Stories and Literary Diversions". It contains

the text of the debate "Whether Sherlock Holmes or Father Brown is the Superior Detective", which was held on Saturday, June 12, 1999 as part of the annual Chesterton Meeting at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN. Pasquale Accardo represented Sherlock Holmes, and had many Norwegian Explorers in the audience that day to show their support of his position, while Steven Miller represented Father Brown.

Dr. William A. S. Sarjeant, M. Bt., donated several items during his visit to the Sherlock Holmes Collections.

Included in his packet of periodical clippings were recent articles regarding the new Czech Sherlockian society; an article Dr. Sarjeant wrote and published in the Autumn 1995 issue of *Plum Lines*, entitled "P. G. Wodehouse as Crime Reader"; and several reviews from Canadian newspapers of Daniel Stashower's *Teller of Tales*.

Daniel Morrow recently donated several journal clippings and articles regarding Sherlock Holmes and radio. Included with these items was a letter from Edith Meiser. ♡

Remembrances

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

IN HONOR OF

Arthur Axelrad
Dr. Howard Burchell
Sandy Kozinn
Kendall J. Pagan

IN MEMORY OF

Don Hardenbrook
Georginnia Izban
E. W. McDiarmid
Ake Runnquist
Caroline Smerk
Wayne Swift
Wayne Swift
Carol Wenk

FROM

Patricia Nelson
Dr. Richard Caplan
Laura Kuhn
Robert Burr

FROM

Vincent Brosnan
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Ted Bergman
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Pj Doyle
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Because of the high cost of returned newsletters, we would appreciate being informed of changes of address or other corrections.