

PART V

THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS

"So it has been decided in the Sacred Council."

It was in this uncertain atmosphere that Jon Lellenberg came home for Thanksgiving. That weekend he gave an open house to introduce friends of the family to his four-month-old son. Among Plainsmen, Lellenberg had invited the Lehmans, the Perrys, the Carmacks, Lenore Carroll, and Don McClain; all came but the Lehmans. After others who knew not the Sacred Writings had departed, the Plainsmen found themselves discussing the fate of their scion society. Lellenberg was relieved to learn that the Council of Elders already had decided to move ahead, with Lehman's agreement, and were calling a Feast of the Blue Carbuncle on Saturday, December 26th, at the Park Place Hotel (renamed the Hotel Cosmopolitan for the evening).

And though the Feast took place on a noncanonical date, in an unfamiliar setting, and without Jerry Gaines's roast goose, it was a great success -- proving that the only indispensable thing at a BSI scion society meeting is Sherlock Holmes. His seat at the head of the table may have remained vacant, but he was present in spirit, joining the twenty-eight Plainsmen who braved an ice storm to be there (including scion founder Robert Willer, just moved back to Kansas City after some fourteen years in Chicago).

It was a full evening. Plainsmen did themselves proud at the private bar and during dinner. Milt Perry unveiled the scion's new Nathan Garrideb Museum of Sherlockiana, which got off to a good start that night with its first acquisitions: Henry Baker's goose preserved for posterity; a plaster cast of the footprint of the Hound (as a puppy); a reproduction of the new plaque at 221B Baker Street, London; a test writing of RACHE in real blood, from Karen Johnson's hematology lab; an actual rock from Gillette Castle in Connecticut; "and other items of the highest kitsch," Daily Journal No. 50 (February 9, 1987) reported. (John Bennett Shaw, watch out!)

Though Jon Lellenberg was not present in person that night, he had fulfilled at last his Good Intention of creating a Logan Clendening Award for the scion society, "to honor each year a member or friend of The Great Alkali Plainsmen whose contributions to the cause of keeping the memory green have been noteworthy and deserving of recognition." The first year's Award was conferred upon Senior Plainsman and scion founder Ernest Willer, "an example and inspiration to his fellow Plainsmen", for keeping "the Canonical flame alive for many years." Stan Carmack unleashed a fearful quiz on the adventure of the evening, only to see it won with a nearly perfect score by a newcomer, Joanne Christenson. John Tibbetts spoke about Sherlock Holmes and the Movies, arguing persuasively that the Master helped pioneer the movie industry at the turn of the century. And Philip Shreffler immortalized the adventure of the evening with his Great Alkali Plainsmen's Classics Number Six:



THE

Great Alkali Plainsmen



OF GREATER KANSAS CITY

ARE PLEASED TO CONFER UPON ERNEST WILLER
THE FIRST ANNUAL LOGAN CLENDENING AWARD,
FOR THE YEAR 1987.

IN MEMORY OF THE LATE LOGAN CLENDENING, M.D.,
BAKER STREET IRREGULAR AND KANSAS CITY'S FIRST SHERLOCKIAN, THIS
AWARD IS ESTABLISHED IN SHERLOCK HOLMES'S CENTENARY YEAR TO HONOR
EACH YEAR A MEMBER OR FRIEND OF THE GREAT ALKALI PLAINSMEN WHOSE
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CAUSE OF KEEPING THE MEMORY GREEN HAVE BEEN
NOTEWORTHY AND DESERVING OF RECOGNITION.

LOGAN CLENDENING (1884-1945) was a distinguished physician, profes-
sor, historian, and journalist. A renowned bookman as well, he was
an early member of the Baker Street Irregulars. His writings about
Sherlock Holmes include "The Case of the Missing Patriarchs" (1934),
one of the most famous of the parodies, and the memorial essay "My
Personal Recollections of Sherlock Holmes" (1937). Author, critic,
humorist, raconteur, party-giver and party-goer, bon vivant, and
practical joker, Dr. Clendening personified the spirit of Sherlock-
ian wit, erudition, and good fellowship at its best.

ERNEST WILLER has been a friend and admirer of Sherlock Holmes since
the 1920s. In 1963 he was one of the three original founders of The
Great Alkali Plainsmen of Greater Kansas City, scion society of the
Baker Street Irregulars, and has served ably as the scion's senior
member ever since. His Moriarty-like visage and mathematical inclin-
ations notwithstanding, Ernest Willer has kept the Canonical flame
alive for many years, and been an example and inspiration to his
fellow Plainsmen.

IN TOKEN ALSO of the Great Alkali Plainsmen's esteem, they are proud
to present Ernest Willer, as part of this award, with a copy of THE
QUEST FOR SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, by a fellow Plainsmen, in hopes
that he will enjoy it, and remain among the Plainsmen for many years
to come.

DONE AT THE FEAST OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE, 1987, BY

Jon L. Lellenberg

JON L. LELLENBERG, BSI,
Avenging Angel Emeritus
& Clendening Chronicler

THE GOOSE THAT ATE THE DIAMOND

ONE DAY A MAN NAMED PETERSON BROUGHT A DEAD GOOSE TO SHERLOCK HOLMES, WHO IS A DETECTIVE. THE GOOSE HAD STOLEN A BIG DIAMOND, ATE IT, AND DIED. THEN SHERLOCK WAS VISITED BY A MAN NAMED BAKER WHO BREAKS WINDOWS AND PUTS WAX ON HIS HAT. BAKER SAID SOMETHING IN LATIN, TOOK THE WRONG GOOSE, AND LEFT. THEN SHERLOCK TOOK WATSON TO A GOOSE MARKET AND MADE A BET, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS CHRISTMASTIME.

FINALLY SHERLOCK FOUND OUT THAT A MAN NAMED RYDER AND A WOMAN NAMED CATHERINE THE COSSACK HAD HELPED THE GOOSE STEAL THE DIAMOND.

IT WAS THE SEASON OF FORGIVENESS, AND SHERLOCK SAVED A SOUL. BUT HE DIDN'T SAVE THE GOOSE BECAUSE IT WAS GETTING ALL FUNNY SMELLING.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY IS THIS: DON'T EAT STOLEN DIAMONDS. BUY YOUR OWN.

The Kansas City Star reported the event on January 3, 1988, and the February '88 City Arts Digest, profiling the Plainsmen, commented in disbelief that they include "a movie critic, a college professor, a toxicologist, a photographer, a historian, businessmen, housewives, and others who would hardly be candidates for straitjackets."

No, not hardly. Not us.

"...to regain the track once more..."

The Kansas City Daily Journal, now edited by Lenore Carroll, made a welcome reappearance in early February, maintaining its editorial traditions with a report on The Feast of the Blue Carbuncle, Shreffler's latest wheeze, the tenth installment in Lellenberg's "Clendening Investigation" series, and an announcement of the next scion meeting.

That took place on the wintry night of February 26th, at Fitzpatrick's, a downtown watering-hole of historic significance, with thirty-three Plainsmen in attendance. A number of new accessions to the Nathan Garrideb Museum (zealously hoarded by Milt Perry) were displayed, Milt boasting of one day rivalling John Bennett Shaw's collection. "Already, Milt says, many of the items are unmatched by any other collection in the world," reported Daily Journal No. 51 (April 1988), but this is hardly surprising, given Plainsmen tastes. Reenie and Stan Carmack broke up the Plainsmen with a performance of Loren Estleman's "Dr. and Mrs. Watson at Home", from the recently published mystery-writers' tribute The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. "The playlet was especially well-received by female Plainsmen," remarked Editrix Carroll, "who sometimes lose patience with the boorish ways of their companions."*

* Surely Lenore does not include herself here, since her husband Bob has yet

The evening at Fitzpatrick's proved just the beginning of an active 25th anniversary year for The Great Alkali Plainsmen. Don McClain acted next to arrange an enjoyable and relaxed movie night on April 23rd at the Grenada Theatre, Kansas City, Kansas's recently restored movie palace. After a tour of the Granada, John Tibbetts introduced sparkling prints of the best of Basil Rathbone, The Hound of the Baskervilles and The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, seen as they were meant to be seen before the world went all awry.

A very different sort of occasion followed on June 26th, when the Plainsmen gathered for brunch at Marie Callendar's Restaurant at 89th & State Line, to hear Jon Lellenberg (co-editor of Baker Street Miscellanea) and Philip Shreffler (editor of The Baker Street Journal) pretend to debate the Higher Criticism vs. Doylean studies. They brandished their books at the Plainsmen as well -- the former's Quest for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and the latter's Baker Street Reader -- but most Plainsmen kept a tight grip on their wallets. Lellenberg administered an unforgiving quiz on The Literary Agent, with Don McClain barely nosing out Phil Wilson on a tie-breaker question. Lellenberg concluded by putting Conan Doyle in Irregular perspective, declaring that what truly matters is the Master, and that the worst thing that could happen to the Baker Street Irregulars would be for its love of Sherlock Holmes to be replaced by a scholarly interest in his creator; and he concluded the meeting, somewhat untraditionally, by playing a recording of the late James Montgomery, BSI, singing his touching "Irregular Song" in tribute to Sherlock Holmes.

Journeying to Kansas City once again, for that Plainsmen meeting, had been our scion's Topeka stalwarts, Bill, Daisy and Nola Wright. Twenty-five Plainsmen were glad to return the compliment on August 28th by travelling to Topeka for a Three Garridebs evening at the Wright homestead. After another of Daisy's awesome "Kansas summertime suppers" of barbecued beef, baked ham, fried chicken, and much else, Bill Wright intrigued the Plainsmen with his new theory about, and photographic evidence of, the location of Moorville, Kansas, U.S.A. -- a possibility linking Killer Evans with a perhaps not so dead Napoleon of Crime after all: the discovery of a now-vanished town of Moriarty, Kansas, not far southeast of Topeka, arguably the origin of Killer Evans' -- and someone else's -- local headquarters.

"They had struggled on with a constancy
almost unparalleled in history."

Our caravan has finally arrived at the present day, twenty-five Sherlockian years since The Great Alkali Plainsmen of Greater Kansas City was founded on October 20, 1963, around Ernest Willer's dining-room table in Westwood, Kansas. Little did Ernest, Bob Willer, and John Altman imagine, that Sunday

to attend a single solitary Plainsmen meeting in the twelve years of Lenore's very active membership. (Obviously Bob trusts her explanations of all these evenings out.)

afternoon, what their words and deeds that day would lead to. Many have been the intrepid travellers in the Plainsmen's caravan over the past quarter of a century. Some have come and gone. Even a few blanched skeletons are lying upon the Sierra Blanco now. But others are with us to this day, and still more ride alongside us in spirit. Far away in Canada, Chris and Don Redmond follow the scion's affairs through the Kansas City Daily Journal, tracing their Sherlockian roots back to their early days in The Great Alkali Plainsmen. John Bennett Shaw resides at the end of the Santa Fe Trail, insisting upon a ceaseless flow of the scion's newsletters and announcements, and continuing to dine out on his tales of Plainsmen teetotalers. From Wisconsin to the north, Margaret Weis keeps an attentive eye cocked toward Kansas City. And from distant Virginia, Jon Lellenberg makes occasional appearances at his hometown scion society's meetings, keeping the pot bubbling in various ways.

One day, when the 50th Anniversary history of The Great Alkali Plainsmen is written, this present period may come to be regarded as an unsettled time in the scion society's life. The coup d'etat by which the Council of Elders took over the reins of leadership toward the end of 1987 continues to work well, but no doubt present arrangements will give way happily to more usual ones, as soon as some idealistic Kansas City Sherlockian with a sense of organization and an inability to say no can be identified and cornered. And the Plainsmen have not yet found a new longterm home for dinner meetings, to replace the much missed Maggie Jones.

But the Great Alkali Plainsmen may celebrate their 25th anniversary -- at The Dinner Horn Country Inn, on October 29, 1988 -- with great satisfaction. Those who do not know history, Santayana said, are doomed to repeat it; but the Great Alkali Plainsmen could do far worse than to repeat their history as a Baker Street Irregulars scion society, for the record of their activities contains many a sparkling episode and hilarious moment in the cause of keeping the Master's memory green. Then, too, what other city in America can boast of a visit by Sherlock Holmes, and point to his involvement in a local mystery? What other scion society can document an indisputable link between England's Great Detective and America's greatest badman? The history of The Great Alkali Plainsmen is a lively chronicle of Kansas City men and women who have made their scion society unique among the Baker Street Irregulars.

The Plainsmen's caravan has come a long way indeed, and shows every sign of travelling a considerable distance yet. And it is safe to predict that the Great Alkali Plainsmen will continue to have a great deal of fun along the route, in their own inimitable way, perpetuating the happiest of myths -- that Sherlock Holmes is not a myth.

...To be continued.

PEOPLE



Philip Shreffler of St. Louis and his wife, Karen Johnson



Bill and Daisy Wright of Topeka



From left: Charles and Carolyn Vellar and Ernest Miller, founder of the Great Alkali Plainsmen of Greater Kansas City.

An assembly of sleuths

Sherlockians — avid readers and believers of detective Sherlock Holmes and his assistant, Dr. Watson — came from surrounding cities for the annual "Feast of the Blue Carbuncle," sponsored by members of the Great Alkali Plainsmen of Greater Kansas City, a society of Sherlock Holmes devotees. Guests included Philip Shreffler of St. Louis, editor of The Baker Street Journal, the official publication of the Baker Street Irregulars of New York, the American society of Sherlock Holmes followers. Milton F. Perry and Stan Carmack were co-chairmen of the dinner at the Park Place hotel. (photos by Bob Greenspan/special to The Star)



Milton and Janet Perry (left) with Reenie and Stan Carmack



Ann Powell-Brown (left) and her husband, Dick Brown, with Lenore Carroll