

THE GREAT ALKALI PLAINSMEN
OF GREATER KANSAS CITY

SILVER ANNIVERSARY HISTORY

BY

JON L. LELLENBERG, BSI

With a preface by

John Bennett Shaw, BSI

An Illustrated History of
Kansas City's Scion Society
of the
Baker Street Irregulars

"...a singular set of people, Watson..."

Published for the occasion of
the Plainsmen's 25th Anniversary Celebration
of their scion society

OCTOBER 20, 1988

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

CONTENTS

PREFACE by John Bennett Shaw

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I. BEGINNINGS: 1963	1
II. EARLY YEARS: 1964-68	10
III. LELLENBERG YEARS: 1972-82	25
IV. LEHMAN YEARS: 1982-87	65
V. THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS: 1987-88	93

PREFACE

Christopher Morley, founder of the Baker Street Irregulars, coined a word to explain this phenomenon: "kinsprits", which is, I believe, a composite of the words "kindred spirits". Others sometimes deprecatingly dismiss it as "the urge to merge". Whatever one cares to call it, the gathering together of two or three or more persons in a group to share a love of and their ideas about Sherlock Holmes, and to attempt to understand, or, perhaps, escape into the late Victorian world, is what we are talking about. The joining together for this purpose has become a frequent and widespread occurrence for those attuned to catch the distant but beguiling halloo of The Great Holmesian Game.

In my case, it has been an inevitable result of my absorbing interest in The Great Detective and of my natural garrulous personality, to have joined and have assisted in the founding of several dozen such groups, as well as being a most enthusiastic member of The Baker Street Irregulars. In America, it is customary to refer to the local or geographical or professional groups devoted to this great cause as Scion Societies of The Baker Street Irregulars. Other nations such as Great Britain, Canada, Japan, Denmark, and Sweden have their own national societies of Holmesians. In some of these countries, they also encourage the establishment of local chapters. The latest statistic on the number of such societies lists 239 that are active. I am an active or honorary member of more than thirty local or national or international Sherlockian societies. And either by personal attendance or by correspondence, I enjoy each one thoroughly.

One such society with which I am proud and pleased to have shared many hours of conversation and socializing and correspondence is The Great Alkali Plainsmen of Greater Kansas City. (And I hasten to point out that in these times of so-called equality among the sexes, it might seem more prudent to rename it The Great Alkali Plainspersons, but that would defy tradition and would appear to be unCanonical.) Reviewing for the purpose of writing this preface my many years of pleasant and, alas, sometimes madly frustrating association with The Great Alkali Plainsmen, I have come to the conclusion that the group is much as are other such groups. It is a diverse assembly of men and women, young and old, rich and poor, fat and thin, loud and soft-spoken -- most blessed with a sense of humor though a few, God help us!, dull and witless -- and composed of all kinds of ethnic, geographical, and educational backgrounds, in some miraculous manner drawn together by only one thing: an appreciation for Arthur Conan Doyle's greater-than-life creation, Sherlock Holmes.

In the Plainsmen we have been fortunate to have had from the beginning both a young (very young) member and an older member who knew the Canon as few have ever done. From the very first meeting I attended, in 1964, these two stimulated and enthused me greatly. We Plainsmen have had, as all other Scions have had, those who do not follow through on anything except breathing (which, in a sense, is a pity), and those who come along for laughs (and these I hope enjoy themselves). I believe that the purpose of a Sherlock Holmes society should be enjoyment, and opportunity to learn more about the specialized Holmesian world, and also to bring others into this jolly jungle of factual fiction (or is it the other way around?), and even to use or de-

velop one's intellectual abilities. In recalling my long association as a Great Alkali Plainsman, it seems that at times the thrust of the meeting or the society's goals was obscured or lost.

But certainly The Great Alkaki Plainsmen have provided much knowledge, pleasure, and mental stimulation over the last quarter of a century. This friendly, intellectual, and clever exchange of ideas and great good humor is reward enough for one and all. A a member in "good" standing since the Plainsmen's fourth meeting, I am honored to be considered such to this day, though we are now separated by many miles. I consider myself an enthusiastic and participating Plainsman, and a friend, and I congratulate all of us who are members of The Great Alkali Plainsmen on twenty-five years of strange and wonderful happenings.

JOHN BENNETT SHAW, BSI

Santa Fe, New Mexico

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A history of a Baker Street Irregulars scion society is necessarily an account of its members, its meetings and activities, its traditions and folklore. This history of The Great Alkali Plainsmen of Greater Kansas City has turned out longer and more detailed than its naive author had originally conceived -- made possible, perhaps unavoidable, by the preservation of the scion's archives from oblivion. The archives now consist of half a dozen jumbo three-ring binders full of minutes, newspaper and magazine articles about the Plainsmen, programmes, notes and quizzes from past meetings, all issues of the Kansas City Daily Journal, the scion's newsletter of record since 1976, a wealth of correspondence, and other memorabilia of twenty-five years of Sherlockian fervor.

In addition, this history has benefitted from the personal archives and memories of a number of Great Alkali Plainsmen, past and present: Ernest Willer, Robert Willer, John Altman, John Bennett Shaw, Chris Redmond, Donald Redmond, Milton Perry, John Lehman, Don McClain, Stan Carmack, Philip Shrefler, and Ann Powell-Brown. Richard Warner of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Jason Rouby of Little Rock, Arkansas, were also good enough to shed light on certain scion mysteries. I am most grateful to all, and to all contributors to the Kansas City Daily Journal, and letters in the scion archives, from which I have quoted liberally.

All section headings within the various chapters are, of course, quotations from "The Country of the Saints" in A Study in Scarlet. It, like the Canon as a whole, has a suitable quotation for every occasion. Particularly appropriate, it has seemed to me, is the use of that tale's caravan as a metaphor for the unwinding history of The Great Alkali Plainsmen.

Any errors of fact or interpretation in this history remain my responsibility. I have tried to be as accurate as possible. But when the archives were inconclusive, or memories were vague, I have tried to err on the side of fantasy.

JON L. LELLENBERG, BSI

Alexandria, Virginia, and
Prairie Village, Kansas