PART III

LELLENBERG YEARS

"...a tall, savage-looking young man..."

There is no reason why The Great Alkali Plainsmen should have languished after 1968. Ernest Willer continued to live and work in Kansas City, as did Milt Perry; Bob Willer and John Altman finished college and returned home. Nor did Sherlockian interests cease. A few Plainsmen gathered informally now and then over dinner during the scion's Great Hiatus, in groups of half a dozen or so; Milt Perry today recalls occasions at the Savoy Grill, the Hereford House, and Stephenson's, at long intervals. And Ernest Willer continued to travel to Fayetteville for Arkansas Valley Investors meetings, in May 1969 with Bob Willer, and again in April 1970 on his own. But no Plainsmen meetings were called, not for nearly four years, until the autumn of 1972.

The correspondence has been lost, but Ernest Willer received a letter sometime that autumn from Jon Lellenberg, an expatriate Kansas Citian living in Washington, D.C. He was a Sherlockian too, he said by way of introduction, a member of Washington's scion society, The Red Circle. He came home several times a year, and it seemed a shame that The Great Alkali Plainsmen were not meeting. Were there plans for a revival? Could there be a gathering around Christmas, when he would be in town again?

Ernest hesitated at first, for few Plainsmen were still in sight. But Lellenberg pressed, both by mail and again by phone when he arrived home in December, until Ernest suggested an informal dinner on the 27th, the traditional target-date for the Feast of the Blue Carbuncle. He promised to round up the rest of the scion's founders, and whoever else he could find.

John Altman was out of town the week after Christmas, but Ernest and Bob Willer and Milt Perry met Lellenberg at Balestrere's restaurant at 103rd & State Line. Lellenberg was in his mid-twenties, and had been living in Washington for nearly two years, since finishing graduate school in California. He was an impossibly tall 6'5", a self-conscious, impatient, and occasionally prickly personality in those days. A Sherlock Holmes fan since childhood, he had discovered the world of the Baker Street Irregulars a few years before, and had been soaking up Irregular traditions and literature avidly since arriving in Washington at the beginning of 1971. When he met with the Willers and Perry that night, he was on the verge of breaking into clear Irregular view. In two weeks he would attend his first BSI dinner in New York; in February his newly-created "Dispatch-Box Press" would publish its first item, a long-lost collection of vintage Holmes parodies; and in March The Baker Street Journal would publish his exegetical analysis of The Naval Treaty and The Second Stain, entitled "A Novel Treatise". He would receive his BSI investiture in January 1974: "Rodger Prescott", to which he would habitually append the canonical suffix "of evil memory".

No contemporary record of that irregular Plainsmen dinner survives, but there was a promising air of deja vu about it. Lellenberg had left for college two months before the scion's founding in 1963, but now he discovered

that he knew all three founders. He had grown up in Westwood Hills, Kansas, just a block and a half from the Willers. Though he and Bob had gone to different schools, they had played together occasionally as boys. And John Altman had been in the class behind Lellenberg's at Pembroke-Country Day.

Had Lellenberg been home in October '63, and heard of the Plainsmen's founding, he might or might not have become involved at that time. But now Sherlock Holmes was his all-absorbing interest, and he was almost mortified that there was no active BSI scion society in his hometown. There should be, he felt; all the more as he did come home several times a year, and wanted Sherlockian parties to attend. He heard for the first time that night about Milt Perry's discoveries, and was enthused, and also astonished that Milt had not written them up for The Baker Street Journal. He urged the Willers and Perry to revive The Great Alkali Plainsmen, and not let that night's impromptu Feast of the Blue Carbuncle go for naught.

There was certainly no opposition to a revival, but Lellenberg found in the ensuing months that nothing was happening. More letters and phone calls in the spring finally succeeded in setting a date for a meeting on May 26th, when Lellenberg would be in town, en route from Santa Fe visiting Shaw and his new scion there, The Brothers Three of Moriarty. Lellenberg was a trifle diffident, though, about pressing others to revive the scion. He did not live in Kansas City any longer, he realized, and in letters that April to Ernest Willer and Milt Perry, he referred to himself half-apologetically as an "outside agitator".

A Plainsmen meeting did take place on May 26th. Despite initial thought to Union Station and the Savoy Grill downtown, the Plainsmen returned -- for the sake of tradition? -- to their early scene of the crime, the Plaza III. Six sat down together in the room where the scion's first irregular dinner had been in 1963: Lellenberg, Altman, the Willers, Perry, and Ted Johnstone, a Pem-Day classmate of Lellenberg's now working on his Ph.D. in history at KU. That was all. "None knew who belonged to this ruthless society": the best mailing list that Bob Willer had been able to produce was long out of date. Fred McGraw had been tracked down living in poor health in Tennessee. Jerry Wigglesworth had moved to Connecticut. Ivan Goldman, the reporter, was gone. Margaret Weis was untraceable.

The meeting lacked numbers, but not spirit. Ernest Willer took the chair, and proposed the opening toast to John Ferrier. Greetings and encouragement from McGraw and Shaw were read, including Shaw's dire threat if Plainsmen announcements, etc, were not all sent to him in the future. Ernest produced an intimidating double-acrostic puzzle that no one present cared to tackle on the spot. Milt Perry gave a reprise of "The Body Beside the Tracks" for Lellenberg's and Johnstone's benefit. Lellenberg scandalized the Plainsmen with a paper of his own, accusing a vice-ridden Watson of inflicting his notorious Afghan wounds himself to escape the fighting at Maiwand.* After the uproar died down, future meetings were discussed. Bob

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* Published for morbid minds as "S.I.W.: A Study in Watson", Baker Street Miscellanea, No. 22, Summer 1980.

Willer proposed a tenth anniversary meeting in October, and Shaw's suggestion of a combined Blue Carbuncle/Holmes Birthday Party early next January, to attend en route to New York for the BSI weekend, was enthusiastically endorsed. The evening concluded with Bob Willer reading 221B.

"Overall impressions of the meeting: Good, if somewhat in search of organization," Lellenberg wrote to Shaw afterwards: "Six people are really too few....But it was fun, which counts most. After the meeting, Johnstone and I drove down to the bottoms, to the approximate site of the old Union Depot where the body of the murdered man was found, and then to the Coates House, where Holmes had stayed. We went inside, and inquired whether Mr. Holmes was registered. Alas, he was not..."

And Lellenberg continued: "I feel diffident about the possibly irritating persistence I've shown so far, for after all, I've never been to any other Plainsmen meetings, just that small dinner last December. But then, if I had not been so naggingly persistent this meeting wouldn't have taken place. So I shall continue to be a pest of the same sort. On to the October meeting!"

"At last his perseverance was rewarded."

Lellenberg would later conclude that he had not been nag enough. A Study in Scarlet speaks eloquently of the desolate silence of the Great Alkali Plain; it now settled once again over Plainsmen affairs. The next announcement should have gone out in June, but never did, nor was a Feast of the Blue Carbuncle held that year. Nor was any meeting called during the entire subsequent year of 1974. Dust once again covered the tracks of the Plainsmen's caravan.

Lellenberg was a slow learner, but by 1975 even he had concluded that an outside agitator was what The Great Alkali Plainsmen needed. The archives do not show how he now called a summer meeting himself, but call one he did, for July 23, 1975, at the Savoy Grill downtown. Responding to the summons were Ernest Willer, Milt Perry, and Ted Johnstone; John Altman was out of town, and Bob Willer had moved to Chicago. But the four had a good time nonetheless. The Savoy Grill, Kansas City's oldest restaurant dating from 1903, had great fin de siècle frontier atmosphere, and took pains that night to see that the Plainsmen enjoyed themselves, a far cry from the old Plaza III.

The conversation touched on Harry Truman as a Sherlockian, the current crop of books and movies about the Master (Lellenberg weakly defended The Seven-Per-Cent Solution as entertainment, against Milt's and Ernest's insistence upon canonical rigor), and other topics. To Milt's dismay, attention turned to the continued unpardonable nonpublication of "The Body Beside the Tracks". He tried to divert the issue by proposing a sequel, suggesting that Sherlock Holmes may have had a brush with the notorious Jesse James when he visited Kansas City in 1880. But Lellenberg parried Perry, calling indignantly for the paper's submission to The Baker Street Journal before any new outlandish ideas were pursued. The evening concluded with Perry's acquiescence, agreement on December 27th for the Feast of the Blue Carbuncle, and a walk up Broadway to the Coates House, where Perry told tales of its historic

past.

Milt Perry was as good as his word this time. Without further urging, he typed up "The Body Beside the Tracks" and sent it off in September to Julian Wolff, the BSJ's editor.

To his consternation, Julian returned it, saying that the BSJ would not be able to use it. Was it a story for which the world was not yet prepared? No reason was given, but not even Julian's best friends ever accuse him of being an authority on matters west of the Hudson River. Years before, for example, in preparing his famous canonical atlas, Julian had mislocated historic Fort Dodge, Kansas, in Nebraska -- ignoring not only history but the Canon's definitive reference to the Arkansas River. Whatever his reason for turning the paper down, though, the question remained: what now?

Fortunately there was an alternative: Baker Street Miscellanea, then in its first year of a now-illustrious history of publishing Sherlockiana and Doyleana. Lellenberg had been involved with BSM from its outset, and he directed Milt Perry there. BSM was delighted to take the paper, and published it next spring.*

Meanwhile, the Feast of the Blue Carbuncle was approaching, and Lellenberg was wondering how many Plainsmen could be rounded up for it. The result was better than he had expected, thanks to some fortuitous circumstances. On October 24th, the Kansas City Star ran a feature story by Brian Dunning, the paper's European correspondent, about Sherlockiana. There was nothing about the story to distinguish it from dozens of others, save one thing. Alongside it was a brief sidebar entitled "Kansas City Connection". Though clearly written with ignorant tongue in cheek, it could not have been a better set-up for The Great Alkali Plainsmen. "Everyone knows," it claimed, "that Sherlock Holmes visited Kansas City. The name of Kansas City doesn't actually appear in the Holmes stories, but students of the great man know better." And after some off-the-mark suggestions about a Holmesian Kansas City connection, it ended: "These and many other important questions are being investigated by silent men of the Baker Street Irregulars and the Sherlock Holmes Society. Watch this space for developments, which can be expected at any time over the next few decades."

Dunning probably congratulated himself on his perspicacity if he noticed how soon developments followed. Perry and Lellenberg leaped at the opportunity. Milt's letter in the November 2nd Star told Dunning to rest easy -- that Kansas City's BSI scion society, The Great Alkali Plainsmen, had been investigating Holmes's activities here for years, and were readying a report for publication. "Among the discoveries are that Holmes spent his 26th birthday here, he appeared in a play here, had a brush with the James gang here, and alerted the authorities to a heinous murder." Lellenberg's letter appeared ten days later, reinforcing Perry's message and chiding the Star (a bit unfairly, remembering Ivan Goldman) for having ignored the story in the

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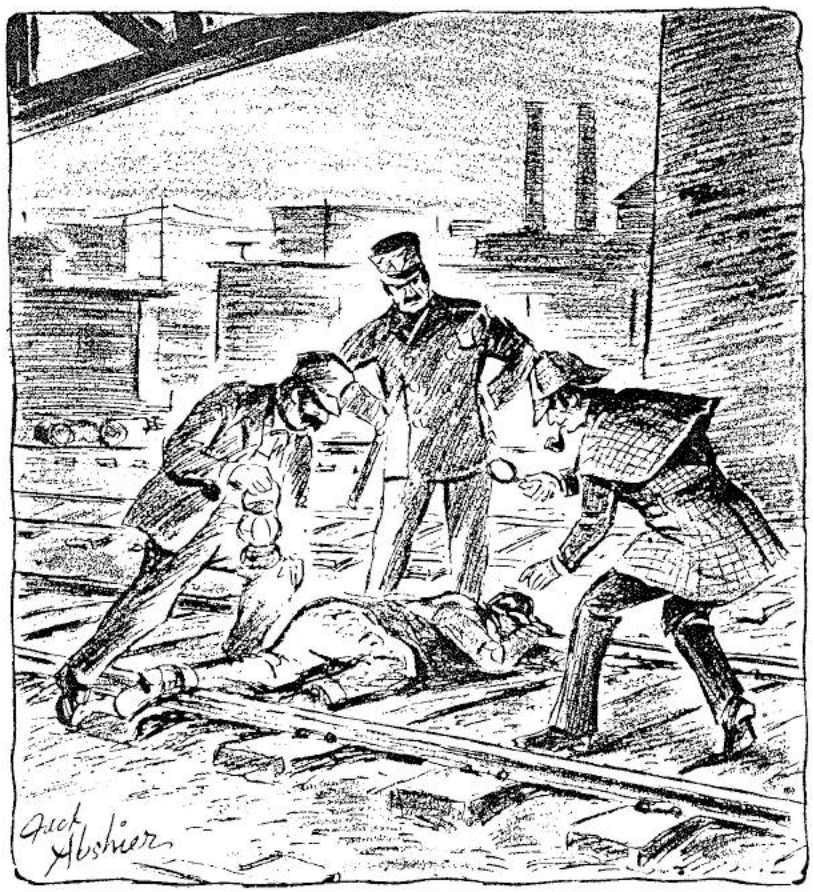
* Baker Street Miscellanea, No. 6, June 1976, reprinted in the April 1977 Historic Kansas City News.

past. "Will the Star now repair its deficiency?" he asked.

And the Star came through, bless its heart. It interviewed Milt Perry promptly, and published a long report of the case on November 28th under the title "Holmesian Logic 'Solves' 1880 Death Here". It even included an illustration of three men, one of them ostentatiously Sherlock Holmes, examining the body beside the tracks. The Star satisfactorily covered both Holmes's



visit to Kansas City, and the Great Alkali Plainsmen, with their Feast of the Blue Carbuncle coming up in less than a month. While lacking quite the tone of reverential respect for the truth of Sherlock Holmes that Plainsmen prefer to see, it was the help needed to bring the scion to the attention of like-minded people on the Great Alkali Plain.

And it did. When the Plainsmen convened at the Savoy Grill on December 27th, there were twenty in attendence, including a goodly volume of newcomers like Art Suskin, Frank Mitchell, and David and Helen Wallace. The previous July, four Plainsmen had dined in a private room that was more like a large closet. Now the Plainsmen took their cocktails under the stained-glass dome in the Grill's lobby room (once the stately lobby of the old Savoy Hotel), and sat down at a long table beneath the windows onto Central Avenue, where they could watch the heavy snow that was falling that night. The atmosphere has seldom been so fine, and the toasts included Holmes's to the landlord of

Left side: Robert & Sheryl Willer, James & Brenda Wertz, Frank Mitchell & daughter, Helen & David Wallace, John Altman. Right side: Jon Lellenberg, Milt & Barbara Perry, Ted Johnstone, James & Mary Lou Kehoe, Amy & Art Suskin.

the Alpha Inn, offered now to the Savoy Grill's manager for the fine arrangements. Milt Perry discussed "The Body Beside the Tracks" for the benefit of newcomers, hinting at Jamesian revelations to follow. Art Suskin gave a mixed review of The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes's Smarter Brother, and Lellenberg inflicted a quiz on The Blue Carbuncle (Suskin won, with David Wallace close behind). That story was discussed at length, with Milt casting himself once again in the role of iconoclast, and Ernest Willer took the Plainsmen's breath away by producing what he claimed was the veritable Blue Carbuncle itself. Bob Willer was howled down when he tried to give a treasurer's report dating back to 1968. Ernest closed with 221B at a gratifying 11:45 p.m., and the happy Plainsmen disappeared into the night and swirling snow.

This was a landmark occasion in the history of The Great Alkali Plainsmen, because it marked their unquestionable reemergence as an active scion society, as opposed to a small number of Sherlockians wondering how to revive it. We are fortunate to have a photograph of the meeting, thanks to the Kansas City Star. "The honorary place at the head of the lavishly set dinner table was empty. Yet water was poured* and a place was set for the man who never lived and thus could never die," the Star said the next day. Its thoroughly sympathetic treatment this time gave another boost to the Plainsmen's rising fortunes, asking rhetorically to what avail this Sherlockian business is, and quoting Lellenberg in reply: "It's part nostalgia, part a desire for more stable times. Mystery is always captivating, and problem-solving gives a feeling of satisfaction. It's romance of the best sort. Simple. Innocent. And never changing."

"Soon the whole caravan was winding along once more."

Ernest Willer retired at the end of 1975, and Lellenberg hoped he would now take a more active role leading The Great Alkali Plainsmen. Ernest demurred, to the regret of both Lellenberg and his son Bob in Chicago, who may have felt somewhat that his father's rightful place in the scion was being usurped by the outside agitator. There is no evidence that Ernest felt that way, however, and he continued to provide sage advice to Lellenberg's efforts to place the scion on an active footing.

The first thing Lellenberg did after the memorable '75 Feast was start a newsletter for The Great Alkali Plainsmen.† The Kansas City Daily Journal borrowed its name from the newspaper that had reported the "body beside the tracks" mystery, and took its masthead from that very issue of January 11, 1880. It appeared for the first time on February 24, 1976, declaring its intentions ("Education never ends, Watson," might sum them up), reporting the Feast two months before, bringing the latest Sherlockian books to the Plainsmen's attention, reminding all of a Sherlock Holmes play at Penn Valley Com-

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* Water again, the curse of our scion!

† Bob Willer had started one in 1968, The Great Scrapbook, but it had flickered out after two irregular issues.

munity College in just a few days' time, and alluding to the possibility of Leonard Nimoy's road production of Gillette's Sherlock Holmes coming to Kansas City that spring. Published five or so times a year from then on, the Daily Journal has carried Sherlockian news to the Great Alkali Plainsmen, and news of the Plainsmen to others, for thirteen years now.

Kansas City Daily Journal.

A NEWSLETTER FOR
THE GREAT ALKALI PLAINSMEN OF GREATER KANSAS CITY,
SCION SOCIETY OF THE BAKER STREET IRREGULARS

No. 1 February 24, 1976

FIRST ISSUE

This is the first of a newsletter intended to provide information about and for The Great Alkali Plainsmen of Greater Kansas City, partial fulfillment of the promise to improve the scion's communications. The reason for using the masthead from the January 11th, 1880, issue of the old *Kansas City Journal* will be perfectly obvious to those who are aware of Milt Ferry's research on Sherlock Holmes in Kansas City. Those who are not, or who wish to know more, are advised to read Milt's paper "The Body Beside the Tracks", forthcoming in the June issue of *Baker Street Miscellanea*. A flyer about this excellent periodical is enclosed. Also strongly recommended is *The Baker Street Journal*, the quarterly publication of The Baker Street Irregulars; $10.00 per year from Fordham University Press, University Box L, Bronx, New York 10458.

BLUE CARBUNCLE DINNER

The last meeting of The Great Alkali Plainsmen was the scion's traditional Blue Carbuncle feast, held at The Savoy Grill on the snowy evening of December 27, 1975. After cocktails under the stained-glass dome, the canonical toasts, and the Grill's delicious dinner of steak and lobster, the business portion of the meeting commenced with Jon Lellenberg in the chair.

First on the agenda was a discussion led by Milt Ferry of the recent local

Notice of the Penn Valley play was received too late to organize a theater party, but Ernest Willer and a few others saw Sherlock Holmes; A New Adventure -- not so new after all, since it was based closely on The Noble Bachelor and Gillette's play. Ernest praised its production values, but assessed it overall as "an example of what can happen to Good Intentions." The Nimoy version of Gillette's play did not come to town -- small loss, perhaps, as word from all quarters received was that he looked good in the role -- until he moved or spoke. The Plainsmen met instead at the Savoy Grill on June 5th. Lellenberg was back for what proved a quiet gathering of only eight Plainsmen, though it included several noteworthy additions to the Plainsmen's caravan.

The Daily Journal has carried detailed reports of all, or nearly all, Great Alkali Plainsmen meetings since its inception, so it is unnecessary to repeat all their details. But it should be noted here that Lellenberg was striving in early '76 to arouse enthusiasm among the neophyte scionists by playing up Kansas City's Sherlockian folklore. He had chosen The Three Garridebs as the adventure of the evening, and down from Garrideb Country came that very civil engineer and his family, Bill, Daisy, and Nola Wright, for the first time, reopening a Plainsman outpost in the canonical community of Topeka, and proving themselves over time the staunchest of Plainsmen.* Also present was Steven Mann, a young man who had recently moved to Kansas City, Kansas, from Oklahoma City, where he had been involved with the recently founded Afghanistan Perceivers of Tulsa. Mann would make himself very useful to the faraway Lellenberg during the next few years, as his energetic agent on the spot in Kansas City.

Lellenberg had mailed out copies of a learned paper entitled "Sherlock

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* Bill had been a Holmes fan since high school, and he and Daisy had raised their four children on the Canon, especially eighteen-year-old Nola. ("We didn't read her Mother Goose," Daisy once exclaimed with pride.) Daisy had read last November's newspaper account of The Great Alkali Plainsmen, and surprised Bill on his birthday with a membership in the BSI scion society.

in Kansas", taken from The Speckled Band of Boston's 1947 anthology The Second Cab, and authored Belden Wigglesworth's friend Willis Wood. Contrary to Plainsman folklore, it made out a case for Holmes visiting the USA in 1876, according to a convoluted interpretation of the Three Garridebs reference to "Moorville, Kansas". Though absent that night, Milt Perry had challenged Wood's theory in writing, in a letter that Lellenberg read to the Plainsmen. Milt went on to associate Killer Evans and Rodger Prescott of evil memory with the Jesse James gang at the time of "The Body Beside the Tracks".

Steve Mann proved to be a bundle of energy that summer, almost too much for Lellenberg's peace of mind. The latter was still feeling his way toward a workable combination of local initiative and the still-indispensble sort of absentee landlordism that his leadership constituted; and also, if someone on the scene were to strike out on his own, Lellenberg privately preferred someone with longer roots in Kansas City than Mann. But the principal problem with some of Mann's enthusiastic ideas for the Plainsmen, Lellenberg told him in July, was that so far "we have a membership which does not plan their personal schedules to attend meetings, but instead attends if they have nothing better to do when the time comes." Probably Lellenberg was feeling a bit discouraged by the small turnout the month before. But forthcoming developments would soon change that.

Planning was already underway for a major extravaganza on what turned out to be the blazing hot day of August 21st. John Bennett Shaw was coming up the Santa Fe Trail to his old scion for the first time since 1968, and both he and Lellenberg talked the meeting up a great deal to neighboring scion societies on the edge of the Plain. John Ferrier would have been impressed by the fair crowd that came. Besides fifteen Plainsmen and Shaw's separate entourage of eight, the meeting was enlivened by three Afghanistan Perceivers, two Arkansas Valley Investors, four Maiwand Jezails, no less than ten Noble Bachelors of St. Louis, plus two wide-eyed NBC TV people from New York. In Kansas City to cover the just-concluded Republican National Convention, they had taken in the spectacle of the Irregular mob at cocktails -- Shaw had insisted on a ninety-minute cocktail "hour" -- and asked if they might join the bacchanalia for the evening.

Shaw has always been a good drawing attraction, and this was no exception. Lellenberg was in the Chair, Shaw reigned as conquering hero returned, and a more lively Plainsmen dinner has seldom been seen. Traditional toasts by Milt Perry, Bill Wright, and Richard Miller of The Brothers Three of Moriarty were followed spontaneously by many additional toasts from the floor.* There was indignant Shavian spluttering when the guest of honor discovered

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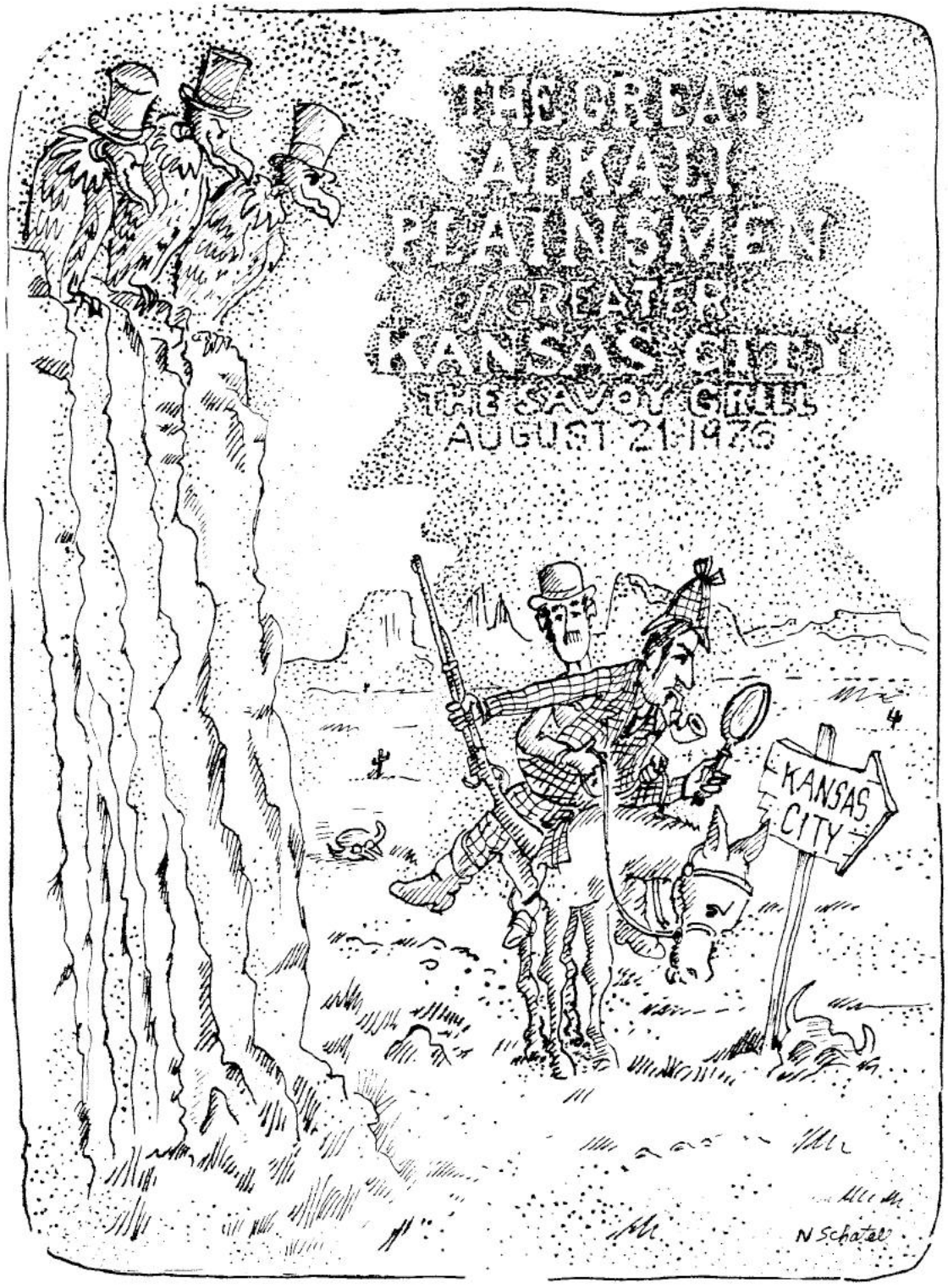
* Including one from a bumptious Jezail who rose to offer a toast to his wife "who's five miles away at our hotel where she belongs." Feminine spines around the room stiffened, other Jezails turned pink, and Lellenberg murmured to the offender that if he heard his voice again, he would sling his butt out onto the hot, hard pavement of Central Avenue. (Next January, the wretch attended the BSI dinner for the first time, and was dismayed to see across the table a solid glowering phalanx of Lellenberg, Shaw, and Miller.) [footnote continued on p. 36]


THE GREAT
ALKALI
PLAINSMEN
OF GREATER
KANSAS CITY
THE SAVOY GRILL
AUGUST 21 1976
KANSAS
CITY
N Schatel

COCKTAILS
under the stained glass dome.

I was standing at the Criterion Bar....

THE CALL TO ORDER

I heard a ring at the bell.

THE CANONICAL TOASTS

To Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson,
To Jefferson Hope and Lucy Ferrier
and
To Professor James Moriarty.

Is alcohol permitted?

DINNER

I insist upon your dining with us.

THE VISITING SCION SOCIETIES:

The Afghanistan Perceivers of Tulsa
The Arkansas Valley Investors Ltd. of Little Rock
The Maiwand Jezails of Omaha
The Noble Bachelors of Saint Louis

A singular set of people....

THE DOUBLE-CROSTIC PUZZLE

Solution, Winner, and Prize

I wish I knew how you reach your results.

THE GUEST OF HONOR

John Bennett Shaw, BSI

As far as I know he is a decent fellow enough.

ADDRESS: FROM THE PLAINS TO THE DESERT
and The Brothers Three of Moriarty.

Dirty-looking rascals, but I suppose everyone has some little immortal spark concealed about him.

A BICENTENNIAL QUIZ ON THE CANON,
by John Bennett Shaw

It is my business to know things.

OTHER BUSINESS

What a chorus of groans, cries, and bleatings!

221B,
by Vincent Starrett

A glimpse of a great heart as well as a great brain.

that Lellenberg had thoughtfully arranged for him to drink the toasts in his traditional Plainsman grape juice. Representatives of other scions present rose to stake claims to Irregular notoriety. Stafford Davis told of the Afghanistan Perceivers' recent terrorization of Watson, Oklahoma, Jason Rouby recalled the Arkansas Valley Investors' early associations with the Great Alkali Plainsmen, John Crane delivered a soft-core porno account of the Maiwand Jezails' plans to raise a suitable erection in Afghanistan, and Philip Shreffler described the downriver origins and activities of The Noble Bachelors.

Shaw was disconcerted to hear his own wife Dorothy introducing him, satirically, along the lines of Watson's cataloguing of Holmes's knowledge in A Study in Scarlet. But he overcame this difficult beginning to give the assembled multitude a rousing talk, recalling his Plainsman years in the 1960s, and how hard it was to get a drink in those days. He had brought a quiz, and Milt Perry shocked his compatriots by winning it. Ernest Willer and John Altman, as founders of The Great Alkali Plainsmen, presented Shaw with a scroll honoring his tireless efforts to make "the fair crowd even larger and fairer wherever his journeys take him."

"...a refuge from the violent man and the godless..."

That was the Plainsmen's last meeting at the Savoy Grill, and they were sorry to leave it. But it lacked a private room for the now-flourishing scion, unless it assembled a mob like that of August 21st to overwhelm the lobby room, and it was pricey as Kansas City dining establishments went. Back in April, Daily Journal No. 2 had queried Plainsmen views about meetings: how many a year, what kinds besides dinners, and where else besides the Savoy Grill? The June dinner had discussed the matter. Four to six meetings a year, rather than the traditional two, was the consensus; dinner meetings were preferred, but perhaps an alternative to the Savoy Grill should be sought. Frank Mitchell was appointed a Committee on Restaurants, and he soon located a promising possibility, The Maggie Jones at 63rd & Troost on the Landing. He and Steve Mann investigated, and found it good. The atmosphere was suitable, the bar service efficient, the food fine, the prices moderate, a private room was available, and the proprietor, Jerry Gaines, seemed delighted at the prospect of hosting The Great Alkali Plainsmen. A meeting there was called for October 30th, beginning a happy relationship

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[continued from p. 33] Alas, the Great Alkali Plainsmen's relations with the Jezails ("a barrier against the advance of civilization") have never been happy. It will be recalled that the Jezails had evaded Shaw's attempts in the 1960s to arrange a joint meeting and canonical competition between the two scions. Lellenberg tried to reopen negotiations in early '76, only to hear the "real" reason from Richard Lesh: the Jezails had always been "distant" toward the Plainsmen because the latter's female members would spoil the pure all-male atmossphere of the Nebraska scion society. Lellenberg replied that it seemed a pity, because the competition "would be in fun, of course, and we'd have our womenfolk go easy on the Jezails involved."

between the Plainsmen and The Maggie Jones that would continue for years.

Twenty-five attended that dinner, which took on a further Hallowe'enish tone with The Devil's Foot as the adventure of the evening. Steve Mann took the Chair in Lellenberg's absence, and ran a lively program including Eille Norwood's 1921 silent-movie version of the story (screened by John Altman, now well-launched in his career as a documentary movie-maker), and a Devilish quiz won by newcomer John Lehman. Besides Lehman, a self-described miserable hireling of the Internal Revenue Service, several other noteworthy figures debuted that night: a saintly seminary student, Stephen Harrell; Tim Kirk, a famous fantasy artist; Hallmark artist Vikki Marshall; and two journalists, Lenore Bradley for the Kansas City Star and Stan Carmack for KMBC-TV.

Both reporters carried further word of the Plainsmen to the public. Although Bradley later boned up on Irregular history to write a good account, she was wide-eyed that night, never fully recovering from the "curious blend of fact and fantasy which characterizes the meetings of the Baker Street Irregulars," as she put it in her January 23rd story, "Holmes Is Where Their Hearts Are". Some Plainsmen could not resist pulling her leg. While Milt Perry was matter-of-factual, for Milt, in discussing "The Body Beside the Tracks", Steve Mann told her that he was "combing the Canon to prove that Holmes was consulted by extraterrestials, interplanetary visitors, supernaturals and ghosts from the past." (It was Hallowe'en, though it seems not to have occured to her.) And Ernest Willer assured her that a dinner invitation had been sent, as always, to Sherlock Holmes in London, and had been answered by Mrs. Hudson, who had said that the Master was on his way west to investigate "the Tonganoxie Terror".* Stan Carmack's two-part television report on November 6th and 7th was treated less hilariously, though, and it was a fortunate day for the Plainsmen when Brother Carmack became a member of the caravan.

The Maggie Jones was a success. "Although it lacks the aura dispensed by that incomparable stained-glass dome at the Savoy," Daisy Wright wrote to Lellenberg afterwards, "it was quite appropriate to a Sherlockian gathering. ...dark enough in the corners to give rise to mysterious speculation." December 18th, however, saw the Plainsmen gather next at the Plaza Theater for an advance screening of The Seven-Per-Cent Solution. Afterwards it was a short walk to lunch at Annie's Santa Fe, where the Plainsmen heatedly debated the movie, and John Altman did his gleeful best to get the distraught Milt Perry drunk. Such was the price of a fundamentalist attitude in the bad old days of the Sherlock Holmes Boom of the 1970s.

When the Plainsmen returned to The Maggie Jones on an unseasonably warm December 27th for the Feast of the Blue Carbuncle, it was to a specially prepared roast goose dinner, confirming the worth of The Maggie Jones to the thirty-one who attended. The Yuletide event was a happy conclusion to the most active year the Plainsmen had ever known. Eloquent toasts were drunk, including one in verse to Peterson the Commissionaire, "who brought the goose," offered by Marilyn Levinson, the first person ever to turn in a per-

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* Kansans will understand.

fect answer to one of Ernest Willer's double-acrostic puzzles. Milt Perry wept into his whiskey as Altman praised The Seven-Per-Cent Solution, but regrouped to win an entertaining round-robin quiz that posed New Year's resolutions by unidentified canonical victims and villains for the Plainsmen to identify -- deciphering entries that were usually difficult, often humorous, and mostly canonically justified.

1976 was "an exceptional year for The Great Alkali Plainsmen," the Daily Journal proclaimed. The scion had acquired interesting new members, and become acquainted with many visitors from other scion societies. Highlights included the publication at long last of Milt Perry's "The Body Beside the Tracks", Brother Shaw's return, and the discovery of a pleasing new home for Plainsmen dinners. Accolades went to Frank Mitchell who found The Maggie Jones, Jerry Gaines for going out of his way to make us comfortable and well fed, John Altman who made cinematic treats possible with his equipment and expertise, and Steve Mann for his assistance arranging Plainsmen affairs. And of course 1976 had also seen the creation of the Kansas City Daily Journal itself.

"Who are you, though?"

By December, Lellenberg had begun to reflect upon the considerable change that the last twelve months had wrought, and to muse about the scion's future on paper, playing with the question of what directions the Plainsmen should take now, having found their feet. The one-page document was "started as a joke," he noted at the bottom of the sheet later, but "continued and finished as a serious effort." He asked himself, out of a knowledge of BSI scion societies second only to Shaw's among the Plainsmen, what the other scions were that he admired most. He came up with a half dozen or so. He admired the interesting, often distinctive programs of some of them. He envied the elegance that others achieved at their gatherings. Still others seemed worthy of emulation because of their scholarship, or (in the somewhat contrived case of The Bruce-Partington Planners) a certain mysterious aura.* He recognized that The Great Alkali Plainsmen would always retain a certain, not discreditable, frontier roughness, but also that the Plainsmen had begun to do interesting things with good prospects for continuing in that vein.

There has never been anything mysterious about The Great Alkali Plainsmen, except perhaps how they put it all away, but in later years Lellenberg would consider himself well-pleased with the scion's "wiry and vigourous constitution". That was not entirely self-congratulatory, either, for he was often surprised by developments; and the scion's strong qualities and often unique attributes, he realized, were owing mostly to other members who were

* In addition to Lellenberg, the founder of The Bruce-Partington Planners within the Military-Industrial Complex, one other Plainsman is a member honoris causa of this shadowy scion. Part of its mysterious aura is that its membership rolls are classified, however, and it would therefore be a breach of security to admit that that other Plainsman is George Erickson.

on the spot in Kansas City. But for what it is worth, this is what Lellenberg was thinking as de facto Avenging Angel at the end of 1976. It would be kind to remember that he was talking to himself at the time.

After the successful October '76 meeting chaired by Steve Mann, Lellenberg had told John Bennett Shaw that he hoped to diminish his own direct role in the scion over time. In 1977, he continued his soon familiar pattern of turning to Plainsmen in Kansas City to plan and run most meetings. His next opportunity came in February, when a Columbia Artists road company production of Gillette's Sherlock Holmes came to town for a one-night performance at the Lyric Theater on Valentine's Day. Not the best night for a theater party, perhaps, but twenty-seven Plainsmen turned out for it. Reactions were cool, though, because the production employed an exaggerated approach unpleasantly close to outright burlesque. Art Suskin, reviewing it for the Daily Journal, chided the director for resorting to cheap laughs in obvious ignorance of Holmesian values. Some Plainsmen were so offended that they declined to join members of the cast at Crown Center's Signboard Bar afterwards, but others did, and discussion of the play, William Gillette, Sherlock Holmes, the Baker Street Irregulars, and the Great Alkali Plainsmen, continued until 1:30 a.m.

Some Plainsmen felt that they could perform Gillette's play as well as the road company they had seen. Though they never undertook it, it's worth recording the casting that John Lehman proposed in a letter to Lellenberg. It captures some leading personalities of our scion at that time, and also the kind of humor for which Lehman, and the scion itself, to a considerable extent, was becoming known:

> Speaking of the Gillette play, the idea of the Plainsmen staging the play themselves is excellent. With twenty persons in the cast, there would not be enough in the audience for anyone to be embarrassed. I have a few suggestions as to who should be cast in some of the roles, though I admit I am vulnerable to accusations of typecasting.
>
> Alice Faulkner -- a sweet innocent -- John Altman
>
> James Larrabee -- blackmailer, kidnapper, a man without a single redeeming social merit -- Milt Perry
>
> Professor Moriarty -- "the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city" -- Lenore Bradley
>
> Alfred Bassick -- Moriarty's chief flunky -- Stan Carmack
>
> Sherlock Holmes -- "the best and wisest man whom I have ever known" -- John Lehman
>
> Dr. Watson -- also known as "Boobus Britannicus" -- Steve Mann
>
> Billy -- a young lad, a blushing little fellow -- Jon Lellenberg
>
> Parsons -- butler to Watson, a wooden character requiring little talent to play well -- Steven Harrell

Jim Craigin -- professional hit man, early advocate of non-smoking in public places -- Marilyn Levinson

Twenty-one Plainsmen convened at The Maggie Jones again on May 28th to celebrate Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's birthday. That was still unusual, even unorthodox for a BSI scion society in those days, but Lellenberg, more than most Baker Street Irregulars, harbored a serious interest in The Literary Agent. He was back in the Chair again to welcome more newcomers to the caravan: insurance executive Martin Baier, Lenore Carroll (who had submitted a fine Holmes pastiche to Baker Street Miscellanea,* and been swooped up for the Plainsmen by Co-Editor Lellenberg), Vern Corriell, president of Burroughs Bibliophiles, a similar literary mania, and the Mayor of Kansas City, Charles Wheeler, who years before had been Napoleon No. 43 of The Six Napoleons of Baltimore. Alas, it was also the first Plainsman meeting that Ernest Willer ever missed -- because of his wife Betty's health, not his own. John Lehman discussed Conan Doyle's life and literary career, Stephen Harrell gave a sympathetic exposition of his Spiritualist beliefs, and the deceased author spoke for himself via his 1927 Fox Movietone film interview. John Altman scandalized the Plainsmen by admitting that he had forgotten to bring the text of 221B, and the meeting adjourned for the first time ever without it. (A good thing for Brother Altman that Ernest Willer was not there!)

Plans were already well afoot for the remainder of the year. On August 6th, John Bennett Shaw joined the Plainsmen again, stopping in Kansas City after his first Sherlock Holmes workshop at Notre Dame University. Quite a few of his students followed him to Kansas City, too. Fifty Plainsmen and visitors from other scion societies were present, denizens of The Brothers Three of Moriarty, The Master's Class of Philadelphia, The Afghanistan Perceivers of Tulsa, The Noble Bachelors of St. Louis, The Bagatelle Card Club of Milwaukee, The Red Circle of Washington, The Arkansas Valley Investors of Little Rock, and The Scowrers of San Francisco. (No Jezails? It had been an educational undertaking at Notre Dame. "We progress, Watson.") Tim Kirk drank to Mean Old Moriarty, John Altman dryly offered Plain Old Alkali, and Lenore Carroll toasted Good Old Holmes, in verse that managed to link together Shaw, mirth, and girth. John Lehman educated the masses that night on the subject of "Sherlock and Sorokin: A Study in the Sociology of Literature".† After hearing at length how the Canon's progression demonstrates Pitirim Sorokin's mind-numbing theories of the decline of Western Civilization, the Plainsmen were more than ready for diversion. That was provided by Shaw, who recounted the past week's doings at Notre Dame -- though the grim note was restored afterwards, sure enough, by another horrid Shaw quiz. The enthusiastic meeting lapped over onto the following morning, when sixteen bleary-eyed Sherlockians joined the Shaws at the Buttonwood Tree for brunch.

Plainsmen were getting out and about Sherlockians elsewhere, too. Frank

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* "Before the Adventures", BSM 12, December 1977. In 1984, BSM's editors reviewed their first ten years and picked Lenore's story as the best contribution of 1977.

† Mercifully abridged for The Baker Street Journal, March 1980.

Mitchell showed up at Brother Shaw's home in Santa Fe, and Marilyn Levinson attended the Sub-Librarians Scion at the ALA convention in Detroit. John Altman descended downriver in August to visit The Noble Bachelors, and Lenore Carroll dined with Jon Lellenberg and others of The Red Circle in Washington.

On September 24th, two dozen Plainsmen gathered for A Dartmoor Evening on the Baskervillean grounds of the Kansas City Museum. Lellenberg forever afterwards gnashed his teeth over missing this meeting. "But the moor with its mysteries and its strange inhabitants remains as inscrutable as ever," the Canon says, 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 Plainsmen were subjected to a Something Hunt -- a scavenger contest around the museum grounds based on The Hound of the Baskervilles -- and then treated to a pantomined reenactment of the adventure by Altman, Carl Helmstetter, Tim Kirk, Vikki Marshall, Mary Nelson, and Ernest Willer. The evening ended with Christopher Plummer's film version of the Master's other famous Dartmoor case, Silver Blaze.

Altman was dissatisfied afterwards with the Dartmoor Evening, and it's true that the Something Hunt, designed none too smoothly from afar by Jon Lellenberg, was confusing and inconclusive (though Keith Jameson, a newcomer late of The Brothers Three of Moriarty, was declared the winner). Then too, there were the squadrons of mosquitoes that rose like vampires as darkness fell. But Altman underrated the stellar success of the Hound pantomine that he had written and directed.

"Dartmoor. The Sun sets. The Moon rises. The Powers of Altman are exalted," one spectator gleefully reported, and The Hound was certainly retold as only someone whose middle name is Stapleton would dare do it. Mrs. Hudson was more intimate with Sherlock Holmes than usual, Watson a trifle denser. Sir Hugo was more lustful toward his maidenly victim than ever, but alas for him, she was "not into kinky relationships." (She swooped down on Tom Gee, a very married Kansas City Policeman joining the caravan for the first time, and turned him as red as a tomato with a sudden kiss as she fled from Hugo and his wicked companions.) Dr. Mortimer showed a sinister interest in adding Holmes's skull to his anthropological museum without further delay. Miss Stapleton blew bubble gum. Sir Henry was nutty enough for the squirrels to pick up and carry off. The Barrymores bore an uncanny resemblance to "American Gothic". 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 comeuppance with a sneering "Sic semper botanists!" from the narrator, with much cheering and hissing by the audience throughout. The purists present might have decried Altman's production as a travesty, had they not been laughing as hard as everyone else.

That autumn saw Jon Lellenberg in London, where he met Dame Jean Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur's surviving child, for the first time, and discovered in passing that Sir Arthur had visited Kansas City in 1923. It was during the author's second Spiritualist speaking tour of the United States, and in his book Our Second American Adventure, he was clairvoyant enough to call Kansas

City "a young giant of a town, half-formed and sprawling, but with the seeds of greatness in it." He marvelled at the city's parks and especially admired "The Scout", Cyrus Edwin Dallin's bronze statue of an Indian scout on horseback, overlooking downtown Kansas City from atop Penn Valley Park. Conan Doyle tried hard to buy postcards of it, and was surprised to find none at all, but he did include a photograph of it in his book. When the Feast of the Blue Carbuncle rolled around on December 27th, a modern-day postcard of "The Scout" was signed by all present and sent to Dame Jean with the Compliments of the Season.

There were twenty-three Plainsmen present that night, enjoying Jerry Gaines' roast goose. Milt Perry reminisced about Harry Truman, John Altman screened all forty-five seconds of Sherlock Holmes Baffled, and everyone listened appreciatively to a recital of the Master's favorite violin music by Bonnie Trimmer, a talented young guest who performed Mendelssohn, Paganini, Offenbach, and Chopin, concluding with "Auld Lang Syne" that brought tears to Plainsmen eyes. Or maybe that was John Lehman's poetic accompaniment, for he had plagiarized far and wide; and with many a glance over his shoulder for representatives of the Rudyard Kipling Estate, he declaimed canonical narratives not necessarily found in the Canon.* His four poems, some very extensive, are in Daily Journal No. 11 (January 23, 1978), but here is a taste:

Sing, Muse, of Homeric times,
And aid me in my rhyme
As you helped that blind Achaean's rhapsody,
Of that fatal bane of Watson,
The Jezail with his shotgun,
Whose fearful blast smote the Doctor's knee;
Then bouncing from the ground,
That nasty Maiwand round
Struck the subclavian artery!
Now with his fill of this,
And wounded tendo of Achillis,
Watson foreswore his Afghan surgery,
For he knew he needed peace
From his recent near-decease,
But he knew not where to go nor how to seek it.
So he went begging through the city
For one kindly word of pity --
And Young Stamford was the man
  from whom he got it.

Ah! Stamford! Stamford!
Heart of stone,
Blackhearted, blackguarded gnome!
Your friend under stress
Needed years of rest,
And you sent him to that blighter
  Sherlock Holmes!

* "Can I help it," he protested, "if my Muse is also an Amateur Cracksman?"

That was only the first of a wonderful series of Blue Carbuncle musicales and theatricals over the next several years, entertainments in which Lehman was the principal moving spirit. By now, The Maggie Jones found it hard to get rid of the high-spirited Plainsmen at the end of their meetings. "The wells are to the right, my brothers!" cried Milt Perry, heading for the bar. Die-hards simply moved to other tables in the by-then nearly deserted restaurant, lingering on into the early hours of the morning, as long as the bar remained open.

"Will you come with us on these terms?"

As the entire world surely knows, the annual dinner of the Baker Street Irregulars in New York falls on the Friday closest to the Master's birthday, January 6th. In January '78, John Altman joined Shaw and Lellenberg there for the first time. Lellenberg relished the opportunity to introduce Altman to the BSI by pointed reference to his middle name, upon which the open-mouthed Altman was roundly hissed by the roomful of delighted Irregulars. Altman threw himself bravely into the maelstrom of events: cocktails at the Algonquin and dinner elsewhere Thursday; the Martha Hudson Breakfast, the William Gillette Luncheon, and the BSI dinner on Friday -- followed by the afterparty given by The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes later that night, plus room parties at the Algonquin and Royalton Hotels into the early hours of Saturday morning; and then, after very little sleep, the Baker Street Cinematograph screenings, Julian Wolff's cocktail party at the Grolier Club, and dinner elsewhere on Saturday. Altman gave the Plainsmen a vivid account of the BSI weekend at their next meeting in March, when he had sobered up again.

That meeting was another film evening at The Maggie Jones on the 18th: John Altman in the Chair, The Valley of Fear as the adventure of the evening, and Arthur Wontner's Triumph of Sherlock Holmes on the screen. John had forgotten about toasts for the meeting, causing Ernest Willer to look at him more like Moriarty than ever. John did give his candid account of the BSI weekend, though. "He seems to have enjoyed himself," the Daily Journal remarked later, "and those who know Altman know what that means." At least he remembered 221B this time -- about two seconds after concluding the meeting as everyone was stampeding out of the room towards the bar.

If John Altman was forgetful in March, Milt Perry was nonplussed in May. The American Association of Museums was coming to town for its annual convention, and Milt was its program chairman. Back in December, the bright idea of a BSI scion society within the AAM had occurred to him. Museums had been of great significance to Sherlock Holmes, after all. They played instrumental roles in some of his investigations, the British Museum had formed an important part of his education when he first came to London, and other museums are mentioned by name in the Canon. What better -- remembering Henry Baker's comments in The Blue Carbuncle -- than an AAM scion society called The Alpha Inn? A joint luncheon meeting with The Great Alkali Plainsmen was scheduled for May 28th, at Union Station across Pershing Road from the convention at Crown Center. An appealing announcement to the convention-goers was drafted, and an invigorating quiz on museums in the Canon was prepared.

When the day came, seven Plainsmen including Milt Perry gathered in the lobby of Union Station, as the announcement had advised. To Milt's chagrin, only one AAM member was present for the "joint" meeting -- Milt himself. Not a single museum troglodyte crossed the road to join the new scion. Unlike Henry Baker, they were to be found in Crown Center's bars during the day. The meeting adjourned early, and The Alpha Inn -- a good idea, withal -- went unrealized, alas.

The Plainsmen were luckier with movies. Jon Lellenberg knew Irregulars who owned prints, film critic John Tibbetts (a Plainsman since 1976) had resources as well, and John Altman was always able to provide equipment. Quite a few pseudocanonical epics had been shown at Plainsmen meetings, as far back as 1964. September 2nd's gathering at The Maggie Jones was another occasion, this time to watch Basil Rathbone's The Scarlet Claw, the Plainsmen's easy favorite of Rathbone's Universal Holmes. This time, thanks to Altman and Tibbetts, the Plainsmen were able to see it complete, uninterrupted, and on a big screen. The projection, Ernest Willer reported happily, "was clear and sharp and the sound perfect." The level of merriment was above average that night, despite Lehman's long, gruesome talk marking Jack the Ripper's 90th anniversary. It might have lasted even longer, had Altman not grabbed his projector and announced that movie time had arrived during one of Lehman's infrequent gulps for air.

It was around that time that Milt Perry was chosen to supervise the restoration of several historic sites in Clay County, Missouri, including the Jesse James Farm just outside Kansas City at Kearney. Back at the July 1975 Plainsmen dinner, Milt had hinted at a Jamesian sequel to "The Body Beside the Tracks". Now he was more or less in charge of Jesse James affairs in Kansas City. The restoration work received a great deal of publicity, and the site was often visited by tourists whom Milt would guide around the premises. He had spoken to some one late-summer day, standing in the excavation of Jesse James's original grave at the Farm, when he noticed one of them lingering behind. He looked up from the excavated grave to see a long pair of shapely legs. Raising his eyes reluctantly, he saw a good-looking blonde grinning down at him, wearing eyeglasses that Tolkien's elves might have fashioned for her. "Hi, Milt!" she said.

Margaret Weis was back.

She was Margaret Baldwin now, married with two children to a Missouri Highway Patrolman, and working as an editor for a small publisher in Independence. Her return to the Plainsmen's caravan was well-timed to coincide with the scion's fifteenth anniversary celebration in October, and John Altman nearly keeled over when Margaret walked into a Plainsmen meeting for the first time in ten years.

That celebration took place at The Maggie Jones on October 28th. The crowd included not only Margaret, but John Bennett Shaw up from Santa Fe, Ron Paradise returned from a year's stay in Philadelphia with The Master's Class, and, for the first time, Craig and Patricia Brown, formerly of The Arkansas Valley Investors. Jon Lellenberg read a message of congratulations from Julian Wolff, who said in part that "the strength of the Baker Street Irregulars lies in its robust scions, and The Great Alkali Plainsmen is one of the truly

active ones." Refuting suspicions of forgery caused by the message's reference to Lellenberg as "my good friend," the Chair called upon John Altman to reminisce about the scion's founding. It is hard to reminisce when you can't even remember, of course, and it was difficult for John to recall the early days, he said, when he was only a teenager with Ernest Willer and Milt Perry pouring strong drink down his throat. (Shaw was heard to snort at this juncture.) But John evoked the scion's beginnings, when the founders had little surmise of its duration and growth and activities over the years to come. As counterpoint, John Lehman rose to deliver a Scion Prophecy, recaptured in part here:

- In the next fifteen years, John Altman's motion picture enterprise will grow so prosperous that in some of his movies the cast will wear clothes.

- Within the next fifteen years, Stan Carmack will leave a Great Alkali Plainsmen meeting sober.

- Within the same period of time, Ron Paradise will arrive at a Plainsmen meeting that way.

- Ernest Willer will eventually resolve the troubling familiarity of his appearance by confessing himself to be the Napoleon of Crime.

- Vikki Marshall will become internationally famous as the author of the bestseller Altman Was a Woman.

- Milt Perry will complete his paper on Sherlock Holmes and Jesse James when (1) the Great Pyramid has at last eroded into the Nile; (2) Jon Lellenberg becomes a pacifist; (3) John Bennett Shaw founds a chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous in Moriarty, New Mexico; (4) Jerry Gaines serves a bad meal; or (5) Tom Gee hits something he shoots at -- whichever takes longer.

- John Bennett Shaw will retire from Sherlockiana when his much-vaulted collection is revealed to be merely a cunning wall painting.

- And John Lehman will meet an untimely end in the parking lot of a Kansas City restaurant late one October night.

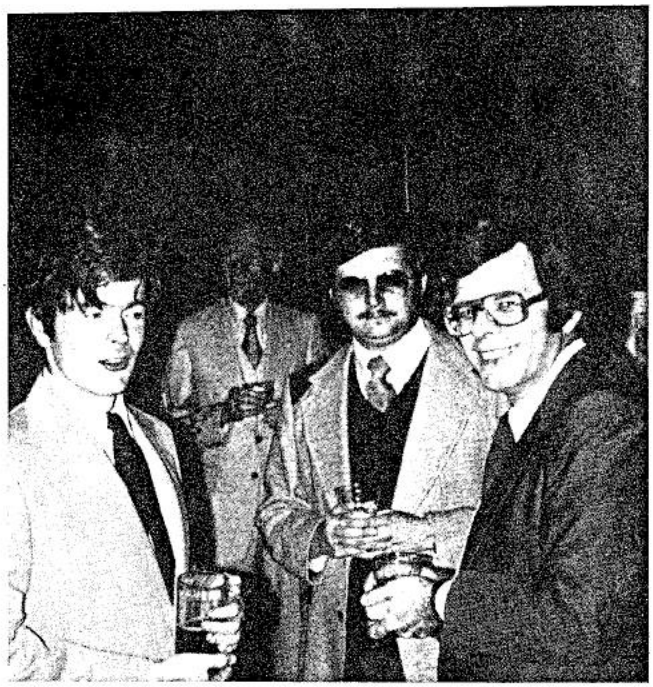
That autumn, a young Minneapolis student, Virginia Lou Seay, was polling Sherlockians across the country to analyze the background of their interest in The Great Detective. Jon Lellenberg distributed her questionnaires at the October '78 meeting, and collated the results before sending the completed questionnaires on to her. Returning completed questionnaires that night were Lellenberg himself, John Altman, Margaret Baldwin, Craig Brown and Patricia Brown, Stan Carmack, Tom Gee, Stephen Harrell, Keith Jameson, John Lehman, Vikki Marshall, Frank Mitchell, Ron Paradise, Milt Perry, John Tangerman, Ernest Willer, Bill Wright, and Daisy Wright. The results were interesting.

[continued on page 47]

Jon Lellenberg

John Bennett Shaw, Ron Paradise, Margaret Weis, Milt Perry.

John Bennett Shaw



John Lehman, Ernest Willer (in background), Tom Gee, Stan Carmack.

PROFILE OF A SHERLOCKIAN*

(Great Alkali Plainsmen Edition)

1. At what age did you first become interested in Sherlock Holmes?

Ages ranged from 10 to 29, most were teenagers at the time.

2. Under what circumstances?

Most discovered Holmes as a result of being a heavy reader, of family influences, or a library. (One checked Holmes out after her mother told her that it was terrible.) Only two as a result of a movie or TV.

3. What characteristic(s) do you admire most in Holmes?

Intellect and logic, attention to detail, courage, integrity. One remarked Holmes's "subtle but extremely true friendship with Watson."

4. Which of the stories in the Canon do you like best? least?

Best: HOUN by far; also SPEC, STUD, SCAN, REDH.

Least: MAZA.

5. How old are you now?

Ages ranged from late 20s to mid 60s, average age 38.

6. What is your occupation? Your parents' occupations?

Plainsmen tended to be professional people, out of similar or upwardly mobile family backgrounds. Medicine, journalism and media, engineers.

7. Were you a good, average, or poor student?

3:1 good over average. One said excellent,† none admitted to poor.

8. What were your best subjects? Your favorite subjects?

History and English were vastly the majority of both the best and the favorite subjects, though mathematics made a significant showing.

9. What other hobbies or interests do you have?

Three led by far: in order, sports, reading and writing (history, mys-

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* Seay published her overall results in Baker Street Miscellanea, No. 20, December 1979, and the Plainsmen Profile may be compared with them.

† Margaret Baldwin, I'll bet.

tery, fantasy & science fiction especially mentioned), music. A few esoteric ones, from paleontology to old home restoration.

10. How does your hobby and/or occupation influence your study of Sherlock Holmes?

Scattered, though most indicated little or no connection. A couple of people did indicate significant connection, however, and one said that the study of Holmes influenced almost every aspect of his life.

11. Do you like to read? What kind of books? Who are your favorite authors?

All said they were readers. Heavy emphasis on history, biography, mystery, fantasy & science fiction. A heavy measure of Victorian writers, from Kipling to Dickens. But the author mentioned most frequently as a favorite was J. R. R. Tolkien.

12. Do you prefer British or American literature?

The great majority preferred British literature.

13. Do you enjoy writing?

Plainsmen enjoyed writing by 2:1.

14. Have you ever attempted to write a Holmes parody or pastiche?

About 40 percent had attempted to write a parody or pastiche.

15. Are you interested in British history?

The great majority indicated some to strong interest.

16. Do you enjoy music? What kinds? Do you play an instrument?

Almost every Plainsman enjoyed music. Classical music led by far, with showings by jazz and rock. The most frequent instrument was the piano, but some esoteric ones like jew's harp and dulcimer were there too.

17. Would you consider yourself to be an introvert or an extrovert?

Extroverts outnumbered introverts by 2:1.

18. Are you generally optimistic or pessimistic about the state of the world today?

Optimists outnumbered pessimists by about 2:1.

19. As a child were you read aloud to seldom, frequently, not at all?

More Plainsmen were read aloud to frequently, when they were children, than those read to seldom, but barely. Only a few not at all.

20. Who is your favorite Holmes illustrator?

The great majority preferred Sidney Paget.

21. Of all the actors that you have seen impersonate Holmes on the stage or screen, which do you like best?

The great majority preferred Basil Rathbone, but some indicated Nicol Williamson and Arthur Wontner.

The Feast of the Blue Carbuncle two months later was not its true fifteenth anniversary, because of past dry spells, but twenty-two Plainsmen celebrated in gala fashion nonetheless. Milt Perry spoke about the "first irregular dinner" of 1963, praising the improvements that The Maggie Jones had wrought. After a quiz and an intermission for spiritous fortitude, John Lehman presented another Yuletide musicale, and of them all, this may have been the best received. A concert of Sherlockian carols was performed (with passable guitar accompaniment, plus sleighbells), by Maestro Lehman, Nola Wright (the only first-rate singing voice in the entire scion), Daisy Wright, and John Altman.

Nine in all were sung, punctuated by equal measures of audience applause and catcalls at frequent intervals, and once by Nola, the scion's well-armed killer angel, shooting an unsuspecting Milt Perry down like a dog. The lyrics all survive in the scion archives, and several were published in Daily Journal No. 17 (January 26, 1979), but we will reprint three of them here -- the first simply because this historian likes it a lot.

BLUE CARBUNCLE

(after White Christmas)

(Verse)

The theft was clean,
The escape was good,
The prize it was in hand.
There never was such a crime
In London, England, U.K.
But it's December the twenty-fourth
And my heart is filled with remorse.

(Chorus)

I'm dreaming of a blue carbuncle
Just like the one I used to own.
How it shined and glistened
As I stopped to listen
To hear policemen in the snow.
I'm dreaming of a blue carbuncle;

Such is the nature of my song,
For stealing is evil and wrong
When what you have taken is gone.

I'm dreaming of a blue carbuncle
With every Christmas goose I pluck.
How I wish they all had zippers,
Instead of like Jack the Ripper,
I open each little critter up.
I'm dreaming of a blue carbuncle
Even when faced with jail.
May all your days be merry and true
And may all your carbuncles be blue.

The second, because, sung con brio, it contained the best in crowd-pleasing stage business:

AGRA JEWELS

(after Jingle Bells)

Dashing down the Thames
After one-legged men,
With revolvers cocked
Since we left the dock;
A pygmy taking aim
Is fair game:
What fun it is to ride and sing
A slaying song tonight!

(Business: Nola whips out a pistol and plugs Milt Perry three times in the chest, causing him to fall out of his chair in cardiac arrest.)

Agra Jewels! Agra Jewels!
Mary wants them back!
Watson will get them safe
Unless the steam goes slack!
Agra Jewels! Agra Jewels!
From Pondicherry House!
What a dowry to give
Watson's new spouse!

And finally, the notorious

LENORE CAROL

(after Deck the Halls)

Deck the halls with Martin Baier,

La la la la Lellenberg, & Milt Perry.
Tibbetts kibitz with the waitress,
La la la la Wallace, Paradise lost.
Margaret Baldwin is an odd one,
Tom Gee, Stephen Harrell, Keith Jameson;
But in this crowd she is normal --
Willer, Willer, Jones & Frank Mitchell!

(Readers may speculate about cryptic meanings as they see fit.)

"...deeds of blood and violence..."

Prospects seemed fair for the Plainsmen at the beginning of 1979. For some time they had yearned for a Victorian costume party; the one at Stan Carmack's home on February 17th left nothing to be desired. The house itself made an important contribution, for it was a brooding 1910 example in stone of Midwestern Gothic architecture, located in Kansas City's Hyde Park district. In anticipation, Vikki Marshall had written a Daily Journal guide to Victorian costume made easy, so simple and well-conceived that it was later reprinted by a number of other scions. Twenty-seven Plainsmen came, through the falling snow, disguised as Victorian ladies and gentlemen, housemaids and costermongers, Army officers and nonconformist clergymen, sweet young girls and leering villains, plus an expatriate Plainsman from Washington who showed up unexpectedly in ragged sweater and jeans, calling himself Levi Strauss. Popular acclaim gave the best-costume awards to Daisy Wright as a downstairs maid and Ernest Willer as himself, the Napoleon of Crime.

John Altman reported on the '79 BSI dinner, confessing that Julian Wolff had forgotten to reserve a place for him (though he did not, as John Lehman claimed, eat his dinner sitting on Julian's lap). It was during this report that Lenore Carroll cried out suddenly: the valuable jewel that she had been wearing on a ribbon around her neck was missing! Plainsman eyes turned suspiciously toward each other. "They always blame the servants!" sobbed the housemaid. Charles Wheeler came under scrutiny, since anyone simultaneously a doctor, a lawyer, and a politician is obviously not to be trusted. Even poor Levi Strauss became the object of unwarranted suspicion for a moment. The Plainsmen searched for a solution to the mystery, both where the missing jewel had been hidden and the identity of the scoundrel who had stolen it. Margaret Baldwin succeeded in recovering the gem, but only an eventual confession by the guilty party led to the culprit's apprehension. (And in a company that included a Kansas City Policeman and a Missouri Highway Patrolman!) Earlier in the evening, the bartender hired for the occasion, Charles Replogle by name, had spilt a bowl of peanuts on Lenore Carroll -- and had taken advantage of the distraction to abstract the jewel in front of everyone with a sleight of hand worthy of the skilled stage magician that he actually is.

Chagrinned by the ease with which they had been deceived, the Plainsmen poured their own drinks for the rest of the night. As the evening wore on, and the snow outside continued to fall, they settled around a crackling fire

and listened to Orson Welles' Mercury Radio Theatre version of Gillette's Sherlock Holmes....And finally, cheered by the Master's triumph once again, they disappeared into the frosty and luminous night. "Well," Stan Carmack was heard to say as the last guests departed, "I think we made the house happy tonight."

The Plainsmen were less enthused on March 12th when they were guests at a preview screening of Murder by Decree. On balance they enjoyed the movie, despite its weaknesses and talky ending. Christopher Plummer's emotional and compassionate Holmes evoked mixed reactions, some liking the unusual interpretation, others missing the coldly unemotional reasoning machine usually presented by Holmes impersonators. No one had less than great enthusiasm for James Mason as Watson. But it is hard to disagree with the parting question asked by Stan Carmack, eyes turned beseechingly heavenwards: "Why don't they use the Canon for their plots?"

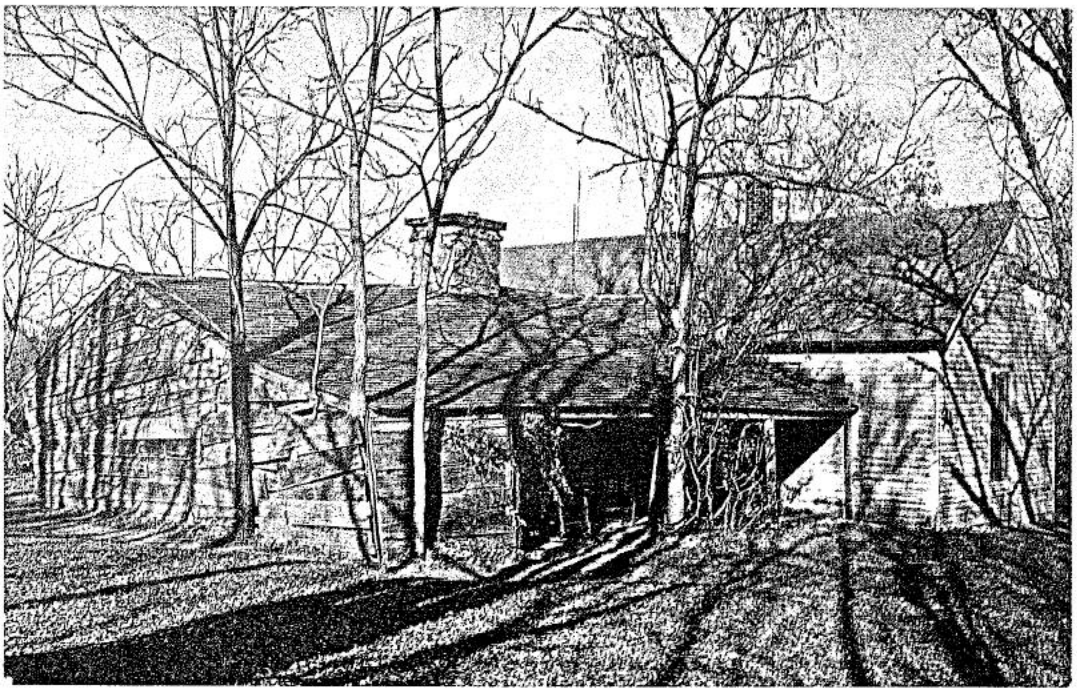
We referred earlier to fair prospects for 1979. They did not prevail. May 26, 1979, was the day that finally saw the formal, if apocryphal, addition of Jesse James to the Sherlock Holmes Canon -- as interpreted by the Great Alkali Plainsmen, at any rate. Milt Perry's frequent hints at a Jamesian sequel to "The Body Beside the Tracks" had been discounted by some as ineffable twaddle. His critics had thought him unserious about it. They were wrong.

Sherlockians elsewhere may wonder at this mixture of English detective and Western desperado. Milt was intent upon it, and by the spring of '79, he was ready to pounce. He was the curator of the Jesse James Farm now, halfway through its restoration, and he called a meeting there on May 26th: a tour of the notorious outlaw's home, followed by dinner at nearby Excelsior Springs' venerable resort hotel, The Elms. "If criminals would always schedule their movements like railway trains, it would certainly be more convenient for all of us," the announcement quoted from the Canon, continuing:

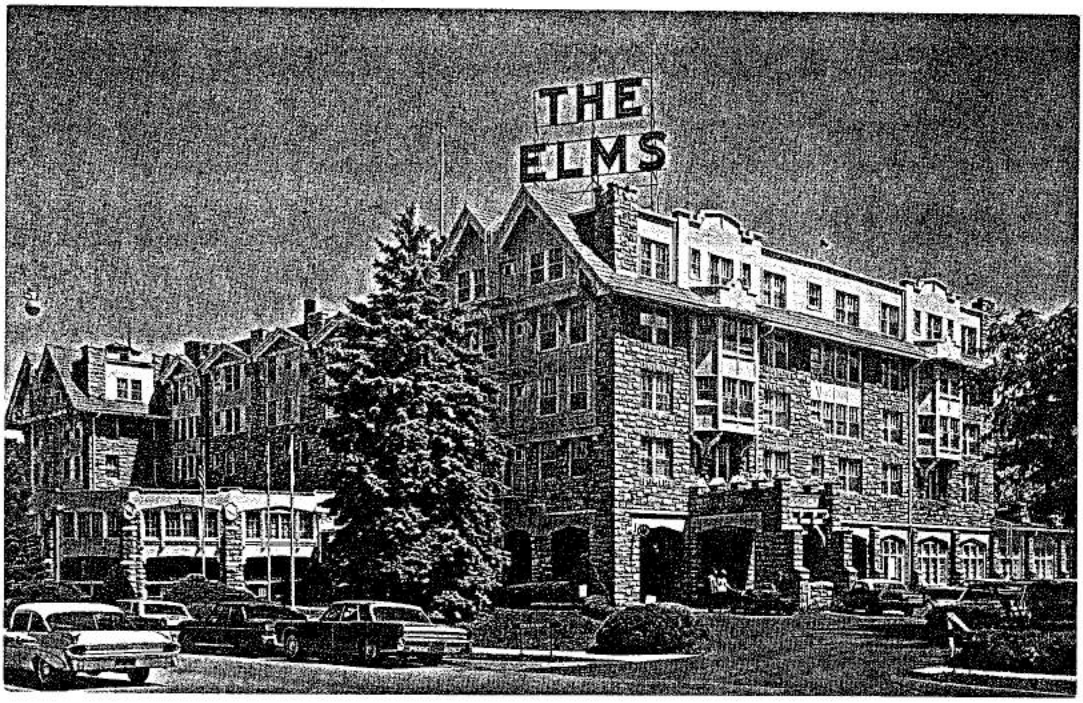
> Some criminals went further in that direction than most, much to the dismay of the railroads in question. Long before Sherlock Holmes ever encountered the Brothers James (colonel, stationmaster, and Napoleon of Crime), according to Plainsman lore, he may have met the James Brothers, Missouri's notorious outlaw heroes. Did Holmes's path cross that of the James gang when he came to Kansas City in 1880? What might have been the young Englishman's reaction to Jesse James, as he stood on the threshold of his career as the world's first consulting detective?

Milt made the most of it, speaking eloquently at both the James Farm and The Elms about Frank and Jesse James, their violent origins in the Confederate guerrillas led by William Quantrill and Bloody Bill Anderson during the Civil War, and their postwar outlaw careers until Jesse's assassination in St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1882.

Lending immoral support that night was Philip Shreffler, upriver from St. Louis again. He had come to shed additional light on the relationship between Sherlock Holmes, Jesse James, and Kansas City, with a letter he had discovered that Frank James had written to a family friend in 1914, the year



What notorious pair of brothers lived here in the 1870s?



What sinister gang will meet here on May 26th?

before his death. The actual text appears in Daily Journal No. 19 (September 4, 1979): Frank James related his audacious foray with brother Jesse one night many years before, to see a play in Kansas City. When Frank took Jesse backstage with him to compliment an actor he had particularly liked, the actor addressed him by name correctly, deduced from his Shakespearean interests that it had been his idea to rob the train at Gad's Hill, Missouri, in '74, and warned the alarmed pair that the nets were closing around them. Frank hustled the edgy Jesse out of the theater before he shot the startling young Englishman. Two years later, after Jesse's murder, he received a telegram: "I want to express my sympathy over the death of your brother. You may recall our meeting in the theatre in Kansas City two years ago. I felt then that it was inevitable. Now I hope that you can rest. Sincerely, Sherlock Holmes."

JESSE JAMES

SEPT. 5, 1847 - APR. 3, 1882

Other BSI scion societies may look askance at the Great Alkali Plainsmen's efforts to graft Jesse James onto the Sherlockian Canon (not that their own hijinks entitle them to point fingers at us). But such a Holmesian linkage is in period, in character, and is backed up by the kind of thorough Sherlockian research that distinguishes our Higher Criticism far and wide from lesser scholarly endeavors.

Even so, Plainsmen hailing from the Kansas side of State Line Road claimed to be uneasy. Of course the great unobservant public, who can hardly tell a weaver by his tooth or a compositor by his left thumb, can hardly be expected to know the difference between Kansans and Missourians. But the differences are numerous and sharp. Greater Kansas City straddles a border violated all too often in history, by rough people in one state attacking their fellow citizens in the other. The Civil War was fought back and forth across that border in "Bleeding Kansas" for ten years before Fort Sumter was ever fired upon; during the War, it was a region of constant guerrilla warfare; and those times are still felt today. Kansas is a state of flinthills, prairies and open skies, Missouri one of woods, caves and river valleys. Historically Kansas is northern, abolitionist, Union; Missouri, southern, secessionist, Confederate. Kansas is generally Republican, Missouri (until recently) has leaned to the Democrats. Kansans are too

pure for their own good, Missourians are tempted by vice and corruption. Kansas admires its famous lawmen, Wild Bill Hickock, Wyatt Earp, and Bat Masterson; Missouri reveres its outlaws, the Youngers, the Daltons, and most of all, Frank and Jesse James.

So it is no surprise that a Jesse James Faction arose in The Great Alkali Plainsmen of Greater Kansas City. It was probably only a matter of time from the first. Milt Perry was its ringleader, with John Altman, Margaret Baldwin (even then authoring an apologia for Jesse James), and Lenore Carroll providing covering fire, and grim-bearded Shreffler egging them on from St. Louis. Watching with concern this disturbing development were Kansans like Lellenberg, Don McClain, and Ernest Willer. But they were outnumbered, for, alas, true Irregular spirit finds it difficult to thrive in a state that banned liquor by the drink as long ago as the 1880s. (And you could never entirely trust anyone who looks as much like Professor Moriarty as Ernest Willer...) So the Jesse James Faction grew larger and noisier.

And soon another shadow fell over our scion society. This one was cast by The Noble Bachelors of St. Louis. The Plainsmen had come to tolerate Shreffler, despite his sombre visage and schoolmasterish tendency to mistake scion meetings for classrooms. They rather approved of his petition to change his BSI investiture from the effete "Lord St. Simon" to the rugged and manly "Jefferson Hope". But now The Noble Bachelors were clamoring for a joint meeting with the Plainsmen. They had been since autumn '76, in fact, to be held sometime in Columbia, Missouri, halfway between the two metropolises. The Plainsmen had held this off for lack of anyone in Columbia to arrange a meeting, but that excuse no longer availed, for Craig and Pat Brown were medical residents there at the University of Missouri. So in autumn '79, a joint meeting was finally scheduled.

Outsiders may wonder, why this attitude on the part of The Great Alkali Plainsmen? Are not the Noble Bachelors devoted Sherlockians? Has not their fame crept across the land? Have they not shown their respect for Missouri's senior scion society by trekking 250 miles across the state to any number of Great Alkali Plainsmen meetings? True, all true. But they are from St. Louis, and there is only so much that Kansas Citians can overlook.

Both cities lie in Missouri. Kansas City's origins actually date from a French fur trader from St. Louis, Francois Chouteau, seeking fortune up the Missouri River in 1821, and finding it by the bluffs where the Missouri and Kansas Rivers converge. But there has never been much fellow feeling between the two cities. Verily did The New York Times call Kansas City America's first Western city, and St. Louis its last Eastern, with all the spiritual gulf between them that that implies. Their natures are quite different. Kansas City is well-designed, park-like, with a progressive citizenry and a high quality of life. In yesteryear the outfitter of America's westbound pioneers, today Kansas City maintains an enviable existence on agribusiness, mercantilism, and light industry of a beneficial nature. But gaze downriver at St. Louis, where the last century's halfhearted went no further, and the Kansas Citian beholds congestion, industrial pollution, urban blight, cultural decadence, and the hideous humidity that only the swampish Mississippi can produce. He gives St. Louis a wide berth.

But the fact cannot be denied that the Plainsmen did agree to meet with the Noble Bachelors, in Columbia, on October 20, 1979. Events were to confirm their worst fears.

Heaven knows, the gracious Browns did everything they could to make the occasion a pleasant success. They invited all to an open house at their home in the afternoon, they arranged a good meal at a suitable restaurant for the meeting, and they organized an informal breakfast the next morning for those still on speaking terms. But an ominous note was struck at the very beginning when Shreffler insisted upon using the occasion to celebrate Professor Moriarty's birthday. The announcement warned that the program would include "a suitably sinister celebration of the criminal mastermind's birthday, a fitting literary tribute, and a round-robin quiz in Moriarty's memory on the Victims of the Canon: each Plainsman is requested to prepare an appropriate but challenging epitaph for the tombstone of some specific canonical victim of his or her choice."

"Tombstones will be provided," Gravedigger Shreffler advised his Noble Bachelors. And his performance in Columbia proved Plainsmen fears justified, for he donned black robes, stroked his black beard in a sinister manner, produced a small mannequin of Moriarty, drew a dagger and waved it in the air, and chanted macabre incantations evoking the spirit of the Napoleon of Crime. Even Ernest Willer was observed to shift his chair anxiously a little closer to the exit.

Of course the Plainsmen can put up with such a display as long as it ends before the bar closes. What <u>really</u> stung was an earlier item on the agenda, each scion's "tribute" to the other. Lellenberg had delegated gentle Stephen Harrell, a man who saw good in everyone, to praise The Noble Bachelors for whatever fine qualities Harrell might be able to detect in them. The citizens whose taxes pay Lellenberg's salary at the Pentagon should be aware that this proved to be a strategic blunder of the worst kind. Shreffler called first upon Charles Lavazzi, the Noble Bachelors' designated hit-man and Count Negretto Sylvius look-alike, to speak about The Great Alkali Plainsmen. <u>Daily Journal</u> No. 20 (November 23, 1979) told all that readers of this history will want or need to know, though there was much more in the same vein:

> Charles Lavazzi of the Noble Bachelors ascribed the name of The Great Alkali Plainsmen to Kansas City's sense of geographical insecurity, and described how it was three years before the Plainsmen could find a meeting-place that would serve them drinks. Referring to the Plainsmen's hallowed tradition of setting a place for Sherlock Holmes at the head of the table at each dinner meeting, he questioned the Plainsmen's true attitude toward the Master since the place setting by then had been reduced to a paper napkin and one spoon.

Stephen Harrell's seminary training had ill-prepared him to cope with the likes of Shreffler and Lavazzi. But he struggled valiantly, regretting the absence of certain Noble Bachelors who had been detained in St. Louis by the police,* and reproaching those present for their recent attempt to burn down

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* Whispering the word "Classic" into Shreffler's ear is not unakin to whis-

their longstanding gathering place, the Cheshire Inn.* And in the next Daily Journal, Lellenberg printed his own, rather tardy, riposte:

> Geographical Insecurity, Eh? Well, just possibly. The name of the Great Alkali Plainsmen was chosen partially as a joke about the typical sort of provincial Easterner whose knowledge of the United States has been summed up by the famous New Yorker cover portraying a map of America with at least three-quarters of its area taken up by an outsized Manhattan Island. At least Kansas City made it onto that map; so much for St. Louis, Chicago, Tulsa, and towns of that sort. But the Great Alkali Plain was once entrenched in the American (and by extension, British) conception of the North American continent....

Yak, yak, yak. No, it had been "a touch, Watson, a distinct touch!" -- that could not be denied. And unexpectedly, from the south, The Afghanistan Perceivers of Tulsa were quick to take unfair advantage of our wounds. They had the effrontery a few weeks later to hijack our principal event -- holding a "Lunch of the Blue Carbuncle" on the noncanonical date of December 12th, and brazening it out with their December '79 Dispatch admission that "the idea of a roast goose lunch was borrowed -- if not stolen directly -- from our scion neighbors to the North, The Great Alkali Plainsmen of Greater Kansas City." "Stolen", of course, is exactly the right word. Soon the Perceivers would drop even the pretense of a lunch, and shamelessly call their bunco blowout The Feast of the Blue Carbuncle. Such nerve!

Those people would bear watching too.

"...a great caravan upon its journey for the West..."

The true Feast of the Blue Carbuncle took place as it should, in Kansas City, at The Maggie Jones, on the canonical date of December 27th. Lellenberg had insisted upon Stephen Harrell reviewing an awful pastiche that he had won in an earlier quiz. Harrell concluded his indignant remarks by drawing a pistol and firing at his persecutor, showing more vividly than words what the Noble Bachelors had done to his sensibilities. The Plainsmen vied enthusiastically to win a round-robin quiz based upon the Master's Christmas stocking, trying to deduce the identities of the the canonical characters giving Christmas presents to Sherlock Holmes. The presents ranged from a bath sponge to a genetics textbook; fortunately gifts of unusually large dogs or venomous reptiles (or unvenomous ones, for that matter) were represented symbolically. Most of all, the Plainsmen enjoyed Nola Wright's production of William Gillette's curtain-raiser The Painful Predicament of Sherlock Holmes, starring her as the voluble Gwendolyn Cobb, John Altman as the laconic Sherlock Holmes, Stan Carmack as an outsized Billy, and Stephen Harrell and John Lehman as asylum attendants. It was indeed a black day for musical comedy

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pering "Norbury" into Sherlock Holmes's. In St. Louis they understand, and blush.

* Small loss.

when Nola Wright turned her back on the stage to become a lawyer. And John Altman's impersonation of a violin played in his lap will be long remembered.

January 1980 saw John Lehman in New York for the BSI weekend for the first time, though he got off to a bad start by getting lost on the way from his lodgings to the Algonquin Hotel, twenty paces away, and failing to show up for the Martha Hudson Breakfast. He caught up with the Irregulars at the Gillette Luncheon later that day, however, and the BSI dinner proceeded without Lehman embarrassing himself and other Plainsmen present, though Julian Wolff may not have been entirely thrilled the next day to see Lehman arrive for his cocktail party half an hour early. But Lehman reported looking forward to future trips to the Big Apple, and to inspecting the marvel of civil engineering linking Manhattan and Brooklyn which New York BSI Jim Saunders had been kind enough to sell him at a bargain price.

The Plainsmen heard Lehman's BSI report on March 21st, corrected and refuted in spots by eyewitness Peter Blau, BSI, visiting from Washington. To mark the centenary of the Master's visit to Kansas City, the Plainsmen began with a twilight flashlight tour of the Coates House at 10th & Broadway. The historic landmark, Hotel of Presidents and Detectives, had been ravaged by a terrible fire on January 28, 1978, that had taken twenty lives and destroyed the south wing (not Holmes's, luckily, but a newer one). Since then its fate had been in doubt, despite its listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1979 the Historic Kansas City Foundation had taken it over to forestall demolition, but it was empty and desolate when twenty-four Plainsmen picked their way through it. "But a ghost of the building's former glory remained in the tall windows where watery winter light shone through," Lenore Carroll wrote afterwards,

> in the proportions of the once-elegant rooms, in the wide halls, the oak wainscoting and doors. With a little effort the Plainsmen could imagine the restaurant with spotless linen and gleaming silver, and Pullman-trained waiters...the barber shop with its plaster pillars and tile floor, where copies of the Police Gazette lay on plush chairs, and the heady smell of bay rum filled the room...the hum of the ventilating system in the background, the Pompeiian warmth of the pool and steam baths, the stained glass glowing in the fading light.

It prompted Lenore to write another piece of creative reminiscence about the Master's visit to Kansas City: a vision of his discovery of a local specialty called "corn", at a certain house run in those days by Miss Annie Chapman, and of his recovery the next morning in the Turkish bath in the bowels of the Coates House (Daily Journal No. 22, April 21, 1980). After the tour, the Plainsmen dined at The Maggie Jones, where Peter Blau regaled them with tales of the Baker Street Irregulars -- assuring them that some Irregulars had yet to read the entire Canon, and that one had turned out to be dead at the time of his investiture, a condition which had escaped the several others who knew him best.

Having heard that Blau, his hated rival on the Surrey shore, had been in Kansas City, John Bennett Shaw returned on May 23rd to chair a dinner meeting at The Maggie Jones. En route to Pittsburgh, PA, for another Holmes work-

shop, he amused the Plainsmen with "The Misadventures of Workshop Holmes: A Wanderer's Tale", telling scandalous stories about other BSI scion societies, much akin to the stories he tells them about the Great Alkali Plainsmen, and our teetotaling ways. The Plainsmen began to think in earnest that one of Shaw's circuses must be brought to Kansas City, and to ponder the possibilities.

A blazing hot summer soon settled over the Great Alkali Plain, with the thermometer registering over 100° nearly every day in July. But the weather broke just in time for the Plainsmen to meet on the 26th. This time they travelled deep into Garrideb Country to a welcome oasis, the home of Bill and Daisy Wright in Topeka. There the Plainsmen found a decent use for water in the Wrights' swimming pool. After several hours of horseplay, captured aptly by caricatures in Daily Journal No. 23 (September 15, 1980), the Plainsmen sat down to a huge and wonderful feast of fried chicken, barbecued beef, and much much else, nonchalantly dismissed by Daisy Wright as "a typical Kansas summertime dinner." The Plainsmen debated the adventure of the evening, Tom Gee was roasted like an ear of corn in honor of a true cause for civic dismay, his promotion to sergeant in the Kansas City Police Department, and much else transpired. It was an ideal summer's meeting, topped off at the end of the evening by the sight of John Altman finally arriving just as everyone else was leaving for the long trip back to Kansas City.

Autumn saw the Plainsmen return to Stan Carmack's home on October 24th for a second costume party, this time based on The Hound of the Baskervilles. Stan's house lived up to canonical description: "It was a fine apartment in which we found ourselves, large, lofty, and heavy raftered with huge baulks of age-blackened oak. In the great old-fashioned fireplace behind the high iron dogs a log-fire crackled and snapped," etc. The costumes enhanced the mood, with Stan as the Notting Hill Murderer, Daisy Wright as Mrs. Barrymore, Margaret Baldwin as Sir Hugo Baskerville, and so on.

Tom Gee had begun his talk on "Today's Police and the Holmesian Method", often postponed in the past by request, when John Lehman (understandably enough) wandered off, and was struck down by an unknown killer. After finishing his talk while Lehman's corpse mouldered, Sergeant Gee led the Plainsmen to inspect the scene of the crime. Stan complained about the blood on the rug, Margaret Baldwin deduced, from the poor spelling and juvenile scrawl of the taunting note left behind by the killer, that Lehman must have written it himself, and Don McClain mused about how natural, how right Lehman looked as a corpse. It was finally Milt Perry, not the local representative of Law and Order, who solved the crime, and brought it home to none other than Host Carmack himself, who had lived up to his costume.

Jon Lellenberg was not there that night, having been detained in Washington. By now, many Baker Street Irregulars were thoroughly confused about his place of residence. His correspondence for The Great Alkali Plainsmen always bore a Prairie Village, Kansas, return address, while non-Plainsman matters were conducted from an address in Alexandria, Virginia. The Baker Street Journal eventually described him as the only Irregular known to be able to "bilocate"; and compounding that confusion now was a parallel one, among some observers, between Jon Lellenberg and John Lehman.

People in Kansas City were under no illusions, of course. Jon Lellenberg was much taller, and able to spell not only his Christian name correctly, but most other words as well with great ease; whereas Lehman's ill-advised insistence upon adding a silent H to his name was typical of his colorful and eccentric orthography. But Sherlockians elsewhere may be pardoned for their confusion. The low point came when John (sic) Linsenmeyer, the new BSJ editor, published Lehman's "Sorokin and Sherlock" paper, and referred to Lehman as not being an editor of Baker Street Miscellanea. Lellenberg's letter to the BSJ was scarcely fit to print, but the following exchange between Lehman and Linsenmeyer did appear, in the September '80 BSJ:

From John Lehman, of Kansas City, Missouri:

John Bennett Shaw, in a recent letter to me, said that you, for some reason, think I am Jon Lellenberg. I am writing you to report that there is no truth to this rumour. After all Lellenberg can't even spell "John" correctly, whereas I can spell that word with astounding and often unerring accuracy.

I acknowledge, with thanks, the publication of my trifle in the BSJ. When I first presented my paper it was at a meeting attended by John Bennett Shaw. I felt like the dog-faced boy at a third-rate carnival parked next to Disney World. I greatly abridged my talk as every second I consumed postponed the main talk of the evening and increased the chance of my new suit's being decorated by vegetables. Jon (the very Lellenberg mentioned above) grumbled, however, that since he had to read the whole thing the rest of the Plainsmen ought to be made to suffer also. Later he gave me about a hundred copies of my paper to give out at a future meeting. I am told that the picnic meeting in which I showed up with a bundle of manuscripts under either arm was noted for its pests, but I didn't notice any as I tried to pass my paper out. And hard running it was. My mother, however, was delighted, especially when she found that her copy exactly fit the bottom of the canary cage. That still left me with a considerable surplus, even after I sent one to Shaw, who'll collect anything. Talking this problem over with Jon (the infamous misspeller) I was just about to suggest he put it in the *Baker Street Miscellanea* when he changed the subject by bringing up the BSJ. If this is not proof enough that we are two persons I shall send you the photograph in which we posed just after I consumed the last of his Wofferman's English Muffins. I am the one with the long fingers closing round his neck.

Editorial Observation: I do not think that you are Jon Lellenberg, although I am glad that you think that I think you are, because I like both Lellenberg and your letter. *Notate bene*: All indications *au contraire, nemine obstante,* the foregoing editorial observation was not written by Will Oursler *or* by Professor Silverstein, or even by Jon Lellenberg. You are perfectly right, however, that Lellenberg, despite the good example set by others and despite offers of counselling, still cannot spell "John" correctly.

The Feast of the Blue Carbuncle closed the year as usual on Deccember 27th, but something rare was in store for the Plainsmen this time: a visit by a quiet, well-mannered member of The Maiwand Jezails. The previous July had been the 100th anniversary of the fatal battle of Maiwand, and Donald Wright (no relation to the Wrights of Topeka) gave an account of the Jezails' ambitious re-creation of the battle. He presented the Plainsmen with the handsome programme printed for his scion's finest hour, and it was placed in the care of Margaret Baldwin, who had kept the two scions apart back in the '60s.

This same meeting heard the first misadventurous report of a Plainsman attempt to produce a recorded version of A Study in Scarlet, from a creditable script by Stephen Harrell, who by now, alas, had moved to Kentucky. Stan Carmack, John Altman, John Lehman, and Nola Wright were featured players in the opening installment, which portrayed the historic meeting at Bart's, but Blue Carbuncle diners enjoyed the out-takes just as much, particularly Stan

Carmack, dean of Kansas City TV news announcers, referring in one take after another to "the reminiscences of Dr. Jane H. Watson". The principal entertainment, however, was a literally magical retelling of The Blue Carbuncle by Charles Replogle. While not strictly canonical, it was retold, to everyone's delight, by Chuck's awesome prestigitation and legerdemain.

1981 started typically enough, with John Altman learning in New York that he had ingratiated himself further with Julian Wolff by neglecting to enclose a check for the BSI dinner. (He got fed anyway.) 1981 turned out to be a year of changing personalities for The Great Alkali Plainsmen, however, with with the lamentable loss of some favorites. Stephen Harrell was gone, Craig and Pat Brown finished their residencies and returned to Arkansas, and Glenda Roberts took a librarian's position at Pittsburg State University, opening a new Plainsman outpost in that corner of Kansas.

Half a dozen hardy souls braved the horrors of a high school production of the musical Baker Street at St. John's Seminary on April 4th. They reported it as cute, if you think high school students are cute, a criticism that could have been made about Plainsman meetings in the 1960s. But the first real meeting of the year took place at The Maggie Jones ten days later. To the frustration of all who had brushed up on A Study in Scarlet, the Plainsman production was still incomplete -- and still is today. John Altman confessed that the hazards of making unauthorized nocturnal use of an unnamed recording studio downtown had stymied progress. Perhaps it was with a sense of justified skepticism about that project's future that Margaret Baldwin proposed a new one for the Great Alkali Plainsmen: a round-robin novel about the Master's visit to Kansas City, and the "body beside the tracks" mystery. Her proposal met with great enthusiasm, and eleven Plainsmen volunteered on the spot to write chapters under her editorial supervision.

Jon Lellenberg had a Plainsman project of his own in mind. Re-reading Alexander Woollcott's famous 1934 New Yorker article about the Baker Street Irregulars' first annual dinner, he had been reminded of its references to "a medico in Kansas City," Dr. Clendening, who had unaccountably failed to appear at the historic event.* The same Clendening, yclept Logan, had authored one of the most often reprinted Holmes parodies, "The Case of the Missing Patriarchs", which Edgar Smith had included in his monumental BSI anthology of 1944, Profile by Gaslight. Here, it seemed to Lellenberg, was the father of Kansas City Sherlockiana, if only one realized it, and a fitting patron saint for The Great Alkali Plainsmen -- all the more so when his initial research revealed Logan Clendening as an erudite bookhound, a witty raconteur, a boisterous practical jokester, a party-goer and party-giver of boundless energy, and a Sherlockian who even looked like what an early Irregular should look like. Lellenberg's efforts bore first fruit in Daily Journal No. 26 (June 20, 1981), when Part I of his "Clendening Investigation" appeared. Ten installments have been published now, and more may follow.

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* "The Baker Street Irregulars", The New Yorker, December 29, 1934, reprinted in his anthology Long, Long Ago (1943).

When the Plainsmen gathered again on July 24th, their round-robin novel remained the center of attention. Lenore Carroll administered the Detection Club Oath to those declaring themselves willing and able to participate: Lenore herself, Tom Gee, Daisy Wright, Beth Brugman, John Lehman, Margaret Baldwin, Ernest Willer, Michael Crousore, Stan Carmack, Don McClain, Nola Wright, Milt Perry, and John Altman. After dinner the first three chapters were read by their authors, Stan Carmack, Tom Gee, and Margaret Baldwin. This alone was impressive. Margaret was already a published author, but some Plainsmen accused TV newsman Carmack of only reading what others had written for him, and Tom Gee was not known to have authored anything longer than a traffic ticket before. Even more astounding was Margaret's later announcement, at the October 24th meeting, that Milt Perry had finished his chapter -- some six years earlier than the closest date that anyone had entered in a scion pool. (Perry was absent that night, recovering from exhaustion and writer's cramp.) As one might expect, Frank and Jesse James made strong appearances in Milt's chapter. The Great Detective and the Missouri Badman were brought face to face, not entirely to the former's advantage.

(Short notice allowed only nine Plainsmen to watch a November 20th Home Box Office cable broadcast of William Gillette's Sherlock Holmes, performed by the Williamstown, Mass., summer stock company, with Frank Langella in the title role. This took place at Overland Park's Oxford Commons clubhouse, thanks to Beth Brugman, with John Altman's usual technical wizardry to make it possible.)

"His wanderings had come to an end."

The '81 Feast of the Blue Carbuncle was held on the slightly noncanonical date of December 28th, the 27th having been a Sunday, but there was another difference this time. The roast goose was as delicious as ever, of course, the various reports informative and amusing, and the musicale entertaining. This year it was a five-act "opera", Carmen Holmenis; or, Watson's Yule-Log, something to stir the hopes of mime theater investors everywhere. The cast included Beth Brugman as Dr. Jane Watson, Chuck Replogle as Sherlock Holmes, Tom Gee as Inspector Lestrade, Mike Crousore as Professor Moriety (sic), and John Lehman (the author, as usual) as Colonel Moran, with an unbilled Don McClain as an unidentified corpse. They sang seasonal arias like "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Murder", "I'll Get Holmes for Christmas", and "The Twelve Days of Sherlock". While the Daily Journal reported that no libretto was known to exist, that proved to be untrue, and here from the archives is one of Holmes's songs:

It's beginning to look a lot like murder!
Take a look at that tiny scuff
Right upon his cuff --
A thousand things such evidence betrays!

It's beginning to look a lot like murder,
  a crime against the law;
And if you'll look with care
At this tiny tear,

You will find the cause!

A gun that shoots air
Is in the care
Of a man named Colonel Moran;
Caught cheating at cards,
He tried very hard
To quietly gun down his man --
And I deduced it all from this
tiny metal strand!

Yes it's beginning to look a lot
like murder,
Everywhere I spy!
But the clew that takes its toll
Is the great three-inch hole
Right between his eyes!

Sure it's murder, bloody murder,
I surmise!

What surprised the Plainsmen that night was Lellenberg's retirement as the scion's chairman. He had been planning it privately for some time, for it seemed clear that The Great Alkali Plainsmen needed no further pump-priming from afar. What's more, Lellenberg was finding his free time under serious pressure. He was busier than ever editing and writing for Baker Street Miscellanea, and chairing a small committee of Irregulars representing Dame Jean Conan Doyle's literary interests in the United States. In addition, a new Pentagon assignment had eliminated much of what remained of his free time. So it seemed to him a good time to turn over his scion responsibilities to others.

His announcement followed a Council of Elders a few days earlier that he had called. Present besides Lellenberg were Margaret Baldwin, Stan Carmack, Lenore Carroll, John Lehman, Don McClain, Milt Perry, and perhaps one or two others. A sort of apostolic succession was arranged. The text of Lellenberg's announcement at the Feast appears in Daily Journal No. 29 (January 22, 1982); it concluded with the following remarks, indicating that the years in Washington were polluting his well of English:

> In 1969, John Bennett Shaw had become so much the spirit of our scion that when he retired and moved to Santa Fe, the life went out of it for three years. I know that won't happen when I leave office, because the life of our scion is here, in Kansas City, and out in Topeka, with you, not with me in Washington.
>
> So during the next several months, I will phase out of my responsibilities for The Great Alkali Plainsmen. Margaret Baldwin and Lenore Carroll will take over editing and publishing the Kansas City Daily Journal, and John Lehman will assume essential coordinating responsibilities for the scion as its new Avenging Angel. John has been doing much of the work for some time, and it's ap-

propriate to resurrect the office's title at the outset of this transition....

It may have come as a surprise to those who knew of the office's existence to hear that Lellenberg was not the Avenging Angel, but in fact he had never used the title, claiming it only retroactively for himself for 1975-81 when he turned the office over to Lehman. Back in 1976, he had responded to a questionnaire for a new guide to BSI scion societies (never published), with the following comment: "Officers are elected at infrequent intervals. The last elections were in 1968, and no new elections are contemplated for the foreseeable future. The second and third offices are currently empty. Meetings are conducted by me or my designated replacement in the event of my absence. I am not the Avenging Angel, though."

The Avenging Angel then had been Milt Perry, since 1969, years that had encompassed the Great Hiatus. Lellenberg had been raised in John Bennett Shaw's School of Benevolent Despotism as far as scion society affairs were concerned,* and he saw no point to new elections in either 1975 or 1981. Coup d'etat, Milt Perry wryly observed at the Council of Elders, had become the Plainsman method of transferring power when necessary. So it had, in 1975, though not in 1981; but it would be again one day, as we shall see in due course.

Lellenberg none too modestly called his retirement from office "the end of an era" in the Daily Journal, but so it was, for him at least, after nine years' heavy involvement with Plainsmen affairs. On January 1st, he wrote to Julian Wolff to inform him of the change, saying that that "the change will be good for the scion society's health, and I hope you'll give the Plainsmen and their new leaders the same kind consideration that you've always given me."

* It is no coincidence that Shaw's self-chosen title in The Brothers Three of Moriarty is "Big Brother".