



Plugs & Dottles

Official Newsletter of the Nashville Scholars
of the Three-Pipe Problem

First Quarter January-March 2021

Jim Hawkins & Dean Richardson, Co-Editors

- Established 1979
- Meetings on third Saturday of every month (except Dec.)
- Website:
nashvillescholars.net
- [Facebook page](#)
- Send comments:
seniorhawk@gmail.com or to
dean.h.richardson@gmail.com

The COVID Pandemic Issue

No in-person meetings since
January 2020

Zoom has kept us together.

Hawkins makes Inspector!



Thanks to Mike McClure for including me in his new game:
**The Original Sherlock Holmes
and His Baker Street
Irregulars.**

Nashville Scholars 2021

*42 Years with Holmes and Watson
and the Literary Agent: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*



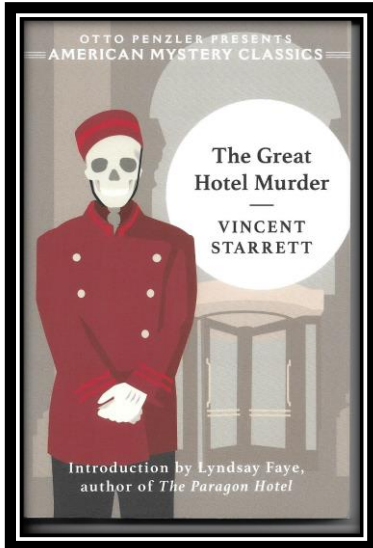
We are all in this together! Indeed we are. But the Pipers, as we are known, have risen to the occasion. We owe a debt of gratitude to Jeff Steward, our tech guy, who has made sure we could meet virtually via Zoom. Non-resident members of our scion society have been able to attend meetings, and we've even had guests drop in from time to time. We need to count our blessings and get through this **together.** (Image: Bill Mason)



It seems that Bill, in the event Sir Arthur had been exposed to COVID19, has put a similar mask on the Literary Agent. And notice how Chris Schweizer peered into his Zoom screen as he led us through *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* at our December meeting. See pages 5 and 6 for a follow-up story on BLUE.



Dean Richardson Reviews
***The Great Hotel Murder* by Vincent Starrett**



Vincent Starrett is perhaps most widely known among Sherlockians for his poem, “221-B,” his pioneering biographical study, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1933; rev., 1960), his masterful pastiche, “The Adventure of the Unique Hamlet,” and as a cofounder of the Baker Street Irregulars, but his accomplishments, range, and influence are much wider: journalist, poet, essayist, bookman (both as collector and critic), novelist, and writer of mysteries and a few supernatural stories. He created several continuing characters, most notably gentleman detective Jimmy Lavender in a series of mystery stories stretching from 1921 to 1964. *The Great Hotel Murder* began life as a Jimmy Lavender story, “Recipe for Murder” (1934), according to Otto Penzler in his introduction to that story in his *The Big Book of Reel Murders*. Fox Film Corporation (not yet 20th Century Fox) bought it for adaptation, and at the same time Starrett expanded it into novel form, using the same title and protagonist as the resulting movie, *The Great Hotel Murder* (both 1935).

The movie (available on YouTube) begins like the novel, but the tone is more humorous (i.e., wise cracks and slapstick), the plot is much simpler, most of the characters are different or have different names, and the resolution is rushed and abrupt (possibly a problem with the print). The only thing all three have in common is a scene in a nightclub. I will say the original story is clever and Lavender is a colorful detective.

So, what about the novel? The plot, of course, is more complex with a larger cast and greater variety of settings. It begins with the discovery of a man’s body in a Chicago hotel room, victim of poison, but was it suicide or murder? Then it’s discovered that he, Chambers, had swapped rooms with another man, Dr. Trample, the night before. If it was murder, which was the intended victim? Enter Riley Blackwood, theater critic and amateur detective, at the request of the hotel owner, to find answers without publicity. Further revelations complicate things. (Why did the victim use an assumed name? Why were there binoculars on the floor?) Theories abound and developments invalidate them. Character relationships keep changing. All are standard classic mystery tropes, but still engaging. The writing is witty, the characters interesting, the plot well paced and well developed.

While Starrett was a great admirer and exponent of Conan Doyle, this novel is more a product of its time, the 1930s, in the heart of the Golden Age of the Mystery. I have been reading the Ellery Queen novels of that era, and I find this book has much in common with those, particularly in its amateur detective protagonist. Like Ellery, Riley is tall, slender, wears distinctive glasses (his horn-rimmed, Ellery’s pince-nez), and can be arrogant and sarcastic (hmm, not unlike Sherlock). But he’s far more personable and physically active, and a bit less analytical, although he does work out the mystery a little ahead of the police and the reader. (Riley appeared in one more mystery, *Midnight and Percy Jones* [1938]).

In short, this mystery is an engrossing read and great fun. It is part of the Otto Penzler Presents American Mystery Classics series, which is reprinting Golden Age mysteries (1920s–1940s) by such masters as Ellery Queen, John Dickson Carr, Erle Stanley Gardner, Charlotte Armstrong, et al. All are well worth your time, especially the October 2020 release, *The Case of the Baker Street Irregulars* by Anthony Boucher (1940).



David Marcum, known as “The Engineer’s Thumb” in the Nashville Scholars, lives in Maryville over in East Tennessee and enjoys a four-hour drive one way to attend meetings. He has edited more than 60 books and written nearly 80 pastiches, including eight published in *The Strand*. One of David’s recent stories, “The Home Office Baby,” has made the cut in Otto Penzler’s *Best Mysteries of the Year for 2021*, edited by Otto and Lee Child. Marcum shared with me that Penzler and his people at the Mysterious Bookshop in New York City read 3,000–4,000 stories per year from all kinds of sources and then

narrow the list down to the 18–20 best. According to Marcum, “It was a complete surprise—my story is one of nine of my Holmes pastiches (to this point) that have appeared in *The Strand* magazine, which is where they saw it.

“There are apparently two kinds of writers—those who outline, and those who write by the seats of their pants. I am the latter. I open a new Word document with no plan or outline and then let Watson tell me a story. That’s how “The Home Office Baby” arrived: I’d had several of my Holmes stories published in *The Strand* magazine, and it was time to submit a new one—which meant that I had to sit down and write it. (I’ve learned that the main secret to writing is sit in the chair and do it.) As always, I just started recording what Watson was telling me, (based upon what’s in my head from decades of collecting, reading and chronologizing literally thousands of Holmes pastiches), and somewhere soon after the story began, my brain-attic recalled reading something about an 1884 incident called “The Home Office Baby,” and so it went from there—from *The Strand* to this book, which will be published in the fall. I’m very glad that the traditional Canonical Holmes will be represented in this volume.”

Why is pastiche so important to you?

“I discovered Holmes when I was ten in 1975, and I started reading pastiches not long after, before I’d even found all of the Canon. Very early on, I received a copy of Nicholas Meyer’s *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* at school during a Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) event—remember those?—and I recognized that a big chunk of the story was incorrect, conflicting with established Canon. But I bought his second book, *The West End Horror*, and was blown away. It’s still one of my favorite pastiches to this day. After that, it was always a treat whenever I would find more stories about Holmes, because just reading the same sixty original adventures over and over and over again wasn’t enough. At first finding new Holmes stories was a rare event, but now I encounter one nearly every day. (I only read and collect traditional Canonical stories.) Over the years, I’ve collected, read, and chronologized literally thousands of traditional pastiches, and I think that I now own almost every one.”

How did you get associated with MX, raising funds for Stepping Stones School, housed in Conan Doyle's former home in Surrey, Undershaw?

“I wrote my first Holmes pastiches in 2008 while laid off from an engineering job, but they weren’t published until 2011, by George Vanderburgh of the Battered Silicon Dispatch Box.

Hoping for wider distribution, I reached out to Steve Emecz. He republished them in 2013, and then my first Holmes novel, *Sherlock Holmes and a Quantity of Debt*. Since then I've written nearly 80 published pastiches. Steve has always provided incredible support as I came up with different ideas, including *The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories* in 2015, now up to 27 volumes (with more in preparation), containing almost 600 stories by nearly 200 contributors worldwide. All royalties go to the Stepping Stones School for special needs students. When I first had the idea for the MX anthology, Steve and I decided to direct the royalties to the school, especially as MX had already been involved in a few other projects supporting Undershaw, Sir Arthur's former home where the school located. So far, we've raised more than \$75,000, with no end in sight!"

More about David's connections to Undershaw can be found in this entry from *A Seventeen Step Program*, his irregular blog:

<http://17stepprogram.blogspot.com/2020/09/a-version-of-this-essay-originally.html>

David is featured in several Sherlockian "hot spots" on the internet.

AMAZON: <https://www.amazon.com/David-Marcum/e/B00K11KA92>

BLOG: A Seventeen Step Program <http://17stepprogram.blogspot.com/>

IHOSE INTERVIEW: <https://www.ihearofsherlock.com/2020/08/episode-199-sherlockian-dynamo.html>



During a visit to Undershaw, the former home of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Marcum took the opportunity to seat himself and write a few lines at the author's desk.



One more question: why doesn't East Tennessee have an active Sherlockian scion society? By the way, we are glad you are a Nashville Scholar and drive the four hours, one way, occasionally to be present for our meetings

“Thank you, and I’m very glad to be part of the Nashville Scholars! Although it’s an all-day round-trip to attend the occasional meeting, I consider it my home Scion. I don’t know why East Tennessee doesn’t have a scion. There was one listed years ago— The Baker Street Volunteers—but no amount of research ever helped me to actually locate it—and years ago I used to be a Federal Investigator, so I have the skills to find it if it ever truly existed!”

The Blue Carbuncle, Child’s Play?

Dean Richardson

As Nashville Scholars are aware, member Shannon Carlisle (Scholars nom “221 B Baker Street”; director, Junior Sherlockian Society, Franklin; Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes nom “The Seventeenth Step”; BSI nom “Beacon of the Future!”) teaches accelerated learning students at an elementary school in Franklin, but her approach is hardly elementary. She helps first- through fourth-grade students develop critical thinking skills through study of the methods of and stories about the Great Detective. This past fall, one of her students adapted “The Blue Carbuncle” as a play. And that student is a first grader! (I was just beginning to read in first grade, and this guy has written a play?)

Due to his tender age and for his protection and privacy, we will not reveal the student’s name, but we can discuss his achievement. Asked about that, Shannon related, “During the first week of December, we read Judith Conaway’s abridged version of the tale in class. While we were reading it, a student mentioned several times that it should be a play. Noting that that was a fabulous idea, I gave him class time to compose it. It took two weeks. I typed as he spoke the words. On the day before our winter break began, I printed the first draft. He returned in January with a few edits. Then, in January, we spent about a week revising and editing several sections of the play. (Revising/ editing the entire play would have been overwhelming.) When reviewing his work, I encouraged him to vary his sentence structure and use more advanced words where appropriate.”



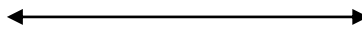
In mid-January, with the play ready for prime time, Shannon decided that it deserved a

recorded performance. She contacted The Fresh Rashers via Bill Mason and requested our help, sending a copy of the play. With enthusiasm we agreed.

Unable to restrain my editorial compulsion, I also proofed the manuscript, suggesting a few word changes and the addition of a narrator. Shannon asked if we could schedule a Zoom so that I could discuss those matters with the author. When we did that, I was amazed at the precocity, energy, and charm of her young student.

The Zoom performance took place on Friday, January 29. The cast included Bill Mason as Holmes, Marino Alvarez as Watson, the first-grade author as Peterson, Dave Price as Henry Baker, Billy Fields as Windigate, myself as Breckinridge, Jim Hawkins as Ryder, and the author’s mother as the narrator. Also in attendance were the author’s father and siblings and both sets of grandparents. It went off without a hitch(cock), and we had a great time. Afterwards, the author had each of us recount our initial exposure to the Canon (I suppose that would be giving our testimony), and we said our good-byes. What a wonderful experience for us all.

We expect great things from this young author, especially with the great opportunities afforded him in such a class with such a teacher. And “I never guess” (SIGN).

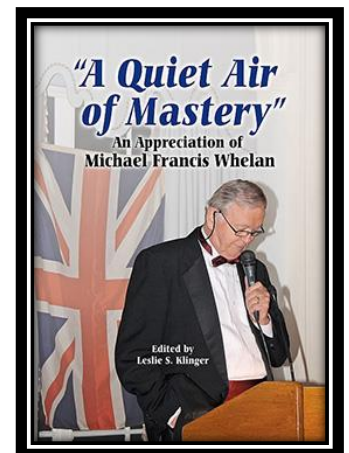


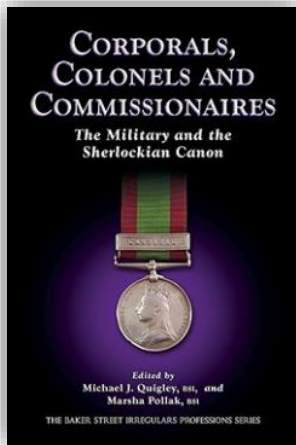
In 2020, the Baker Street Press published three important books: **The Staunton Tragedy** (“**The Missing Three Quarter**”), a facsimile of the original edition, edited by Michael Whelan (BSI). The chapter titled “Urgent! Need Your Services Immediately” was written by Dr. Marino Alvarez (BSI and Nashville Scholar).



Marino joined the Nashville Scholars in 1989 with the investiture of “Professor Coram” (GOLD). The story is often retold how he appeared at one of our meetings, at the old Davis-Kidd bookstore, with a paper in hand, which he delivered that night. Inducted into the Baker Street Irregulars in 2015, he is “Hilton Soames” (3STU) in that organization.

Dr. Alvarez also has a chapter in the second important BSI Press book of 2020, **“A Quiet Air of Mastery”**: An **Appreciation of Michael Francis Whelan**. Mike Whelan served the Baker Street Irregulars as “Wiggins” (head of society) for 23 years, “placing an indelible mark on the organization and preparing us for the future” (BSI Press quote). Edited by Leslie S. Klinger (BSI), the book is “composed of reminiscences, anecdotes and history from Irregulars of all ages and backgrounds.” Marino’s chapter is titled “A Salute to Michael Whelan.”





The third volume published in 2020 by BSI Press is the latest book in the BSI Professions Series: **Corporals, Colonels and Commissionaires: The Military and the Sherlockian Canon**, edited by Michael J. Quigley, LCDR, USN (Ret.), BSI, and Marsha Pollak, BSI. The book deals with the military aspect of lives in the canon, beginning with **John H. Watson, M.D., Late of the Army Medical Department**. The chapter titled “The Old Campaigner: Dr. Watson’s Military Service” was contributed by Bill Mason, invested into the BSI in 2015 as “White Mason” (VALL), and into the Nashville Scholars in 1998 as “The Hydraulic Press” (ENGR).

All three volumes are copyrighted by and available from [Baker Street Press](#).



A Report on the Frederic Dorr Steele grave marker by Jim Hawkins

Frederic Dorr Steele, the “other famous” illustrator of the Sherlock Holmes stories, finally got a proper gravestone in 2020. He was the son of William Henry Steele and Zulma DeLacy Dorr Steele. At the age of 70 he passed away at Bellevue Hospital in New York City and was cremated in the Fresh Ponds Crematorium in Queens, NY. He was buried 76 years ago in **Albany Rural Cemetery** in Menands, New York.

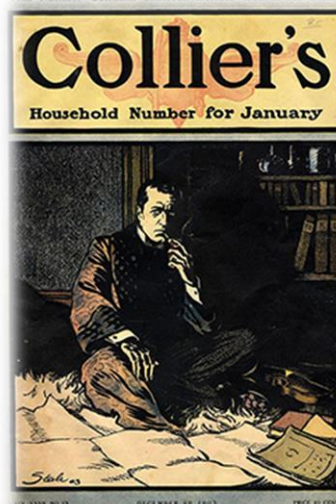


Although his ashes were interred in the family burial plot, no gravestone was erected to mark the grave. Linda Hunt, while doing research for the BSI Press book, *Aboriginals*, discovered that Steele’s grave was unmarked and suggested a tombstone should be erected. To accomplish this Burt Wolder then organized a committee whose members included himself, Linda and Harrison Hunt, Bob Katz, and Andrew Malec, all of whom would subsequently become directors of the nonprofit referenced on page 9. Numerous Sherlockians donated the funds needed in six months.

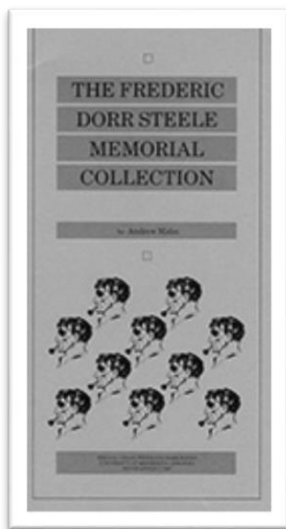
Of Steele, Scott Monty, cohost of **I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere**, had this to say: “**Frederic Dorr Steele** is as closely associated with Sherlock Holmes as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, William Gillette, and Sidney Paget—all of whom were consequential figures in making Holmes spring to life for millions of people over the ages.” Burt Wolder, the other cohost of IHOSE, prepared a video for a GoFundMe drive to raise funds for a headstone for the forgotten Steele. (See the [video](#) at YouTube.)

According to the *Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia*, Steele completed more than 163 illustrations for the Sherlock Holmes stories from 1901 to 1944, the year of his death. Here is a [list of the illustrations](#) from the *ACD Encyclopedia* website.

Steele's concept of Holmes was obviously drawn from the person of William Gillette, who portrayed Holmes on stage, first in Buffalo, NY, in 1899, and then some 1,300 times across the United States and England. With his imaginative illustrations of Holmes, Steele brought us lots of joy as we made our way through the canon. We think of him as living a long time ago, but in terms of my own life, Frederic Dorr Steele died just two months before I was born.



In my search for materials for the John Bennett Shaw website in 2018, I often came across references to FDS. In fact, his children donated a large collection of manuscripts, photographs, artwork, and other materials relating to Steele's life and career to the University of Minnesota Libraries in 1986. In early 1987 a brochure written by **Andrew Malec** to commemorate the donation was published. One thousand copies of the brochure were printed, "of which 325 are presented to the Baker Street Irregulars and the Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes, on 9 January 1987, by John Bennett Shaw, BSI, Senior Fellow, University of Minnesota" (from the brochure). The brochure by Malec (BSI) is available as a downloadable PDF [here](#). A more comprehensive pamphlet about Steele, written by Malec in 1984 is **The Other Master: Frederic Dorr Steele**, [available here](#).



From an email to me by Andrew Malec. "I was a graduate student in the University of Minnesota Library School (now closed) between the years 1978–1985. During part of that period, between 1979–1981, I was a half-time graduate student assistant working with the collections and later held other positions which provided me with some connections to the Sherlock Holmes collections. **Austin McLean**, now deceased, was the Curator I worked under.

After Austin retired there was an interim curator, and **Tim Johnson** took over in 1998. **John Bennett Shaw** was present at a conference at Minnesota in 1984 which was also attended by two of Frederic Dorr Steele's children Robert Steele and Zulma Steele Grey. Another daughter, Anna Steele March, was unable to attend the conference. An FDS exhibition was mounted for the conference, the preparation for which involved extensive correspondence between the Steele children. This in turn led to the donation of a large number of FDS materials." (**Andrew Malec**, currently a Minneapolis law firm librarian).

As previously mentioned, this story began when Linda and Harrison Terry Hunt were doing research for their BSI Press book, **“ABORIGINALS”: The Earliest Baker Street Irregulars, 1934–1940.**



They discovered that Frederic Dorr Steele’s cremated remains were buried in the Albany Rural Cemetery, just 40 miles north of their home in Catskill, NY. Founded more than 180 years ago in 1841, **Albany Rural Cemetery** is an exemplar of the rural or garden cemetery movement of the 1800’s with its winding roads, wooded hills, and beautiful burial monuments. It is a National Historical Landmark site, covering an area of 467 acres. The committee was inspired by the beautiful grave marker established in Chicago for the author Vincent Starrett.

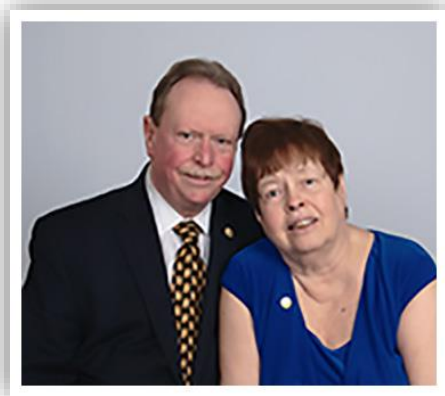
(In the image above, the light place is where the footings for Steele’s headstone were poured.)

“A nonprofit corporation, Frederic Dorr Steele Memorial, Inc., has been created in New York State to complete the grave marker project and sponsor future programs. Steele’s headstone was installed in November; a ceremony and program are being planned for 2021, and a website is under development for the organization to help explore and develop future projects that commemorate Steele and his work” (Burt Wolder, author, and cohost of **I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere**, podcast).



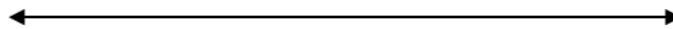
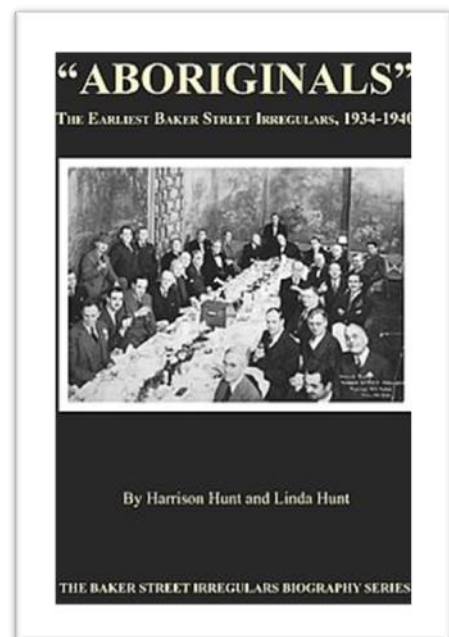
Frederic Dorr Steele Memorial Committee

John Baesch, Peter E. Blau, Ross Davies, Michael Dirda, Thomas Francis, Evelyn Herzog, Harrison Hunt, Linda Hunt, Alex Katz, Robert Katz, Jon Lellenberg, Andrew Malec, Glen Miranker, Scott Monty, Richard Olken, Jan Prager, M. E. Rich, Philip Shreffler, Albert Silverstein, Burt Wolder.



My sincere thanks to **Harrison Terry Hunt** and **Linda Hunt** of Catskill, NY, for sending this information. This image of the Hunts is from the back inside cover of their book. Thanks to **Terry and Linda**, **Andrew Malec**, **Donald Pollack**, and **Julie McKuras** for their assistance in bringing this story together. And thanks to **Burt Wolder** and all the gracious contributors for getting the funds together to erect the monument for **Frederic Dorr Steele**.

If you have not read their book, **“ABORIGINALS”: The Earliest Baker Street Irregulars, 1934–1940**, I highly recommend it. It is a fascinating look at the very first Baker Street Irregulars from the 1934 gathering in New York. On the back cover **Leslie Klinger** comments, “The individuals depicted in this book are a remarkable collection of people—intelligent, witty, accomplished, and convivial. Some graced our tables only once; others became the lifeblood of the society. Some came to the Dinner out of intense interest in the subject matter, others came solely out of friendship, while a few never attended at all. Though some may be famous, I promise you that all are fascinating” (Leslie Klinger, General Editor of the Baker Street Irregular Biography Series). Available from the BSI Press. It’s a thoroughly enjoyable book. [See this page](#) for details and ordering.



MARCH MADNESS

BE SURE TO JOIN US MARCH 20
WHEN **SHANNON CARLISLE** LEADS OUR DISCUSSION OF
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF LADY FRANCES CARFAX
AN AGEING HOLMES DOES A RATHER SLOPPY JOB ON THE CASE
AND TREATS WATSON SHABBILY
SHANNON PROMISES A TOTALLY CREATIVE APPROACH

WE WILL GET THROUGH THIS TOGETHER!