

Tom Feller Report on A Gathering of Southern Sherlockians

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The Third Annual Gathering of Southern Sherlockians



Figure 1 Bill Mason at the podium

This is a joint meeting of the Sherlock Holmes clubs of Atlanta (Confederates of Wisteria Lodge), Nashville (Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem), Birmingham (Genius Loci), and Greenville, South Carolina (Survivors of the Gloria Scott), although others can and do attend. We hold it in Chattanooga because that is the most central location. There was heavy rain when Anita and I got up Saturday morning. We immediately regretted not driving to Chattanooga the night before, especially since the meeting seems to start earlier and earlier each year. We listened to The Memory Keeper's Daughter by Kim Edwards on the drive. The title character has Down's Syndrome. The rain ceased just before we reached

Monteagle, the highest point between Nashville and Chattanooga, and we stopped at a Hardees' restaurant at the top for biscuits and orange juice.

We reached Chattanooga with several minutes to spare before the meeting started. It took place at the Read House, but we had reservations at the Days Inn across the street. We also regretted not staying at the Read House, because it rained off and on the rest of the weekend. There were seven presentations that day after the welcome by Kent Ross of Atlanta, the chief organizer. The first consisted of video clips of Peter Cushing, whom Richard Green of Birmingham considers to be a very underrated Sherlock Holmes actor. Kenneth Carr and Ira Block of Atlanta both had presentations that touched on the connection between Holmes and Winston Churchill. Carr pointed out Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty during the time period of "His Last Bow", so he must have been aware of Holmes's activities. Carr also produced a map showing how close Churchill's home in Kent was to Holmes's retirement home in Sussex. He also revealed that one of Churchill's World War II secretaries was named "Marian Holmes", whom Carr speculated was the daughter of Sherlock or Mycroft Holmes. Block attempted to identify Trelawney Hope of "The Second Stain" as Lord Randolph Churchill and the prominent lady of "Charles Augustus Milverton" as Lady Churchill, Winston's parents. Brad Keefauver of Peoria, Illinois, presented a paper in which he disputed Watson's characterization of Holmes as untidy, and Joel Senter of

Cincinnati attempted to show a connection between Holmes and jazz music. Senter was once perusing a second-hand record store in Gallatin, Tennessee, when he found a reel-to-reel tape that contained a duet between two singers playing Holmes and Watson. He also produced pictures of a jazz violinist from the Twenties and Thirties who bore a striking resemblance to Holmes and would have been the right age as well. Comic relief was provided by Elliott Black of Greenville who did magic tricks. Although not a presentation, we did hear Ron Littlefield, mayor of Chattanooga, who welcomed us to Chattanooga and told us about the restoration of their city hall, which was built in 1908.



Figure 2 Jerome Boynton and Gael Stahl

There was no break for lunch, although we did visit the Starbucks inside the hotel. The banquet consisted of prime rib. There were toasts afterward, and Kay Blocker of Nashville used some lines of poetry that Anita and others wrote to toast Moriarty. Then Anita won an anthology of detective stories contemporary with the original Holmes ones as a door prize. Finally, we reached our big moment.

Last year, we were informed that the Nashville club was responsible for this year's post-banquet entertainment, specifically a play. Anita and I plotted a pastiche on the way home, and I wrote it up the following week. We've been tinkering with it ever since. The biggest change was that we converted it from a stage play to a radio play, because we were having difficulty getting people together for rehearsals and we were not sure who was going to be in Chattanooga to perform it. With a radio play, people could read their lines. In addition, the actors playing Holmes and Watson rewrote some of their lines. Otherwise, it was as we had conceived it the previous year.

The premise of the farce was Sherlock Holmes is called to Nashville, Tennessee, to protect the famous singer Jenny Lind, who is being stalked by the notorious outlaw Jesse James.



It was very well received, and the audience laughed at the right places. We celebrated with some champagne in the hotel bar afterward. Sunday morning we met for breakfast back in the meeting room and took a quiz, in which I tied for second place. Since the winner already had a copy of the prize, the other second place finisher and I split the two-volume set of Baring-Gould's *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. The first presentation of the morning was on the back story of "The Five Orange Pips" by David Milner of Greenville.

Milner disputed the background of Colonel Elias Openshaw, arguing that it was not true to the post-Civil War history of Florida. Then the Birmingham club performance a radio play, using the 1953 teleplay that adapted "The Adventure of the Black Baronet" by John Dickson Carr and Adrian Conan Doyle. Finally, Kent Ross led us in a reading of Vincent Starrett's poem, "221b Baker Street", but not before informing us that we had been so good the night before, that they expected us to provide the post-banquet entertainment again next year.

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