

# Class Notes

## 'The Casebook of Robert Hahn,' or the 'Hound of Holmesiana'

There's nothing elementary about Robert Hahn's knowledge of Sherlock Holmes. In fact, Hahn (A&S '53) ranks among the top six "Holmesiana" experts in the world—no small feat in light of the thousands of devoted literary fans who look upon Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional character as the definitive detective.

Sherlock Holmes' century-long appeal is no mystery, Hahn says.

"Sherlock Holmes is an outstandingly vivid character, and the stories are interesting. Doyle takes an age that we don't know and draws it so well: London at that time was a very mysterious city of fog, narrow streets, and crime. Holmes is a very logical and creative man, worthy of admiration. The time and the man fit together.

"Most school-age individuals between the ages of ten and 15 come in contact with at least one anthology that carries a Sherlock Holmes story," Hahn explains. "I like to say that Holmes fascination is an illness that strikes young; the lucky recover, but for others the fascination lingers."

Hahn's own fascination began at the age of ten when he and his grandfather read *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. "From that point on, I was lost," Hahn smiles. He now owns several hundred editions of Doyle's creations, as well as journals and stage and movie memorabilia. Sherlock Holmes has been featured in more than 700 radio programs, 65 plays, and 175 films, in addition to many television specials. The first Holmes film, which lasted only 45 seconds, was made around 1900.

His intrigue with the character has led Hahn into teaching, writing, lecturing—and guiding other Holmes buffs further into the Holmesian fold.

"In the '70s I taught courses at Elmhurst and Triton colleges, and at



Three Holmes buffs (l-r): Vincent Starrett, Basil Rathbone, and Robert Hahn.

Illinois Benedictine, where I also curated a Holmes library. In February of this year I taught a six-week course at Concordia College, just outside of Milwaukee," reports Hahn, who relocated from Chicago to Sheboygan, Wis., in 1981. "Teaching about Holmes is like teaching English literature with a specialization on a specific author such as Hemingway or Shakespeare, only we concentrate on Holmes rather than on Doyle. In this instance, the character has become rather more important than the author."

Hahn has lectured on his favorite topic at more than 100 gatherings, including those of the Lions Club, Kiwanis Club, and Rotary Club. He also has appeared on numerous Chicago radio and television shows. He is in his 25th year as editor and publisher of a quarterly newsletter, *The Devon County Chronicle*, and has been published in a number of journals. Hahn has written detective fiction and a new stage adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and currently is working on a novel and a television script. He has been a member of various Holmes-inspired organizations such as the Baker Street Irregulars, Hugo's Companions, and The Merripet House Guests, which he founded in Sheboygan. He also joins other Sherlockians in the yearly celebration of Holmes' birthday in January.

"In our gatherings and in journal

articles, we like to look at details and discrepancies in stories," Hahn says. "We can argue endlessly about whether or not a train departed Paddington Station at a certain time. We take these details very seriously, and look at railroad schedules and weather reports and such."

Prior to retirement, Hahn worked as a consultant in credit and international finance. He also lectured and wrote in that field as a member of the Midwest Credit Managers' Association.

Above and beyond the enjoyment he finds in persuing Sherlockian lore, Hahn cites several highlights in his career as a literary scholar.

"Visiting London and locating the probable site on Baker Street where Holmes and Watson would have lived was a thrill. A lot of Sherlock's London still remains," Hahn reports. "I also had the opportunity to meet some very interesting people, including the actor Basil Rathbone, famous for portraying Holmes, and Vincent Starrett, the late author, poet, critic, and *Chicago Tribune* columnist considered one of the greatest of all Sherlockians."

Hahn, who laughed when asked if he favored pipes, capes, and deerstalker caps, stressed, "The association is the big thing—sharing our love for the character Sherlock Holmes."

—Monica M. Walk