

ON THE AIR

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE VINTAGE BROADCAST SOCIETY

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 3

MAY - JUNE 1984



"HE CURLED HIMSELF UP IN HIS CHAIR."



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PUBLICATION

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Report From the President



Hello Fellow Members,

This month the President's page will be devoted to an important message from the club's Editor Kevin Eastwood.

What he has to say is endorsed by myself and each of the other Directors.

So without any further ado, I am pleased to present Kevin Eastwood.

Lew

Hello,

Well, it has come to this..... Kevin Eastwood (Editor, remember?) has actually taken pen in hand to address the club personally (not as strange as it sounds, really).

Actually, the reason for my withdrawal from anonymous seclusion is quite simple (remember, Einstein's theory is relatively easy).

In order for this committee to continue to publish an above average magazine we MUST HAVE YOUR INPUT!! Remember, this club is for all the members and all of the members must contribute in order to make it successful. We, on the editorial committee want to hear what you have to say, we cannot have a well-rounded club otherwise. Hearing the same point-of-view all the time is not much fun now, is it?

Please, without some feedback, "On The Air" will just become stale. One letter an issue is not enough. If you've got stories to tell, comments to make, photographs, etc..... please, send them to us.

We are not the "Editorial Committee" because we are the only persons knowledgable enough. Our job is to gather articles, photos, etc... and put them together in a workable format. I believe that, with your input we can have one of the best publications this hobby has ever seen (now go in there and fight!...oops, wrong speech).

Seriously, please think about what I have said, and I hope to see some of you at the meeting.

Kevin

THE BEHIND SCENES

RECENT MEETINGS **** RECENT MEETINGS **** RECENT MEETINGS

Listed below are the names of the Club's Board of Directors. If you have any suggestions or information which might be useful to the club, please write any of the individuals listed.

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- . All ads must be submitted Photo ready.
- . Size of original must be proportional to printed size.

NOTE: Because of excessive printing cost, we are temporarily discontinuing the member's discount on ads.

COPY DEADLINE

JUNE 30, 1984

PUBLICATION DEADLINE

JULY 15, 1984

Feedback

Hey, wait a minute. If this is a letter to the Editor, then what am I doing with it? Oh Yeh, now I remember, Eastwood told me to deal with it. Nice guy that Kevin, someday I'll get ya, ol' buddy. Anyway, as long as someone took the trouble to write, I guess the least I can do is to try and give an honest answer. So here goes nothin'. P.S. The J.S. after every question and answer is me, Jack Shugg, your friendly Vice President.

Kevin Eastwood
Editor "On-the-Air"
145 Linden Road
Mineola, NY 11501

Dear Kevin (Remember that Eastwood, Kevin, not Jack)

As a new member (aren't we all) of "The Vintage Broadcast Society," I hope that some goals and/or guidelines would be set down (you ain't the only one with that hope. j.s.)

I began collecting in 1981 and have stumbled across many problems in trying to develop my collection. I will list the worst of them and hope you might recognize a few.

1. Where to buy programming.....(To answer this I can only say that for me to endorse any dealer would not be fair to you or the club. The V.B.S. must remain neutural, unless some clown is a blatent rip-off. I can, however, suggest that you contact Mr. Jay Hickerson and ask for a sample issue of his publication "HELLO AGAIN." Jay has a way of weeding out the scam artists and for six bucks a year you can't go wrong. Write Jay at, Box "C", Orange, CN 06477. j.s.)
2. The wide variance in pricing. Cassettes from \$3.00-\$7.00 per hour. Reels from \$6.00-\$15.00 per 1800'. (The answer to this is easy. Dealers are and always will be in a position to charge what ever the traffic will bear. After all ain't that the American way? j.s.)
3. The wide variance in quality. (Quality will depend on a number of factors, number of generations down from the master, the quality of the cassette or reel used, etc. It can also be dependent on the experience of the recordist & his equipment. In this matter I can only advise you to know the source you're buying from and understand his rating system. If you don't like the quality of what you get then you are within your rights to demand your money back. j.s.)
4. The variance in program titles and dates..... (This is a problem that has been a thorn in the side of every collector from "Giddie-Up-Go." The reason for it is simple. Since there are no titles for certain shows; "The Lone Ranger", "The Scarlet Pimernel" and others, collectors have come up with their own system. For the most part this consists of using one or two of the opening lines of the episode. Others use the name of a central character, and still others do as they please. Try to obtain logs of the shows you're interested in and you should have no trouble. Since a lot of these programs were syndicated, they were not always broadcast on the same date. I know I'm not a lot of help on this one but you can't win them all. j.s.)
5. Duplicate copies of the same show..... (This is one I can't answer. If you have a lot of dupes, it's either because of the previous problem, or you're trying

to up-grade the sound quality of a particular show. I can, however, tell you that in the case of open reel, there will be times that you will have no choice but to take some shows you already have, in order to get some you don't. Otherwise you'll have to ask for a custom reel and this is where the price goes through the roof. j.s.)

6. The differences in tape decks. i.e., numbering index. Stereo/Mono capable and speed..... (Just like everything else, different strokes for different folks. To the best of my knowledge, no two indexing systems are the same. Even if they were, they would vary from tape to tape because of speed variations in different recorders. Independent channels are a must for the O.T.R. Collector, in order to be able to utilize all four tracks when you are mastering a reel. You can use a "stereo only" machine when duping. Double speeding is okay, but, I can't say that I approve of double tracking. I know I'm going to get flack on that last statement, but I don't like cross-talk. j.s.)

7. Buying groups, How do they work, and are they worth it. (Buying groups work just fine, and they will save you a lot of money. The way they work is simple. A group of collectors ante up a certain amount of money for each month, say ten dollars a month toward buying reels. Most groups are started by someone who has "hot" sources, and can get "Primo" uncirculated material. The reels are sent from one collector to another until all members of the group have had a chance to copy the "Master." The "Masters" can then be used for trading for even more goodies. If you like what you get, you stay in, if not, you drop out. Simple. j.s.) (Adding another opinion on points 1,2,3, & 7 is our everloving Treasurer, Ron Baron. I also do not wish to endorse any particular dealer, but I will say that price and quality tend to go hand in hand. The dealer offering six hours reel at \$6.00-\$7.00 - a piece, tends to: (1) be using a dozen or more machines at once so as not to be able to give any one tape a great amount of care (2) Double-speed (3) Double-track which will usually cause cross talk. (4) Use cheap tape. (5) Not be concerned with the sound quality of their masters (low quality masters make even lower quality dubs) and (6) Give no sound rating in their catalogs. On the other hand, there are dealers who will custom record tapes for you in real time, single track at a time, on good tape from low generation, high quality masters. And they will give the sound ratings in their catalog. But they charge anywhere from \$6.00-\$10.00 an hour. This is where your buying group comes in. I think its the way to get the most for your O.T.R. dollar. r.d.)

8. The very low profile clubs. There so few and scattered around the country. Those of us who do not live in New York City, Buffalo, Indianapolis, Denver Los Angeles, etc. are hard put to find out about clubs. (I don't think that it's the clubs that are low profile, rather it's the hobby. Collecting O.T.R. is a very private hobby. You don't invite the neighbors over to hear your new "Shadow" or "Gunsmoke" shows the way you would for a new "Beatles" or "Stones" album. So, unless you open your month, or just luck-out, you'll always think that you're the only kid on the block. Spread the good word. j.s.)

(This concludes the problem section of the reader's letter. He goes on to suggest some areas in which the V.B.S. should become active. j.s.)

I am currently buying back issues of "The Illustrated Press" to see if they have addressed any of the above mentioned issues that I have brought up.

As for goals and/or guidelines for V.B.S. a few suggestions are as follows:

1. Develop a pamphlet with suggestions on how to get started in O.T.R. collecting, then give it to all new members, assuming the current one are aware of all the problems and how to deal with them. (This is a great idea. Any volunteers? j.s.)
2. Develop a plan of active recruitment. Do not plan on just word of month. Get a dealer or two, or three and ask them to include a flyer on V.B.S. with their mailings, and for this service give them a break on ad rates in "On-the-Air". (Not bad, any other suggestions? j.s.)
3. Develop a clear outline of the advantages of belonging to V.B.S..... For those of us outside the New York City area monthly meetings are not a major selling point..... (With this our reader hits the nail squarely on the head. As soon as possible we hope to have our lending library in full operation. And we are always open to more suggestions. It is your club, tell us what you want and we'll try to comply. And while I'm on the subject this is your magazine and without your input it will get very stale. j.s.)
4. Now that V.B.S. exists, why?..... (In my opinion V.B.S. exists to salvage and preserve O.T.R. broadcasts still held in private hands on the East Coast. It exists to keep the hobby from becoming stagnant. It exists because of the interest of yourself and others, striving to keep radio from becoming background noise. It exists so that radio, as a lot of us knew it, will be something other than a few lines in a history book. When your interest fails, it will no longer exist. j.s.)
4. Try to develop a plan to involve those of us outside the "attending area." (Any suggestions out there? After all it is your club. j.s.)

Best regards for a successful group.

Sincerely,

Tom

Thomas H. Monroe
1426 Roycroft Avenue
Lakewood, Ohio 44107

We thank Jack Shugg, Vice President, for taking the time to answer Tom's letter and also thanks to Ron Baron, Treasurer, for his comments.



The VINTAGE Library

BY JACK SHUGG

I have to admit that when the subject of Sherlock Holmes first came up at the Editorial Committee Meeting, I was, to say the least, a bit unfriendly toward the matter. After all, what's left to be said. It's not that I don't have a soft spot in my heart for Mr. Holmes, it's just that in my eyes there's nothing left that hasn't already been covered in one form or another. Within the last two or three years there has been so much written that it would surely appear to even the most fanatical of the master's disciples that there remains nothing more of consequence to be learned. I myself had helped contribute to the overload with the presentation (along with my partner Max Schmid) of a seven hour broadcast titled "The Enigma of Sherlock Holmes." And yet, even as this is written, more material from the Little Tin Box once held in the vaults of Cox & Co. are beginning to be made public. So it will come as good news to both the Sherlockian scholar, and the followers of Conan Doyle that no less than three new volumes are now available. It also comes as somewhat of a relief to me to have something to contribute to this issue. In the course of the next few paragraphs I will not attempt to prove or disprove whether or not these volumes are in fact based on truth, I will simply give my opinion of the writer's presentation. If they are factual accounts of further adventures of Holmes and Watson then we can still hope for even more. The books are listed in order of publication.

"The Private Life of Dr. Watson" (Being the personal reminiscences of John H. Watson, M.D.) By Michael Hardwick. From E.P. Dutton. Published Oct., 1983. 298 Pages. \$13.95. Although I find the writing style of Mr. Hardwick to be quite different from that of Conan Doyle, I must accept the fact that these pages were allegedly written before the historic meeting at Saint Bartholomew's Hospital, and, therefore, reflect a different Watson from the one that we've become used too. It seems unfortunate to me that Mr. Hardwick does not identify his source for this manuscript, but never-the-less there is enough material to make it appear genuine. What we learn is that Watson was, at least in his youth, not the bumbler that he would, in later years have us believe. He was born in Scotland on July 7th, 1852, and he was a descendant of a Spanish sailor, shipwrecked off the Scottish Coast in 1588. If we are to believe that this is indeed the true diary of Watson then we must wonder why the dear doctor has led us to believe that he was not Holmes equal. Readers will learn of Watson's adventures in both America and Australia, as well as the Orient and India. We are told, in what Mr. Hardwick claims to be Watson's own words that in his early days Watson was a bit of a rake, a fighter, a whore master, and a gadfly. His adventures ranged from the Rugby Field, to the bedroom of Sarah Bernhardt, from Brooklyn to Afghanistan. The book is what I like to call a fast read, for once you start it you will find it most difficult to put down. I like Hardwick's style, and from his previous efforts, he surely knows his subjects. Readers may remember Hardwick for "The Sherlock Holmes Companion", "The Man Who Was Sherlock Holmes" many of the B.B.C. radio plays based on the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, as well as the screenplay for "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes". Whether or not his is truly Watson's diary is not for me to say. All I can do is to tell you that, true or not, the book is a fascinating look at a man of whom much too little is known. I must highly recommend it. One last thing before I move on. It would seem that a day or two before the supposed first meeting at Saint Barts, Watson was having a drink at the famous

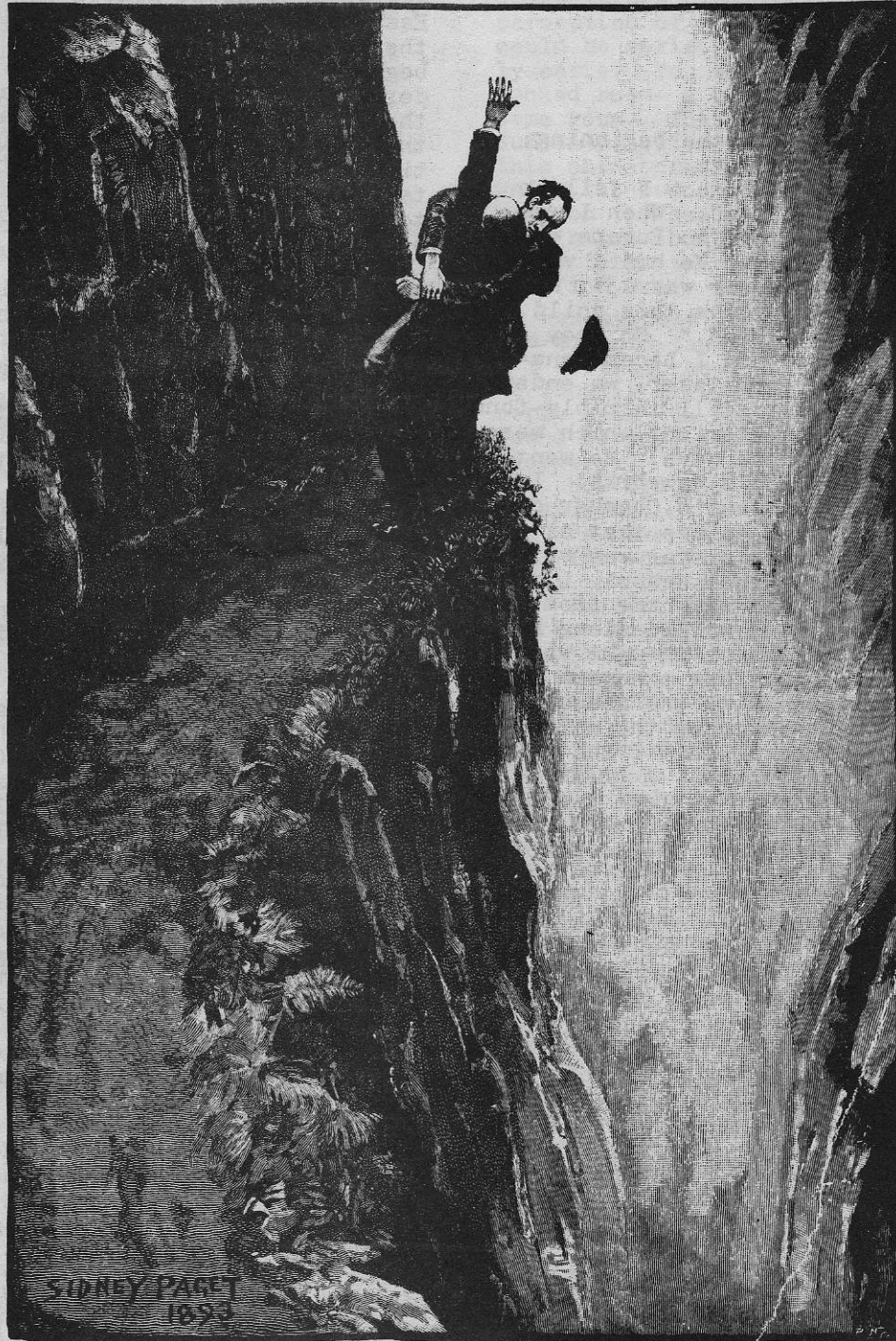
Criterion Bar in Trafalgar Square when an acquaintance of his tapped him on the shoulder and said "Dr. Watson, Sherlock Holmes." Was Watson a bit too drunk to remember, and if not, why did he omit this incident from his introduction of "A Study of Scarlet"? You decide.

"Ten Years Beyond Baker Street" By Cay Van Ash. From Harper & Row. Published in April of 1984. 339 Pages \$14.95. This volume is perhaps even more enigmatic than that of Watson's in that it asks us to accept the fact that it is not from the pen of John H. Watson, but rather it is said to have been the work of a certain Dr. Petrie. It is claimed that it was not part of certain papers which were opened in 1979, which Mr. Van Ash says is exactly fifty years after the death of Dr. Watson. This would make the year 1929, and yet a certain Nicholas Meyer claims to have proof that the date was ten years later. Even so, why would Watson, who remained in close contact with Holmes say nothing about such an important turn of events. Mr. Van Ash would have us believe that during the year 1914 Dr. Petrie persuaded Sherlock Holmes to become involved in the affairs of a certain Oriental doctor named Fu Manchu. If so, then surely Watson would have given some mention of such an important encounter. Over the years we have learned much of Holmes activities during his so-called retirement, and that in fact during that time Holmes was working for the British Government. Why then is it of such importance that it is not until now that we learn of this encounter? Should we doubt the facts that Mr. Van Ash presents? Again, it is not for me to judge. From certain facts and documents from that time, there seem to leave little room for doubt, but then again, why all the secrecy? We are asked to believe that Nayland Smith was kidnapped and that Petrie went to Holmes for help. But why would Holmes deem this of such importance as to leave his "Retirement" while other matters of greater importance be set aside? The writing style of Mr. Van Ash is most certainly close enough to that of Dr. Petrie to lend credibility to the tale, but then where did this document originate? Again it is not for me to say. What I can say is that true or not, the book is a grabber. I warn you that you will be hooked from the very first page, and that its 339 pages will fly by as if they were only fifty. Van Ash's narration is spellbinding, and his portrait of Fu Manchu is even more evil than that of his mentor Sac Rohmer. Even the late professor Moriarty would have to concede that he would be no match for Fu Manchu. Perhaps this is why Sherlock Holmes decided to take on the challenge. From Limehouse to the Welsh Coast the action never lets up. Who wins? It wouldn't be much fun if I told. Would it?

"The Unknown Conan Doyle" uncollected stories by Arthur Conan Doyle. Edited and Introduced by John Michael Gibson & Richard Lancelyn Green. From Doubleday. Published April, 1984. 454 Pages. \$14.95. This is vintage Doyle. The book contains 33 short stories first published between 1879 & 1930. Ten of these have never before seen print. If you're looking for Holmes, then be warned that you will not find him here, but if you're looking for Doyle then you'll find some interesting reading. Because of the 51 year span which these writings cover, you will find a wide variation in the writing style and subject matter, but perhaps it is this variance that makes the book even more important. I can think of no other source that would make the study of Doyle more accessible. From the occult to mystery, it's all here. The flaws are few, and found mainly when Doyle tries to write in Americanism, and even these are easily overlooked. I have found "The Unknown Conan Doyle" to be a most important volume, and it belongs on the shelf of every collector. We can only hope that there is yet more to come.

FLASHBACK

Even though this issue has been devoted to Sherlock Holmes, there are still other heros from our youth that we would love to hear more of. We can only hope that somewhere there are still unpublished adventures of Marlowe, Spade & the "Continental OP." That perhaps in the vaults of Walter Gibson there are future adventures of "The Shadow," and just as John Gardner has chosen to give us more exploits of James Bond, someone out there will set pen to paper and help us be young again, at least for an hour or two. After all it ain't no fun growing up.



THE DEATH OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.

FLASHBACK

A CONVERSATION WITH EDITH MEISER PRESENTED BY JACK SHUGG AND MAX SCHMID

(This article originally appeared in

"COLLECTORS CORNER.")

Edith Meiser produced and wrote the scripts for the original radio stories of Sherlock Holmes back in the '30's.

CC: You were there, from the beginning; what was it like?

EM: Let me first tell you how I fell in love with "Sherlock Holmes". When I was very young, I was sent-off to Europe with my mother to be educated. We had a very rough crossing- by ship. I was 13. My mother told the purser "Give this child a good, exciting book to read." So they gave me a "Sherlock Holmes" and I became enamored of it. Three years later, we ended up in London, and I was still terribly-fond of the Sherlock Holmes stories, which were still coming out in those days. We went over to Madame Toussaint's Waxworks. In the basement was the museum's Chamber of Horrors. We didn't get to see that exhibit because my younger sister was with us. Later, on the way home from school, I visited the exhibit. On the way home from the museum, I discovered and walked along Baker Street. Stopping at what I thought was Sherlock Holmes' flat, I saw a hansom cab pull up and a tall man with the famous Sherlock Holmes cap walked up the stairs and into the building. I felt I had actually seen Sherlock Holmes. A great deal of time passed. I was in my late twenties when William Gillette revived one of his old stage hits on Broadway- Sherlock Holmes. By that time, my husband and I were beginning to do radio shows. Radio was still fairly young. We had a few shows at 711 Fifth Avenue, which was the NBC studios. I had a couple of daytime shows, and my husband had a nighttime show, and we were just beginning to be radio producers, and I suggested Sherlock Holmes as a wonderful radio series, and he agreed. I wrote the first couple of scripts, in 1928, I think. It took us nearly three years to find a sponsor who was remotely interested. It was a Mr. Clarence Mark at G. Washington Coffee Company. Fortunately, he was a Sherlock Holmes lover. So we sold the series to him. I never did meet Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who wrote the original Sherlock Holmes stories. He was still alive while we successfully negotiated the rights to the stories. He died before we went on the air with the program. The Holmes books were out-of-print. I had to send to England for them. They were considered minor classics- like Last of the Mohicans.

I naturally thought you could go into any bookstore and buy a Sherlock Holmes book. I sent to England for what the "Baker Street Irregulars" call the 'The Entire Canon'. We went on the air with the old-style touches, and we were blasted by critics all across the U.S. The newspaper critics had begun to cover radio. They asked: "Who needs this old-fashioned stuff?" Well, our sponsor was not deterred by this. He liked it, and stayed with it. It was the first coast-to-coast broadcast. We did one in New York at about nine o'clock (for the East coast), and another at 12 midnight (for the West coast). It went on for a year, and began to pick-up a following. We didn't modernize the precise, Edwardian language. At the end of the year, Jimmy Cannon, one of the most-famous radio columnists of the time, ran a yearly column. All the columnists rated their favorite shows, similar to today's Oscar and Tony awards. We won 95 per cent.

CC: This was in 1931?

EM: Yes. It finally found its audience.

CC: You used Gillette for the first year?

EM: No, we used Gillette for the first show, only. The first show was not done at 711 Fifth; but at the top of the the New Amsterdam Theater. It was still a nightclub then. Everyone, including the guests, were required to wear black ties. It was the only time we had a live, in-studio audience. All the G. Washington Coffee dealers were there. Mr. Gillette was an elderly gentleman, in his eighties. We were terrified that he would have a difficult time standing for the entire program. We wanted to give him a sitting microphone, but he refused. His diction was so precise, and he was so bright. He was so alert that we ended the broadcast a minute-and-a-half ahead of time. After the broadcast, we drove him to his home in Connecticut, a sort-of castle with its own small railroad. He was so taken by our Chrysler car, he told us he felt like getting his license, but he did get around by motorcycle.

CC: There are a very limited number of reference books available about that period. The one book that everyone considers the "bible" (Tune in Yesterday by John Dunning), you've just proven wrong. They credit William Gillette with the first 34 broadcasts.

EM: No, just one. After the first broadcast, Holmes was played by an elderly Englishman, Richard Gordon and Leigh Lovell as Dr. Watson. Lovell had his own Holmes stock company in England. He became extremely popular, something we never dared tell any of the people who played Holmes. In fact, as I wrote it, Watson got more fan mail than Holmes. Watson is not much of a character in the Conan Doyle stories. I developed the character of Watson. I felt that because you had two people on radio, working together, you had to have more development of characters.

EM: I was able to develop a character that was quite amusing and that I was quite fond of. Leigh Lovell went back to England as a

young man. His stock company of players was the first to do Ibsen in England.

CC: He had a very warm speaking voice; a little chuckle in it.

EM: So did Nigel Bruce, later on when he played Watson. That's how we developed the character. He needed to be more than a "feeder" of stories to Holmes; instead to needle him from time to time.

CC: How restricted were you in those days as to what you had available for sound effects?

EM: The sound effects were wonderful. For some strange reason, we were not allowed to use recorded sound effects. We had the best sound effects man in the business; and all effects were invented. Supposedly if it was "live" it was more vital; it nearly killed all actors. For instance, TV had to be live...we referred to it as "summer stock in an iron lung". The effects were so much more real if you had the actual sound already recorded.

CC: How were your studios constructed; was it mostly makeshift?

EM: No. At 711 Fifth they were built for radio. Some were big for their time. Later, the Rockefeller Center studios came to be known as Radio City. At the time, they felt that TV would be included, so they built what they thought would be useful for TV. The first TV studios were built with the recording equipment and cameras in the middle and the studios where the actors were was cloverleafed-out, which never worked-out.

CC: According to a recent article, the first Television broadcast of Sherlock Holmes took place in 1937. Were you involved in that?

EM: No. I wasn't involved in producing for Television. About that time we were doing the radio show from California with Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce.

CC: Can we go back a minute to the first broadcast? As you said, it was in a nightclub?

EM: It had been built as a nightclub...on the top of the New Amsterdam Hotel...on the roof, was where Ziegfeld had his big nightclub parties.

CC: The theater is still on 42nd Street.

EM: Yes, it still exists.

CC: It wasn't built as a radio studio?

EM: It was set-up for very special events like this. They did do very special shows now and then, but it wasn't used regularly.

CC: Do you remember what the first script was?

EM: Yes, surely. My 'good luck' script. "The Speckled Band" with the horrible snake slithering through the ventilator.

CC: Did you mostly adapt in the early years?

EM: Oh, yes...I not only adapted, but produced and directed those shows.

CC: How long did you stay with the series?

EM: The first one ran about three years, and we used-up all the original Doyle stories. I was then permitted to do what was called "free adaptation," which meant you took a locale or character and built it up into a plot. That was done from then on. We would then repeat a Doyle story. Out of every three, there would be a Doyle repeat.

CC: How close was the supervision of Doyle's estate at this point?

EM: Dennis Conan Doyle, the son of Arthur, and the estate, were cooperative. He was entitled to kill any script he didn't approve of, and he only killed one. That was long after we had gone into the free adaptations, and I had written a script about Moriarty, the famous villain. He and Holmes were trapped in an old house. The finish was the only thing that Dennis objected to. Radio was very pure in those days; you couldn't say "darn" or "damn". Arthur Conan Doyle was a spiritualist, so we couldn't use the words "ghost," "haunted house," etc.

These things didn't fit the Conan Doyle perception of Holmes, anyway, although it could be eerie. This story was particularly eerie. You knew that Holmes was in this locked room- a bedroom. Moriarty was in the same room. This meant the end of Holmes. Suddenly, out from under the bed, you hear this china crash. Watson had been stashed under the bed and had come out and hit Moriarty on the head. Watson occasionally carried a gun, but Holmes never did. As I wrote this story, Holmes asked: "what did you find under the bed?" Well, of course, it was evident it was the crash of crockery and the old-fashioned Thundermug. We couldn't do that, because there was a problem. We finally arrived at the solution. Holmes' reply was: "a bootjack." The enthusiastic sound effects man kept-in the sound of the crockery.

CC: How did you handle the subject of cocaine addiction in those days?

EM: We never did.

CC: You would assume that everybody knew about it from reading the books.

EM: There are probably only about three stories where it exists. Doyle dropped it very early-on because of adverse reaction.

CC: When the series was brought back in 1955 and produced in England, it was broadcast here. The cocaine addiction became quite prominent.

EM: We were still being very pure in those days. I only had one other script killed. This time the sponsor killed it. It had been one of my own stories. The sponsor was a rum importer before being a coffee importer. I wrote the script about a fire on the rum wharf, that the Thames was set on fire (which actually happened). Holmes was stuck on the other side of the wharf, but was rescued. Clarence Mark, the former rum importer said it was impossible for rum to alight on top of the water. I told him it was reported in the newspaper as happening.

EM: We spent an entire afternoon in his office bathroom proving to him that it was possible for the rum to stay on top of the water. He eventually gave in.

CC: Did you have to change the way you scripted for the various Holmes actors?

EM: No, we used the same scripts, especially for the repeats. Basil Rathbone was the most well-known of the Holmes actors, because concurrently, he appeared in the Universal Pictures' series of Holmes movies,

which my husband produced. Dick Gordon was more popular as a radio Holmes than Rathbone, but Rathbone was also in the movies.

CC: Gordon played the role until 1936?

EM: Yes, around that time.

CC: You had Clive Brooks playing the role for a while?

EM: Well, that was in England...It was a motion picture, I think. In radio, after Leigh Lovell and Richard Gordon, Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce followed. There may have been others in Europe.

CC: After Rathbone, Tom Conway took over the role of Holmes?

EM: Yes, and by that time, I was no longer doing the series, because we were no longer the producers. The advertising people produced the shows, and we ran into a fight about making Holmes violent. Nigel Bruce and I left about the same time, when the advertising agencies decided to make the series violent. Violence was just beginning to come in. It was called "action."

CC: Nigel Bruce returned to the series with Tom Conway.

EM: He left the series at the same time I did. The ratings went down as the violence went up. Holmes was a cerebral detective—he didn't go around clobbering people. I built-up the show until it was the top-ranked show on its network, and they would ask for more action.

CC: Do you follow the modern Holmes; in the movies, for example?

EM: I see them. Some are well-done.

CC: How do you feel about how the character is being treated now?

EM: I don't know. I was very involved for a while, but I feel completely disassociated now.

CC: Many Sherlockians get very upset with the "Seven Per Cent Solution".

EM: I was very upset with that. It was way out-of-line. I resented it.

CC: It seems in some of the modern movies they're trying to turn the character into a buffoon.

EM: It's too bad. Conan Doyle had Holmes use a great deal of forensic technique. Conan Doyle invented it. Before that, it hadn't been used.

CC: Whose decision was it to bring the character into modern times? The 1940's movies "Hound of the Baskervilles" and "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" were left in period.

EM: Those two movies you mention were my husband's.

CC: They brought it up to modern times, probably for war propoganda.

EM: My husband was off in the army at that time. We had later interests later on, I went back into the theater.

CC: You were quite well-known in the theater before you came into radio. Wasn't it a gamble?

EM: Yes. No one knew more about radio than we did, so we were experts in one field. Prior to talking pictures I had been a vaudeville headliner and my husband was in export advertising, both dying due to the economic situation in 1929.

CC: Did you do any acting on radio?

EM: In the beginning I did...I could play a Mrs. Hudson.

EM: This was before AFRA, the American Federation of Radio Actors, and I wasn't about to save our advertisers any money, so I didn't belong to the organization until I stopped producing and the union became AFTRA to reflect TV, that I joined.

CC: Was it difficult in radio as a woman in those days?

EM: No, as a matter of fact. There were many women producers. Most of the daytime radio shows were produced by women, which was also true for classical theater.

CC: The reverse is true today.

EM: Things were done very cheaply then. Nowadays, things cost so much, and it's hard for women to get into producing. The movies had quite a few good women producers, too.

CC: What would your typical budget be for a half-hour radio show?

EM: Not including the cost of the time, for production costs...probably about 5000 dollars or less. Musical programs, such as George M. Cohan, Irving Berling and Bob Hope, cost much more.

CC: You also worked with Helen Hayes at one point?

EM: Yes. I wrote and directed her program. It was called "The New Penny". She did that one for a year. She also played Queen Victoria on Broadway. One night per week she would not do the show, in order to do my program. The same was true for George M. Cohan, who was doing "Ah, Wilderness!" It was considered good publicity. Another guy we did a series with was D. W. Griffith. Talk about sound effects! We did "Intolerance" with the crumbling walls of Jericho. He narrated this series about his films.

CC: Most actors stayed away from TV; a medium they considered trash. But they rushed into radio.

EM: In the early days of TV, it was murder. When it was live, you could make a fool of yourself if something went wrong. You could forget your lines, or if you walked in the wrong place. The tension was so great, a lot of stars didn't want to do it.

CC: Why is so little of this stuff preserved today?

EM: They were just junked. A lot of RKO and RCA Victor's classical music library was just thrown-out.

CC: We know people who have found 16-inch transcription discs in the garbage at NBC. Their legal department says keeping the material involves too much paperwork to deal with. We've been trying for three months to locate a decent recording of Gillette or Doyle.

EM: I would say it probably doesn't exist. The discs were done here, and via telephone you did them later on for the coast. There were other stations that were not on the line that you sent the discs to.

CC: The last appearance we know of that Gillette made as Holmes was 1934 or 1935. He had done a LUX RADIO THEATER program, after his last film was completed. Even recordings of that cannot be located. In the earliest days, did they record the program every week?

EM: No, that came later, especially as you went to a bigger network. Basically, the two stations and Chicago would pick-up the show by phone. As the smaller stations had more money, discs would be recorded for them.

CC: There isn't a wealth of material until 1934 or '35. In regards to the Holmes series, when you adapted one of the longer stories, did you ever use a serial form?

EM: Yes we did. About four were serialized. "The Hound of the Baskervilles" required four, for instance. Everyone said it wouldn't work because it hadn't been done before. The show following would always contain a recap. Generally, it was a one-show program.

CC: How did you rate the size of your audience in those days?

EM: You would send in the top of the can of G. Washington Coffee, or by gauging the fan mail. It was before the ratings services.

CC: When did the ratings services come out?

EM: Probably in the 1930's. We worked through the ad agencies, since they bought the time, but we worked with the sponsor. We could change the ads if we wanted to. We had the rights, along with the sponsor, to the radio show. If the sponsor didn't like the agency, he could go somewhere else. We went through nine advertising agencies for one sponsor. The ad agencies got wise. They put in their own radio departments, which started the downfall of the radio producers.

CC: You had Watson actually deliver the commercial announcement during the program?

EM: Yes, and that was the first time that a character in radio had delivered the ad.

CC: Did he do it himself?

EM: He poured the (G. Washington) coffee and talked to the announcer.

CC: Did you write the ad?

EM: I did, although the agency won all sorts of kudos for it.

CC: They retained that format throughout the Petri Wine series. How much actual control did the sponsor maintain over what came out of your scripts and over the air?

EM: We were very lucky. As long as we dealt directly with the sponsor, we had very little trouble. We owned our shows. The minute you began working with the advertising agencies, the story conferences began.

CC: Fred Allen talked about that a lot. It was one of his favorite topics.

EM: Well, that's when I returned to the theater, and my husband, Tom McNight, went into TV.

CC: There are stories now that in the early days the announcers had to wear tuxedos.

EM: Yes, and the actresses had to wear full evening gowns. Except for the first Holmes show, we had no studio audience, but the staff announcers had to wear tuxedos. Bob Hope had a studio audience before he became a big star and went out to the coast in the mid 1930's.

CC: What would happen in live radio if someone blew a line? Have you ever had any break-ups where you couldn't get control?

EM: We never did.

CC: There have been some pretty outrageous fluffs in radio.

EM: There's one English actor we used in the Holmes series for the elegant, stuffy roles like Lord of the Manor. He was rather given to spoonerisms, when things get turned around. He was always telling us that certain things were done differently in England. I told him that if we did it his way, no one would understand what he was talking about. I thought I'd give him a tongue-twister: "But my dear Mr. Holmes, you would not shoot a sitting partridge, would you?" It came out as expected... later, I would mention it to him to see if he improved at all.

CC: Weren't there censors to object to that?

EM: It didn't matter. Our sponsor was very much amused by that because he knew exactly what I was doing. I wouldn't have done it if I had a different sponsor.

CC: How much liberty did an actor have in those days to throw-in a line?

EM: Not very much. We did the WILL ROGERS SHOW, and he said what he wanted.

CC: That was the show where he came out with a stopwatch so he could stop at the end of his allotted time?

EM: He never did anything like that when he did his show for us. He ran as long as he pleased. You never knew how long he was going to talk.

EM: You never knew whether he would take up his entire hour, or only speak for five minutes, and that was up to him. We had to gear a show with a big orchestra with singers. He would come in unrehearsed and demanded a live audience in the studio, always. You never knew what city he would turn up in, and where you would pick him up. So, sometimes he would say: "Set up an audience for me in New York, Chicago, and on the coast." He loved the audience's reaction to his jokes. Sometimes you had to pipe him in.

CC: So, he was in a remote location, and the orchestra, etc., was in the studio. How did the producer manage the show; what about commercials?

EM: The orchestra filled-in before and after he spoke. You didn't run your commercials as often as you do now.

CC: What year did this 60-minute show run?

EM: The late thirties, I believe.

CC: The ones available are prior to that.

EM: That's when he just got his start. This time, he was swinging wide. All of his monologues were topical and had to do with government. He was the only man who had an "okay" from the White House to say anything he wanted. Normally, stuff like that was written-out and approved first. This was the only exception.

CC: Coming into the war years, were the Holmes programs left in-period, or were references made to the war?

EM: On some other shows they might have referred to the war, but Holmes was left in-period.

CC: What was your husband's name?

EM: My husband was Tom McNight. Our production company was McNight & Jordan, since my husband's partner was Willie Jordan. I used my own name at the end of the scripts.

CC: Have you kept up on the radio drama that is done today?

EM: I am apt to be a bit sour on a lot of the radio drama today, after having been involved for so long. I think radio by-and-large, was more literate than TV. In radio, all you had were words, and you weren't afraid of using rather eloquent words. People caught-on to what the words meant. I have a friend who was an actor; he is now a professor of English literature. When he came to this country about 15 years ago, he was horrified to learn that the average high school student had a vocabulary of only 1500 words. He says that the average high school graduate's vocabulary now is less than 500 words. For kids brought up with radio, it was much more. The same thing is happening in the theater. People who have limited vocabulary are writing.

CC: Sherlock Holmes albums and all the album collections of radio shows sell incredibly well. The market for them is unbelievable.

EM: All of them are bootlegged and I get nothing from the sale of them. I'm a little bitter about that.

CC: By 1978, there were 957 individual performances of Holmes on radio and TV; this doesn't count the movies or stage performances, etc. They credit you with more than 200.

EM: I buy the records with my name on them.
CC: What was the last year you turned-in a script?

EM: Probably the 1950's.

CC: Doyle placed the Holmes and Watson characters in their early-to-mid forties; the movies showed them at that age. What age did you believe them to be?

EM: Late thirties.

CC: Conan Doyle retired Holmes in the final bow prior to World War One, then brought him back in the 1920's.

EM: I think his publisher pushed him into it.

CC: If you were to do it now, would you change anything?

EM: No. Holmes, a classic, was of its time.



Sherlock Holmes's sitting-room at 221B Baker Street

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