



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
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Minutes of the meeting of The Bimetallic Question

April 2nd, 2015

Date of our next meeting:

Thursday, June 4th, 2015 at 6:30 p.m. at:
The Westmount Public Library (Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec

The Quiz at the next meeting:

The Cardboard Box prepared by Bruno Paul Stenson

Next Meeting's Toast Presenters:

The Master: Karl J. Raudsepp; Dr. Watson: Maureen Anderson; The Woman: Rebecca Stacey;
Mrs. Hudson: Elliott Newman; The Society: Patrick Campbell.

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, April 2nd, 2015 at the Westmount Public Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Mark Altosaar, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Paul Billette, Bill Brownstein, Patrick Campbell, Louise Corda, Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, Susan Fitch, Kristin Franseen, Raf Jans, Katerina Lichtenwalter, Ryan Lichtenwalter, Peter McCabe, Elliott Newman, Erica Penner, Karl J. Raudsepp, Arlene Scher, Rebecca Stacey, Bruno Paul Stenson

Regrets: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Kevin Chappell, Derek Chappell, Chris Herten-Greaven, Anne Miller, Nancy Walkling, Ronnie Zilman

Call to order: The meeting was called to order by Paul Billette, standing in tonight as Sovereign for Carol Abramson.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

1. The Bimetallic Question Meets Bill Brownstein

We were delighted to welcome author and Montreal Gazette columnist Bill Brownstein to our meeting, who interviewed several Bimetallic Question members for a future column on our Society. Bill's Gazette photographer Peter McCabe also captured a number of us on film and video, and we took a few souvenir snaps of our own.



Pictured left to right: Raf Jans, Bill Brownstein, and Wilfrid de Freitas.

[Special Note: Bill Brownstein's full page feature article on The Bimetallic Question was published in the Saturday, April 11, 2015 Montreal Gazette, leading off its Arts and Culture section.]

2. Detective Work Tracks Down Westmount Sherlockian Society

We were also thrilled to welcome first-time guests to our Society table, husband and wife Katerina and Ryan Lichtenwalter. They arrived in Montreal about two years ago, and being Sherlock Holmes fans of many years faithful study, decided to search online for a local group and discovered us via our Bimetallic Question website.

3. The Quotable Essence of Holmes.

Louise read a favourite Sherlock Holmes quote to us, very fitting as an opening to our meeting's show-and-tell: "My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know."

4. Georgia Sherlockian Realizes Literary Goal

Wilfrid circulated a letter recently received by the Society from Ray Ziemecki of Albany, Georgia, announcing the publication of his novel *Sherlock Holmes Gone in the Fog*, available as an eBook on Amazon and Smashwords. The book is being well received critically, is selling well, and also realizes Ray's lifetime goal, at age 78, to publish a Sherlock Holmes novel. It was three years in the writing and in the author's words, "a true labour of love".

5. Burlington's Excellent West End Horror

Theatre Burlington celebrated its 60th anniversary season with an excellent production of the play *Sherlock Holmes and the West End Horror*, Jack reported to us. He and Maureen visited Burlington, Ontario and saw the play last October 2014, bringing back some extra play programs to give away. Paul: We'll send one to Thierry Saint-Joanis, a memorabilia collector in the Sherlock Holmes Society of France, and another to Baltimore, Maryland based Peter Blau, the leading collector of Sherlockian memorabilia worldwide. Patrick: Blau's collection became so extensive that he eventually had to rent a second apartment to have enough space to house it. Paul: This is not surprising considering all the Sherlock Holmes related books being written and that currently 975 Sherlock Holmes societies like ours exist around the world.

6. Two Cases of Mistaken Identity and a Beaver Hat

Bruno drew our attention to two errors in the previous minutes concerning him, in that the book *The Cottage Physician* was previously owned by his great grandfather and not his grandfather, and also his family name is Stenson, not Stetson. "I am not a hat!" noted Bruno. However on the subject of hats, Bruno brought in a Victorian beaver top hat and gave a very knowledgeable presentation on how such hats would be made, in a chemically toxic and painstakingly labour intensive process necessitating the use of soft waterproof undercoat hairs from as many as 10-12 beavers per hat. Fortunately for beavers and hatters everywhere, the beaver hat lost popularity when Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert stepped out for the first time in a fine

silk top hat, leading fashion of the era in a new direction, and boosting Britain's silk imports from China.

7. Stamps of Sherlockian Approval

Karl showed us expertly and beautifully framed examples of stamps honouring Sherlock Holmes issued by Great Britain's Royal Mail in 1993. Each shows a different Sidney Paget illustration in miniature, from the stories *The Reigate Squire*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Six Napoleons*, *The Greek Interpreter*, and *The Final Problem*. Please contact Karl if you can give him any more information about this stamp issue.

8. Ticklish Situations Prevented by Victorian Moustache Cup

There is a particular Victorian pottery design implication to the fact that we are seeing more and more gentlemen sporting moustaches these days. Arlene read to us from a *Today I Found Out* web article emailed to her by a friend predicting the return to popularity of the Victorian moustache cup, a cup with a special inside lip spanning from rim to rim in order to protect the drinker's bristly facial adornment from coming into contact with beverages such as hot tea or coffee. This feature was especially important since many Victorian men waxed or dyed their moustaches, and wilting or beverage contamination was assiduously to be avoided. English potter Harvey Adams is usually credited as being the cup's inventor, at around 1850-1860.

9. The University of Minnesota Was Only Fooling

Kristin told us about an April Fools' Day online joke posted by the University of Minnesota Library, on its website. It announced the discovery of Moriarity's skull, the relic being donated to their Sherlock Holmes collection, the jest quite convincingly claimed. Paul and Kristin reminded us that the collection itself does indeed exist, and is one of the largest Sherlock Holmes and Arthur Conan Doyle collections in the world, with more than 22,000 items.

10. The Watsonian Awaits Our Contributions

Rebecca asked if we are aware of the existence of the John H. Watson Society? It publishes a bi-annual journal called *The Watsonian* to which Rebecca has enjoyed contributing artwork. Mostly a scholarly publication, the journal is currently seeking submissions of art and articles concerning Watson, be they traditional or revisionist in style. Rebecca will be happy to give everyone more information on successfully contributing to *The Watsonian*, just get in touch with her!

11. Toast to Mrs. Hudson by Wilfrid de Freitas

When we consider how closely we associate Mrs. Hudson with Sherlock Holmes, it is interesting to note that she actually appears in or is referred to in only fifteen of the sixty adventures as chronicled by our good friend Doctor Watson. Most of the time, it has to be said, the references to her are passing, dare I say it, inconsequential even: like showing clients up to Holmes's rooms, or preparing breakfast ("She has as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotchwoman"; by the way, why not a Scotswoman? I mean we don't say Scotchman, do we. But I digress.)

Without doubt, her finest hours are in EMPT, when she minutely shifted Oscar Meunier's wax bust of Holmes in the window to give the impression that he really was sitting there ("Mrs. Hudson has made some change in that figure eight times, or once every quarter of an hour."), and in DYIN when, despite Holmes's repeated refusal to see a doctor, she takes matters into her own hands ('With your leave or without it, Mr. Holmes, I am going for a doctor this very hour.' 'Let it be Watson, then,' said he.' "He's dying, Dr. Watson", said she).

However, her main over-riding quality was that she was always there, and could be relied upon to act precisely as Holmes would have wished, in any of the peculiar situations – and let's face it there were several – in which she found herself. Clearly Holmes appreciated this quality because, as Dr. Watson says, "...his [rent] payments were princely. I have no doubt that the house might have been purchased at the price Holmes paid for his rooms during the years that I was with him. "

Apropos which, I don't recall it ever being established how Mrs. Hudson became the landlady of 221 Baker Street. Notice I say, 221 and not 221b: the b is a contraction of the French *bis*, literally encore or repeat, indicating a subsidiary address, in this case on the upper floor. Anyway, getting back to the question of Mrs. Hudson's status as landlady, my best guess is that she was a widow who owned the leasehold, and Holmes's munificent rent payments left her quite comfortably off. No wonder, as Dr. Watson says in DYIN "She was fond of him, too, for he had a remarkable gentleness and courtesy in his dealings with women."

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Mrs. Hudson

12. Toast to the Master by David Dowse

David told us, "I don't have a toast, I have my tie. This is the Sherlock Holmes tie that I got from the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, many years ago. And many people looking at it for the first time will be puzzled. This is the Sherlock Holmes tie and yet its design looks like a mushroom to me! But no, in fact, it is the deerstalker and the pipe. And in my own inimitable way, I've incorporated the pipe of Sherlock Holmes into my signature. Every time I sign some letter or card to a friend or family member I will put the little pipe with the smoke coming out of it, underneath my name.

"To Sherlock Holmes, and the pipe!"



David Dowse elegantly attired in the Sherlock Holmes Society of London tie, with its deerstalker and pipe motif.

13. Where Do the Best Sleuths Come From?

Wilfrid brought in a Royal Doulton fine china Sherlock Holmes character jug, noting that the company's actual name for this production line is *The Sleuth*. For the past 20 years or so they have been made in China, and to determine where an example originates from, should you care, you may check on the bottom to see if it reads Made in England for the earlier examples, or Designed in England for the more recent ones. However Wilfrid observed that given that the process of manufacturing fine china objects originated in China, perhaps the newer ones should be the best!

14. You Have Been to the Book Fair, I Presume

Karl asks Bill how the idea to do a column on The Bimetallic Question came about? Bill tells how he and Wilfrid were sitting next to each other at their respective tables at the Westmount

Book Fair not long ago. “We got talking,” says Bill, “and that was much more interesting than the rest of that day!” Karl: What is Bill’s new book about? “It’s the story of the most famous Canadian film maker you never heard of, John Dunning”, Bill responds. Verdun native Dunning became a mentor to many other more famous film colleagues like Cronenberg, and co-authored his memoir with Bill titled, *You’re Not Dead until You’re Forgotten*.

15. You Might Encounter Hercule Poirot Here

David was recently gifted an entirely enjoyable outing to a tea house at 5326 Saint-Laurent Boulevard called Salon de thé Cardinale, a very nice English style establishment styled from about the 1930s. Many different teas from the sweet to the savoury and other fine products are on hand, and David anticipates as Sherlockians we’d feel at home there, noting, “It’s the kind of place you would see Hercule Poirot visit.”

16. Do You Have Your Encyclopedia Sherlockiana?

Wilfrid highly recommends the *Encyclopedia Sherlockiana: A Universal Dictionary of the State of Knowledge of Sherlock Holmes and His Biographer, John H. Watson, M.D.*, by Jack Tracy, as probably one of the most useful reference books on the subject. Luckily it is also easy to obtain everywhere, and entertainingly and reliably covers a wide range of detailed information.

17. Toast to Dr. Watson by Rachel Alkallay, read by Louise Corda

Laurel and Hardy. Rogers and Hammerstein. Caesar and Cleopatra. Anthony and Cleopatra (she got around). These names are engraved in immortality. One does not think of one without the other. One without the other would be less than half. One would not function as well without the other. Nor would fame visit them without if they were not a team. Add to these illustrious couplings the most famous coupling in detective lore: Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

Undisputed genius that The Master undoubtedly is, he would be an unrecognized genius whose famous musings and deductions would have been lost in the fog of Victorian crime were it not for his faithful biographer, John H. Watson, M.D.

Watson was the perfect foil for Holmes: he spoke what he thought; Holmes thought before he spoke. Yet many of Watson’s spontaneous blurbings gave Holmes the spark, the “Aha!” moment that was required to bring scattered clues together to create the complete puzzle. And what loyalty Watson showed! Putting up with Holmes’s pot-shots in their small flat at 221B, the smoking, the drugs. The strain on his marriages. Being aroused from sleep at all hours, to follow the wanderings of London’s devious criminals in the fog with his much-admired friend.

Would all of us wish for a loyal friend such as Dr. Watson!

To Dr. Watson!

18. The Quiz: The Gloria Scott prepared by Rebecca Stacey and Chris Herten-Greaven

Quiz winners were: Raf 42.5 points, Patrick 31 points, and Erica with 28.5 points.

Prizes were provided by our last meeting's quiz winner Carol Abramson, and were 3 elegantly wrapped gift packs of assorted gourmet tea bags.

Our thoughts on the story: Notable as Holmes's first case, it's probably the most bloodthirsty of all the stories when we read about the treatment of the prisoners on the ship. Very different as a story, especially regarding the variations in writing style displayed. Reminiscent of *Heart of Darkness* in style. Long stretches without Holmes or Watson, as in *A Study in Scarlet*. The glimpses into Holmes's college days are lighthearted and fun, particularly regarding the Bull Terrier bite prompting a friendship. Not much deduction by Holmes...Does Holmes even solve the case? Yet he's essential to the plot! Enjoyable and nostalgic, a pleasant, well-structured story that just carries you along.

Raf tells us he will be away next time we meet and Bruno therefore volunteers to prepare the next quiz. After some group deliberation, Wilfrid suggests it be on *The Cardboard Box* and Bruno agrees.

19. Toast to The Woman by Bruno Paul Stenson

Bruno fills in for a member who could not be with us with this impromptu toast:

Anonymous to some, the woman; well-known to others, perhaps to many of us. Fleeting in her appearances in the Canon, yet eternal in the hearts and minds of Sherlockians everywhere.
Ladies and gentlemen, The Woman

20. Toast to the Society by Paul Billette

When thinking about tonight's toast, I started to wonder what is a society? To answer this question I turned to Wikipedia, a modern creation which has replaced my trusted Encyclopedia Britannica purchased so many decades ago. Wikipedia told me the following.

A human society is a group of people involved in persistent interpersonal relationship, or a large social grouping sharing the same geographical or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. Human societies are characterized by patterns of relationships between individuals who share a distinctive culture and institutions; a given society may be described as the sum total of such relationships among its constituent members.

We certainly qualify fully. Our common relationship centres around a man who, in the words of the poet, never lived. Nevertheless, more than a century later, we keep playing the Grand Game. As Such, we share a very distinct cultural institution. We meet on a regular basis, we celebrate in great pomp the annual birthday of our common Master and our members can be considered as eclectic.

By its very existence, the Society contributes in some ways to the enrichment of our quality of life. Paraphrasing Wikipedia, the sum total of our relationships is very worthy of special recognition.

To the Society!

Continuing on the topic of societies, Paul tells how he had attended a fascinating U. of M. conference where it was discussed how ant societies were studied to find out how to better program traffic in Montreal. "Certain ants in the colony have to ability to learn the most efficient routes to food sources," recalled Paul. Jack observes: "They planned the flow of Montreal traffic using ants?! They must have been drunken ants!!!"

21. We're Keeping our Square Round Table

Patrick Campbell pointed out how much easier it is for us to see and hear each other with this evening's different configuration of the library tables into a large square, rather than our usual formation into a long rectangle. He requested that we take a vote to see if members present would approve making this square configuration of the tables a regular setup for our future meetings. The vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously. Comments were heard that now we are more democratic sitting around, as it were, our square round table, like the one the knights held their meetings at in Arthurian legend.

22. You Can Bank on Us

Paul Billette, in his capacity as Society Florin, gave us his annual report on our finances. A modest but comfortable sum reposes in our coffers as we begin a new financial year.

23. Varia:

Wilfrid lets us know that he has been continuing to try to organize with the Westmount Public Library a fitting gift from us to thank them for our use at no cost of The Westmount Room as our terrific Victorian meeting space. However negotiations are somewhat slow as approval for any gift must be passed by various library and city committees.

Bill would like to come to our big January Sherlock Holmes birthday party, as "It sounds like a blast!" We encourage him to do so, and suggest he consider being our next special guest speaker.

24. Close of the Meeting

We adjourned in a mood of jollity and conviviality as members and guests all posed for a group photo with Bill Brownstein.



Pictured standing in back row, left to right: Bruno Paul Stenson, Mark Altosaar, Erica Penner, Raf Jans, David Dowse, Arlene Scher, Karl Raudsepp, Maureen Anderson, Elliott Newman, Jack Anderson, Wilfrid de Freitas, Katerina Lichtenwalter, Ryan Lichtenwalter; front row: Patrick Campbell, Susan Fitch, Paul Billette, Bill Brownstein, Rebecca Stacey, and Kristen Franseen.

Our dear friends, you would confer a great favor upon us by joining us at the next meeting of "THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION" which is being held on Thursday, June 4th, 2015, at 6:30 p.m.

If you detect any errors or omissions in these minutes please contact Susan Fitch our Intrepid Web Person at susanruthfitch@yahoo.ca .

A tip of the deerstalker hat to our Sergeant-at-arms Hudson, Raf Jans, for printing and mailing Society minutes to all members requesting the paper version.