

The Wolfe Pack
The Nero Wolfe
Literary Society

HUDSON REPORTER.com
9 WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS SERVING HUDSON COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

02/12/2008

Move over Sherlock - the Wolfe Pack is in town!

Fans of a classic literary detective come together

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Who's afraid of Nero Wolfe?

Certainly not Jean Quinn, the editor of *The Gazette*, a 52-page, biannual journal named after the fictional daily newspaper read by one of the most famous detectives in literary history, Nero Wolfe.

New York City-based classic detective Wolfe, who was created by author Rex Stout, became a distinguished figure in American mystery fiction and has a following akin to that of Sherlock Holmes.

Quinn is one of 450 members of the Wolfe Pack, the official worldwide group of Wolfe's most fervent aficionados.

When she's not serving the club's publication, Quinn, of Parlin, spends her days in Jersey City, acting as vice president of corporate communications for Provident Bank. The bank was founded in Jersey City in 1839, but what stands out about her workplace as a member of the club?

"When I was checking out that Wolfe might have come to New Jersey, I remembered that he had a bank in New Jersey where he put into safety deposit," says Quinn, explaining that from New York City, one can hop off the PATH train at Journal Square; so she asks, what would be more logical than to open a safety deposit box at Provident Bank?

And that is only a hint of the Wolfe Pack's passionate, analytical approach to reading "the Corpus," as the members call the collection of works featuring Wolfe, as written by his "sidekick" and biographer, Archie Goodwin, the Watson to his Holmes.

Digging in the 'Corpus'

"Nero Wolfe is a genius," Quinn says, adding that his creator, Stout, was also a genius. "He's a very large man. He weighs about a seventh of a ton. One of the things we frequently discuss is whether he weighs a short ton or a long ton," she laughs.

Every aspect of Nero's life is held under the metaphorical magnifying glass, as Wolfe Pack members attend book discussions, readings, Wolfe-themed gatherings and travels, and the annual Black Orchid Banquet, which includes academic-like presentations on theories and analysis of the Corpus.

"We read the books in chronological order," says Quinn. "The plots are so convoluted that you usually don't remember who did it anyway. We'll discuss different characters, of course. We'll point out all the inconsistencies."

Quinn explained that doors and kitchens move, among other discrepancies, but there's allegedly a reason for this, she laughs; "Rex Stout blames [the inconsistencies] on Archie Goodwin, saying he wasn't good with keeping up with the details."

Of course, questions over some differences are more interesting than others: Nero's girth is fed by his gourmet appetite, which is in turn fed by a Swiss chef, who oddly enough, Quinn says, speaks French. And so there is



LEADER OF THE PACK – Devoted readers of Rex Stout's classic detective Nero Wolfe form the Wolfe Pack, including Werowance Ira Matetsky, *The Gazette* editor Jean Quinn, and Bob Schogel, gathering over dinner to read and discuss his adventures and the finer details of his many books.

debate and speculation - over dinner or at a locale right out of the pages of the Corpus.

Better yet, Quinn adds, "Part of my speech in Trenton [at the yearly banquet] was whether or not Sherlock Holmes was Nero Wolfe's father and the child of Holmes and Irene Adler, the only woman who ever outwitted Holmes."

A few examples of the Wolfe-themed excursions?

"We have been to the Culinary Institute in New York. We've had a dinner there," said Quinn. "Our most exciting trip was to Toronto because [actor] Timothy Hutton invited us to visit the A&E show [Nero Wolfe] that ran for a few years."

The Gazette

Quinn says she is currently mailing the club journal, which she edits, to five continents - joking that she lost Africa and she's never had anyone in Antarctica.

Features have included an appraisal of Nero's extravagant art collection, codas to fill plot holes, and Quinn's own assessments of Nero's feasibility as an adoptive parent and Archie's secretarial skills - her first professionally published pieces.

She describes the group and its publication as "being invited into the old brownstone on West 35th Street," where Stout lived - the city of New York even allowed them to put up a plaque to mark a brownstone the club discovered that bears a remarkable resemblance to Nero's home, though the street address Stout made up for him, she says, would put him "in the middle of the river."

The articles that appear in The Gazette center around such finer points.

"Characterization and the relationship between the characters is extremely interesting," Quinn notes, adding that Fer-de-Lance was the first Nero Wolfe book she ever read. "As I got older, I started going to the meetings, and besides loving the books, the people who were members were such an interesting collection of people. There's a lot of people from publishing. We have a meteorologist. We have a physician who used to treat the apes in the Bronx zoo, a champion bridge player, a chili judge. They've become personal friends."

Members of the Wolfe Pack

Among those fellow members are Al Diamond, of Cherry Hill, and Bob Schogel, of Rockaway.

According to Diamond, as a "populist" writer, Stout tailored the stories after being published in magazines to have better appeal in their hardbound editions.

"Nero Wolfe is timeless; early stories about him seem to go through the entire 20th century ... and he's just as timely in the 1970s as he was in the 1930s. He's a very unusual character, being extremely overweight, someone who solves crimes with his head rather than his actions, is a gourmet cook, and an orchid grower."

Diamond finds the Wolfe Pack just as interesting as Nero Wolfe.

"It is quite a cross-section, everywhere from reverends to irreverent people, from younger people in their 30s who are just finding Nero Wolfe and people in their 70s who remember reading the books when they were first published."

For more information, visit www.nerowolfe.org.

Comments on this story can be sent to Mpaul@hudsonreporter.com.