

INTRODUCTION TO THE WOLFE PACK

Ellen E. Krieger[†]

Given the low esteem in which Nero Wolfe holds lawyers, except possibly Henry Barber and later Nathaniel Parker, there is an amusing irony in the fact that this year's edition of *The Green Bag Almanac and Reader* focuses on Nero Wolfe and the Law. It is also fun to speculate on how Mr. Wolfe would react to the use of the word "Tidbits" in the title, given his unfortunate experience with a tinned liver paté, Tingley's Tidbits.

Of course, I myself have been involved for more than three decades in The Wolfe Pack, a group that Mr. Wolfe would undoubtedly regard no more highly than he does lawyers. There are, to the best of my knowledge, no references in the Corpus of Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe novels and novellas to fan clubs, but I imagine that Mr. Wolfe would hold the members of such groups in some contempt, although he might take secret pride in being the subject of one.

The gestation period for The Wolfe Pack makes the elephant look like the fruit fly. There were rumblings of an association for Wolfe aficionados in 1969, when The Viking Press promoted its publication of William S. Baring-Gould's *Nero Wolfe of West Thirty-Fifth Street* with a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times Book Review*, inviting readers to enter a "Mammoth New Nero Wolfe Contest." The hardly "mammoth" contest consisted of answering four extremely simple questions about the Wolfe books, to become charter members of a non-existent West 35th Street Irregulars. When I sent in my completed contest form, and received by return mail a certificate signed by one L.T. Cramer, I hoped that this organization would develop into something more than a name derived from a publicity campaign, but it was almost a decade before anything came of it.

On November 3, 1977, Carol Brener, then the owner of the Murder Ink bookstore in New York (and no known relation to Fritz Brenner) held the memorable "Maitre D'tective Dinner" to celebrate the publication of John McAleer's definitive biography of Rex Stout. At least, I assume the dinner was memorable to those who attended, although I was unfortunately not among them. But I was (and alas remained) on the waiting list for this event, so I

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received a copy of a questionnaire that Carol distributed at the dinner to ascertain the extent of interest in forming a Wolfe Pack (John McAleer had rejected “The West 35th Street Irregulars” as a name for the group, as being “too Holmesian”), and to solicit volunteers to plan and run the organization. Possibly because of my disappointment at having missed the dinner, I volunteered my services to The Wolfe Pack in just about every capacity imaginable. As a result, Carol turned over to me her material on the Pack, consisting of seventy completed questionnaires and some very helpful preliminary organizational work.

On June 6, 1978, I laid in a supply of beer and invited six total strangers with a professed interest in murder to my apartment to lay the groundwork for The Wolfe Pack. It was a congenial meeting (even though no one touched the beer), as well as a productive one (possibly because no one touched the beer). At the end of the meeting, the seven of us wrote checks for \$10 each, payable to The Wolfe Pack, and turned them over to our newly-appointed treasurer, becoming the Pack’s first official members.

Six months later, the Pack held its first annual Black Orchid Banquet, a festive occasion made all the more so by the attendance of Rex Stout’s widow, Pola Stout. Three decades later, one of Rex Stout’s daughters and several grandchildren often attend the banquet, which is held annually on the first Saturday in December (a date selected to commemorate Mr. Stout’s birthday on December 1). In the years since 1978, the Pack’s activities have expanded to include a bimonthly book discussion group, an annual Assembly of speakers preceding the banquet, and many memorable special events — pilgrimages to Rex Stout’s home “High Meadow” in Brewster, New York, and to the archive of his papers at Boston College; weekends at the Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia (widely believed to be the model for *Too Many Cooks’* Kanawha Spa); a visit to the Toronto set of A&E’s *Nero Wolfe* TV series. The Wolfe Pack’s journal, *The Gazette*, is about to enter its twentieth volume.

All Wolfe Pack members are receiving this year’s edition of *The Green Bag Almanac and Reader*, which is also designated as an issue of *The Gazette* — representing a partnership between the legal profession and Wolfeans. To this Mr. Wolfe might say “Pfui,” but I, on behalf of The Wolfe Pack, give it a resounding “Satisfactory”.



THE EDITOR'S DESK

Jean Quinn[†]

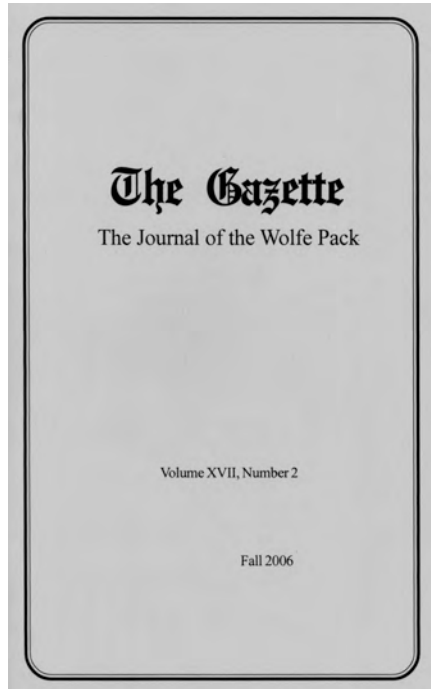
Welcome to a very special edition of *The Gazette, The Journal of The Wolfe Pack*. This issue is being published in collaboration with *The Green Bag Almanac and Reader*, and it has been written by legal professionals for a dual audience of lawyers, law professors, and judges as well as Wolfe Pack members.

This issue is intended to be a definitive legal guide to the world of Nero Wolfe and his creator, Rex Stout. However, it is far more likely to become known as the definitive Nero Wolfe guide to the legal profession. Mr. Wolfe always listens carefully to legal advice, albeit less so to angry attorneys threatening legal action against him, and then proceeds to do as he sees fit. Mr. Wolfe takes a firm hand with attorneys.

Mr. Wolfe does not think highly of attorneys or the legal profession, in general, and I ask the indulgence of the legal scholars new to the *Gazette*: Please do not take this personally. Regardless of their professions, Mr. Wolfe holds few men, and even fewer women, in high

esteem. He is of the belief that attorneys are “inveterate hedgers. They think everything has two sides, which is nonsense. They are insufferable word-stretchers.” Pfu.

His distain is not based on ignorance of the law. Mr. Wolfe knows a tort when he sees one. It's just that laws get in the way of doing things his way, and lawyers will go on and on about legal ramifications and such. And, attorneys most frequently bill by the hour, unlike Mr. Wolfe, who price-gouges based upon the com-



[†] a/k/a Lon Cohen; Editor-in-Chief, *The Gazette, Journal of the Wolfe Pack*. Copyright © The Wolfe Pack. Reproduced with permission.

plexity of the case, his current temperament, or both. A client would pay dearly for presenting a difficult case the same day Mr. Wolfe discovers spider mites on the Cattleyas.

It is essential that a private detective have an attorney, and a good one. When the occasion arises, and it frequently does, that Archie Goodwin or Mr. Wolfe needs legal representation, the call for assistance goes to a Mr. Parker, whose name is either Nathaniel or Henry George. Evidently, Mr. Wolfe likes Mr. Parker well enough to invite him to dinner, but not enough to call him by his correct name.

Mr. Wolfe never lets his opinion of the legal profession reflect on the hospitality offered to all who entered the Brownstone. "The guest is a jewel resting on the cushion of hospitality," he told Archie Goodwin. This editor will do the same and offer a warm, if not bejeweled, welcome to the guest editor of this issue of the *Gazette*.

Submissions to the *Gazette* are always appreciated and may be sent by e-mail to loncohen@nerowolfe.org.

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I read it to him from the notebook, filling in the gaps from memory, though I didn't need much because I've condensed my symbols until I can take down the Constitution of the United States on the back of an old envelope, which might be a good place for it.

*Rex Stout,
The Red Box, ch. 12 (1937)*

THE MYSTERY FICTION OF REX STOUT

Beginning in 1934, Rex Stout focused his fiction writing almost entirely on mystery fiction — principally the novels and novellas featuring Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin. For a complete list of those works, with publication dates, stories included in collections, novels included in anthologies, and a selection of cover art, visit the Wolfe Pack's website at www.nerowolfe.org, and follow the links to the "Corpus" section.

For bibliographic information about Stout's writings and writings about Stout and his characters through 1980, the best resource is Guy M. Townsend, John J. McAleer, Judson C. Sapp, and Arriean Schemer, eds., *Rex Stout: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (1980). As that book is out-of-print and can be hard to locate, a more accessible source for a listing of Stout's writings and some writings about Stout is the checklist contained in John J. McAleer, *Rex Stout: A Majesty's Life* (1977), pp. 569-84.

Several of the Nero Wolfe novels and story collections are still in print, mostly in paperbacks by Bantam Books, and available at most bookstores. The selection of titles available in print changes from time to time, so check your bookstore shelves or a website for what is currently in print.

For those interested in commentary about Stout and in the doings of the Wolfe Pack, back issues of *The Gazette* are available from the Wolfe Pack. Two collections of the best of *The Gazette*, edited by mystery author and anthologist Marvin Kaye, are also in print: *The Nero Wolfe Files* and *The Archie Goodwin Files* (both 2005). Other titles that may be of interest are William S. Baring-Gould's *Nero Wolfe of West 35th Street* (1969), Ken Darby's *The Brownstone House of Nero Wolfe* (1983), O.E. McBride's *Stout Fellow: A Guide Through Nero Wolfe's World* (1993), and J. Kenneth Van Dover, *At Wolfe's Door: The Nero Wolfe Novels of Rex Stout* (1991, updated 2003).

If ordering these items (or anything else, even if completely unrelated to Wolfe or Stout) online, please consider accessing www.amazon.com by visiting www.nerowolfe.org and clicking on the Amazon link there. The Wolfe Pack receives a small percentage of the take from all such orders.

THE NERO WOLFE BOOKS OF REX STOUT

Fer-de-Lance (1934) • *The League of Frightened Men* (1935) • *The Rubber Band* (1936) • *The Red Box* (1937) • *Too Many Cooks* (1938) • *Some Buried Caesar* (1939) • *Over My Dead Body* (1940) • *Where There's a Will* (1940) • *Black Orchids* (1942) • *Not Quite Dead Enough* (1944) • *The Silent Speaker* (1946) • *Too Many Women* (1947) • *And Be a Villain* (1948) • *Trouble in Triplicate* (1949) • *The Second Confession* (1949) • *Three Doors to Death* (1950) • *In the Best Families* (1950) • *Curtains for Three* (1951) • *Murder by the Book* (1951) • *Triple Jeopardy* (1952) • *Prisoner's Base* (1952) • *The Golden Spiders* (1953) • *Three Men Out* (1954) • *The Black Mountain* (1954) • *Before Midnight* (1955) • *Three Witnesses* (1956) • *Might as Well Be Dead* (1956) • *Three for the Chair* (1957) • *If Death Ever Slept* (1957) • *And Four to Go* (1958) • *Champagne for One* (1958) • *Plot It Yourself* (1959) • *Three at Wolfe's Door* (1960) • *Too Many Clients* (1960) • *The Final Deduction* (1961) • *Homicide Trinity* (1962) • *Gambit* (1962) • *The Mother Hunt* (1963) • *Trio for Blunt Instruments* (1964) • *A Right to Die* (1964) • *The Doorbell Rang* (1965) • *Death of a Doxy* (1966) • *The Father Hunt* (1968) • *Death of a Dude* (1969) • *Please Pass the Guilt* (1973) • *A Family Affair* (1975) • *Death Times Three* (posthumous 1985)