

NATIVE SONS & DAUGHTERS: Rex Todhunter Stout

Murder-mystery thriller

He averaged 2 books annually for 30 years

One of the most prolific mystery writers of the 20th century was born in Noblesville. Rex Todhunter Stout wrote six dozen novels during his lifetime.

His family of 11 were Quakers and his father once shared the jobs of owner and editor of *The Noblesville Ledger*. They lived at 1151 Cherry St., but eventually his family moved to Kansas, where he grew up. During his youth, he was an avid reader and breezed through the Bible and his father's 1,200-book library before he graduated from high school. He tried college, but decided he was not going to learn anything there. So off he went to the Navy for awhile.

After the Navy, he began writing short stories for magazines and invented a school savings banking system, which he sold to more than 400 school boards. However, the stock market crash of 1929

Citizen review

LIFESPAN: Born Dec. 1, 1886, in Noblesville; died Oct. 27, 1975, in Danbury, Conn.

CAREER: Author.

KNOW HIM FROM: Reading his Nero Wolfe mystery books.

affected his fortune.

At age 43 his first book, "How Like a God," was published. His budding writing career got a boost five years later in 1934 when he introduced the fictional detective Nero Wolfe in a book titled "Fer-de-Lance."

Most Wolfe stories were murder mysteries and readers soon became hooked on the overweight, orchid-loving detective and his suave sidekick Archie Goodwin.

It's no mystery why the Goodwin character liked orchids. Stout loved flowers

and he grew 187 species of iris in his Connecticut home.

Amazingly, Stout could whip out a Wolfe novel in little over a month's time. "I've never rewritten a page, never made an outline," he once said in an interview. "I just start off with a single sheet of paper with the character's names, their ages and what they do."

For the next 30 years, Stout had an average of two books published every year to satisfy his readership. When he died, 40 of his books were still in print and had been translated into 28 languages.

A couple of his books were later turned into movies, but the gray-bearded man was never fond of that medium.

His fan club, called the Wolfe Pack, gathered in New York City in 1988 to honor Stout on the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Noblesville-Southeastern Public Library in Noblesville has most of the books by Stout.



Rex Todhunter Stout remained a popular figure into his 80s because of the popularity of his murder mysteries involving the character Nero Wolfe.

Source: *Who's Who in America and Stout's books.*

County Line...

Noblesville Daily Ledger By JIM NEAL

Rex Stout

Only last week this column mentioned that one of the pictures in the 1970 Hamilton County Historical Calendar showed the house in which Rex Stout, famous author of fictional detective stories, was born here in Noblesville.

I now have a copy of the Sunday, Oct. 5, 1969 Washington Post and it contains an outstanding feature story, with tremendous pictures, about this 82-year-old writer.

The article appears in the Post's Style Show section under "The Arts." It is the kind of thing that only a large newspaper like the Post can do and Phil Casey, the author of the article, did a superb job in telling about this Quaker son of a school teacher who also was a weekly newspaper editor.

The article runs in the neighborhood of five columns of type or approximately 4,000 words which is equivalent to four of these County Line columns, so I would like to steal only a couple of paragraphs. Casey writes as follows:

"Stout was born in Noblesville, Ind., the sixth of nine children and descendant of a long line of Quakers on both sides of the family. His father taught math, ran a weekly newspaper and later became a county school superintendent in Kansas, where Stout grew up. At one point Stout was attending a tiny schoolhouse in which the entire enrollment was he and his brothers and sisters and the teacher was his oldest sister. His mother taught Greek.

a rich man at 29 when he invented a school bank system that eventually had two million school children enrolled in 420 cities, has wasted little time since he was born here in 1886

"There is a well circulated report that Stout had read the Bible twice by the time he was 3. He scoffs at this. He read it only once, he said. Though he's a birthright Quaker, he will have no truck with religion and can't stand accepting anything as a matter of faith. No matter how he made out with the Bible, he did read through his father's 1,200-book library, and numerous other books, by the time he was 13 or 14."

Stout served in the Navy in the early 1900's and was a yeoman on the presidential yacht in 1906 when one of his duties was to look after Kermit and Quentin Roosevelt. He had so many experiences of this kind that it was no wonder The Washington Post writer needed so much space to tell the story of Stout.

Regarding life, Stout had this to say, "I thoroughly approve of life. Not reverence for life. I approve of life itself. I have no quarrel with nature.

"People are always saying something is unnatural. How can it be unnatural if it happens?"

About himself he adds, "My great lack is a sense of guilt. What is it? What is it like? I tell my literary friends that and they act as if I'm crazy. If you feel guilty about something, then you should fix it. If it's too late to fix it, then what's the use of feeling guilty? It's a waste of time."

It's for sure that Rex Stout,

H.C.,
Biography -
STOUT,
REX