

Monthly Letter



We Are Fun, Friendship and Learning!

Herb Moscovitz, our good friend from the Philadelphia Dickens Fellowship, enlivened our January 3rd meeting by teaming with our own **James Armstrong** and **Rob Clere** in a play about Edgar Allan Poe's meeting with Charles Dickens in Philadelphia in 1842. Everyone agreed that Herb's puppets, especially "Grip the Friendly Raven" stole the show.

James, as Dickens and Rob as Poe discussed *Barnaby Rudge*, America's lack of copyright protection and the possibility of the penurious Poe finding a job with an English publisher while each fended off Grip's, (played by Herb), friendly forays to their heads. Grip's continued tap, tap, tapping at them planted the idea of a poem in Poe's fevered brain. After the play Herb delivered a very good lecture about Poe and Dickens and their Philadelphia connections. Rob with his knowledge of American history augmented this by closing out our adventure through *American Notes* with more of Dickens's critique on slavery. We thank **Herb Moscovitz**, **Rob Clere** and **James Armstrong** for combining their skills to make our January, 2009 meeting one of our most memorable. The other Friends of Dickens who attended were **Irma Marie Cerne**, **Louise Jonsson**, **Gela Kline**, **Carrie Lee**, **David Lukomnik**, **Pat Maniccia**, **Mike Quinn**, **Jeannette Rosen**, **Michael** and **Ruthy Rosen**, **Adair Russell**, **Dorothy Smith**, **Ellen Spears** and **Ken Wachtell**. *Photo credits: Michael Rosen using Herb's camera.*

The Editor apologizes to **Ed** and **Janet Bowers** for failing to note, in the last issue of our *Monthly Letter*, their attendance at the Christmas Party on December 6, Ed and Janet have been members of our branch since its inception in 1993 and were stalwart members of the Dickens Fellowship before that. Both are great readers and travelers, true Dickens lovers, who lend their keen wit and critical appreciation to any literary discussion. At the Christmas Party Ed connected with **John Russo**, another guest. Both men are now retired from NBC News where Ed was a newsman and John an engineer. But neither knew that the other would be going to the Christmas Party and they don't usually socialize together. Now what does that say about *coincidence*, a criticism often leveled at Dickens. Thank you, Ed and Janet Bowers, for helping us know about and correct the oversight.

Our 2009 Annual Charles Dickens Birthday Luncheon will be celebrated on Saturday, February 7th at **The Irish Rogue, 356 West 44th Street, New York, N.Y. 10036**. If you haven't yet made your reservation there's still time to do so. If you have not yet received your invitation please contact **Mike Quinn** at (347) 427-3006 or **Ellen Spears** at (718) 454 - 4251.



THE PERSISTENCE OF RUMOR

The following article has been taken from from The Times On Line of January 16, 2009. In the somewhat jaded view of your editor it is yet another sign that rumors, whether founded on fact or unfounded, will persist.

Ring 'shows that Charles Dickens had son with his in-law'

Simon de Bruxelles

A diamond ring once owned by Charles Dickens has been cited as proof that he had an illegitimate child with his sister-in-law.

The author was dogged by rumours for much of his life, but none was more persistent, potentially damaging or more fiercely denied than the claim that he had a long-standing relationship with Georgina Hogarth, the family housekeeper.

Georgina had moved in with the Dickens household after his marriage to her older sister Catherine and stayed with him after she had left. To counter one claim that Georgina had borne him three illegitimate children, Dickens insisted on having a doctor examine her to provide documentary proof of her virginity.

The claim was particularly damaging because besides the scandal that would have ensued, almost certainly leading

to a costly divorce, a relationship with a sister-in-law was treated as incest under Victorian law and was a criminal offence. The previously undocumented gold ring set with a single 0.9-carat diamond has now emerged as Exhibit A in the case for the prosecution.

According to an inscription, the ring was presented to Dickens by Alfred Lord Tennyson, the Poet Laureate and one of his closest friends, in 1854. It later became the proudest possession of Hector Charles Bulwer Lytton Dickens, who said throughout his life that he was the novelist's son. The ring is being sold by Hector's descendants with letters, two wills and newspaper cuttings that they say help to prove his claim.

Nigel Ward, an auctioneer from Pontrilas, Herefordshire, said: "Hector Dickens acquired the ring from one of Charles Dickens's legitimate sons who had been given it by his father. Perhaps one reason he was prepared to part with what must have been a treasured possession is that they were half-brothers."

Despite his claims to be a respectable family man - Dickens and his wife had ten children - he had a long standing affair with the actress Ellen Ternan, who was 18 when they met in 1858. But it was rumours about Georgina that really angered him. Dickens described the claims about his relationship with Georgina as "monstrous misrepresentations" in his journal Household Words.

When he died in 1870 he left her £8,000 in cash, a vast sum of money in those days, and a collection of jewelry, far more than he bequeathed to either his estranged wife or his mistress. Mr Ward said: "The fact that Hector was Charles's son has long been the understanding of the ring's custodians."

Florian Schweizer, curator of the Dickens Museum in Doughty Street, Central London, said that the ring could turn Dickens's history "on its head". He said: "There have been rumours of them having an affair but it has never been substantiated because there has never been any reliable evidence emerge. They lived together for the last 13 years with Georgina as a friend and companion, but Dickens also had a mistress at the same time."

The ring is being sold with a guide price of £25,000-£35,000 on February 21. Mr Ward said: "Dickens's desk was recently sold at auction for £433,000, so who knows what it will go for."

There are intriguing issues, fascinating speculations and unresolved questions here. But in the jaded view of your editor making a buck is at the bottom of it. Maybe we can all agree that the rumors will persist.
MJQ

HAPPY FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

On February 7th, which is Dickens's birthday, we wish many happy returns to **Doris Latham** and **Sylvia Ryan**. Also celebrating are **Pam Mosconi** on the 11th, **Rob Clere** on the 13th and **Ellen Spears** on the 24th. May they and all February birthday celebrants everywhere enjoy another year of *Fun, Friendship and Learning*.

Monthly Quote

"Sunshine is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up, snow is exhilarating; there is really no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather."

John Ruskin

English Critic, Reformer and Polymath

(1819-1900)



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Bulletin Board

Susan Mann continues to recover at home after breaking both ankles while at work. She is one of our most expressed and exciting program moderators. We wish her well and look forward to her return to vibrant health and full participation with us.

James Armstrong is currently working hard on a new play, a musical this time, for which he is doing the book, about the historic Montgomery (Alabama) Bus Boycott.

Doris Weller continues to recover from shoulder surgery and several placements in rehab facilities of short duration. She and **Seymour Bernstein** with whom she is currently staying send their best wishes to everyone. We on our part look forward to seeing them again soon.

Marilyn Baranoski one of our favorites at Saturday meetings has been missed. Her new job at the Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum requires her to work most Saturdays. She and husband **Tony** are well and send their best.