

The Nancy Drew 75th/Stratemeyer Syndicate 100th Conference Report by Jennifer Fisher

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Celebrating 75 years of Nancy Drew and 100 years of the Stratemeyer Syndicate which created Nancy Drew and many other popular series over the years was the driving force behind my organizing this intense endeavor. Challenging though it was to put together an event of this size and complexity, it was an effort well worth the time and energy—a near once in a lifetime event that some have dubbed it—which I hope to repeat again in 2007.

I set out to have a variety of topics and speakers who could focus on the many facets of Syndicate series book history. From Edward Stratemeyer's beginnings to the organization of the Stratemeyer Syndicate to the proliferation of its many series including the popular Tom Swift, Hardy Boys, and Nancy Drew series, the conference featured these themes as well as an interesting focus on the Syndicate series illustrators and ghostwriters. Authors of books dealing with a Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys theme were present to discuss these books as were licensees of Simon & Schuster's: Her Interactive and Papercutz who spoke about the computer game and graphic novel ventures. An artist, Laura Ruby, delved into her perspective on the art of detection with her Nancy Drew series.



Speakers that presented were: James Keeline (Edward Stratemeyer, Series Illustrators), Leslie Garis (Garis family—prolific Stratemeyer ghostwriters), Geoffrey Lapin (Interviewed Leslie & spoke on ghostwriter Pat Doll), Trudi Abel (Edward Stratemeyer's business model), Laura Ruby (Nancy Drew series of artwork), Sharon Reid Harris (Nancy Drew's travelogues), Melanie Rehak (Mildred A. Wirt Benson & Harriet Stratemeyer Adams), Kathleen Chamberlain (Lesbianism and Nancy Drew), Jim Lawrence Jr. (Ghostwriter James Lawrence), Neil Morrison (Tom Swift Show &

Tell with visuals from his collection), Susan Kandel (*Not a Girl Detective*), Marilyn S. Greenwald (Leslie McFarlane and The Hardy Boys), Pamela Tandy & Spencer Tandy (Russell H. Tandy—series illustrator—influence of Orientalism), Bob Nelson, Jennifer Fisher & Moderator Garrett K. Lothe (Panel discussion on Nancy Drew & Hardy Boys over the years), Todd H. Latoski (Nancy Drew Wanderer paperbacks), Leslie Brazeau (Her Interactive's Nancy Drew computer games), and Stefan Petrucha (Nancy Drew graphic novels). Vendors that were present included conference merchandise, Simon & Schuster, Papercutz, Lee & Mike Temares with many vintage series books, Barnes & Noble (Susan Kandel's book), and Specialty Board Games. Todd H. Latoski had a display of his Wanderer books and Joe T. Slavin had a display of foreign Nancy Drew books. We had a special silent auction of Syndicate items—some incredibly rare and very interesting.

Our program advertisers—which have made our program even more collectible with images of Nancy Drew throughout in very decorative ads. Our back cover and inside back cover were created by David Farah who publishes and writes *Farah's Guide*, a great guide to the Nancy Drew book printings. Other advertisers included: Simon & Schuster, Penguin Young Readers Group (Grosset & Dunlap), Bloomsbury, Her Interactive, Spindrift Books, Gumshoe Girls, Lee & Mike Temares, Meredith B. Jaffe, D.D.S., *Yellowback Library*, *Susabella Passengers & Friends*, The Nancy Drew Sleuths, Chronicle Books, Speciality Board Games, Renee Walker, D.R. White, Papercutz, William Morrow Publishers, and Ohio University Press. Most of these sponsors also advertised in the Gala program for Friday's party.



Thursday, June 16:

About 22 people headed to Newark, NJ, by train from Manhattan—to catch a tour bus to view Stratemeyer Syndicate sites. Highlights of the 6 hour tour included Stratemeyer's home from the 1934 *Fortune Magazine* article, Howard Garis' home, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams' Maplewood home, the former Maplewood office of the Syndicate, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams' grave and Edward Stratemeyer's grave—flower bouquets and kind

words were said at each grave as people spoke nostalgically of everyone involved. We stopped for lunch in Elizabeth, NJ, at an old train depot that had been turned into an Italian restaurant.

For dinner, some of us visited the Moon Rock Diner around the corner from the hotel and enjoyed chatting.

Friday, June 17:



Our 2 day conference began today at the NYSEC rental facilities nearby the hotel. With a slightly late start after some set up snafues, we began a day of interesting presentations from: James Keeline, Leslie Garis & Geoffrey Lapin, Trudi Abel, and Laura Ruby. A quick lunch break was followed by Geoffrey Lapin, Sharon Reid Harris, and Melanie Rehak. James Keeline's second presentation was postponed until the following day. There were quite a few power point presentations with pictures that evoked

feelings of nostalgia. Geoffrey Lapin's presentation on ghostwriter Pat Doll was especially poignant. Melanie read from her upcoming book, *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her* which allowed the audience an interesting perspective on the two women whose influence on the Nancy Drew series was most profound—Mildred A. Wirt Benson and Harriet Stratemeyer Adams.

Throughout the day we had conference merchandise, raffle tickets and door prizes, and Simon & Schuster was set up with a lot of items for display which would later be given out as door prizes. They displayed items from the upcoming Bobbsey Twins, the new Hardy Boys series, and the Nancy Drew: Girl Detective series.



A decorating crew met up with me after the conference ended for the day to head to the Fashion Institute of Technology where we began to set up for the Nancy Drew 75th Anniversary Gala party that evening. A 1930s setting demanded 1930s decor. In the 1930s, crepe and tissue paper decorations were quite prevalent—used most often at children's parties today. Back in the 1930s and in previous decades, parties for adults were much more common and the famous Dennison company was prolific in creating decor and party planning guides which highlighted their products. Chenille figures made of chenille pipecleaners and paper faces and ribbon were popular favors or ornaments.

Using old Dennison party books that I owned and with help from some of collector Megan Fleming's books, I designed the party to have a 1930s festive flair. My decorating crew was joined later on by a few more helpers—all in all: Kevin, Jim,



Dorothy, Rachelle, Chris, Todd, David, Ria, and Rachel. A goody bag for each attendee was put together which included some great items from Grosset & Dunlap and Simon & Schuster: Nancy Drew books, Hardy Boys book, Bobbsey Twins poster/flier, Hardy Boys flier, Hardy Boys pen/radio, Nancy Drew watch.

Attendees also received a sleuth clues notebook, pencil with event name on it, chenille figure of Nancy from *Old*

Clock, a program and a mystery dossier.

A deco theme and colors of red, white, black, and fuschia set the tone as did a backdrop of 2 felt panels featuring Nancy Drew and the 3 ladies from the silhouette endpapers of the vintage Nancy Drew books. Many pictures were taken in front of these panels. A dessert bar fare and period Jazz and Swing music set the mood as a slide show of images from the first eight Nancy Drew books—both covers and internal—as well as the cover of *Larkspur Lane* intertwined with 9 clues to lead our attendees to the location of a treasure and the unmasking of a murderer. Blending Syndicate history and fiction, we attempted to solve the mystery of the missing volume 9 *Larkspur Lane*. Characters in attendance included: Aunt Gertrude, Iola Morton, Frank Hardy, Callie Shaw, Helen Corning, Ida Topham, Togo, Lucy Brown, Nancy Drew from *Old Clock*, Ralph Fairbanks, Cherry Hopkins, Nancy Drew from *Golden Pavilion*, Chet

Morton, Joe Hardy, Ned Nickerson, Bess Marvin, George Fayne, Carson Drew, Nancy Drew from 1933. At the end of the evening, everyone turned in their solution and our grand prize winner was Kelly!



Saturday, June 18:

Without any tables to set up, we all swung into action and got everything set up to get our vendors and table displays going. Our speakers that began the day included: James Keeline, Kathleen Chamberlain, Jim Lawrence Jr., Neil Morrison, and Susan Kandel. Susan did a reading of her book for us which was interesting. After our break, Marilyn S. Greenwald, Pamela & Spencer Tandy, Bob Nelson, myself, and Garrett Lothe, Todd H. Latoski, Leslie Brazeau, and Stefan Petrucha rounded out the conference. More interesting power point presentations illustrated these fabulous presentations.

Everything for me is always rushed with the planning, organizing, and running of an event so I'm always a little sad once everything is over and I've had little time to actually sit and enjoy a full presentation or get to visit with an old friend or a new chum! There were a lot of people who attended Saturday who were also in attendance on Friday with some new faces as well. A Grosset & Dunlap editor was there who was able to talk about some of their reprints coming out this year. Anthony Accardo, who illustrated some of the Nancy Drew notebooks, came to visit. A Foxs News reporter came and was the sweetest about covering our event—they will have an article running shortly about the conference.

Some of the attendees met up in a *The Mystery of the Fire Dragon* inspired dinner at Ollie's, a fun Chinese restaurant. After dinner many visited at Starbucks next

to the hotel and then in the back lounge of the hotel about conference activities and other interesting issues. Megan showed pictures from her Boston Public Library Nancy Drew display which was fabulous. Earlier in the evening there was even a celebrity siting of Matthew Fox who plays Dr. Jack in the show, *Lost*.

Sunday, June 19:

A few stragglers left in town met for brunch at the Flame diner nearby and we all went our separate ways. My journey took me home to Texas where I have begun the final stages of planning for the upcoming Nancy Drew Sleuths convention in Phoenix, AZ, October 12-16.

I want to thank all of you who attended, supported the conference with our merchandise and raffle ticket sales, and advertised with us.