FOAFTALE NEWS

NEWSLETTER
OF
THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

No. 76 **September 2010**

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Editor

It was wonderful to see so many ISCLR members at our conference in Amsterdam. The papers were outstanding, and we enjoyed a warm welcome from our hosts at the Meertens Institute. Many thanks to Theo Meder, Hetty Garcia, Mereie de Jong, and everyone else who was so good to us! I especially enjoyed the closing banquet, at which Carsten Bregenhøj narrated a legend based upon our conference's papers and activities.

In this issue of *FOAFtale News* you will find a very interesting article about the "Vanishing Lady" legend, minutes of our Amsterdam meeting, answers to an intriguing question, and a letter from the editor of *Contemporary Legend* that announces an exciting new series. Please think about submitting an article to the journal and also, of course, sending material to me for *FOAFtale News*. Your support is always appreciated.

Watch for the movie *Chain Letter*, to be released October 8 (just in time for Halloween). Hope to see you in Harrisburg!

Elizabeth (Libby) Tucker

Next Annual Meeting: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, May 25-27, 2011

Yvonne J. Milspaw, organizer of ISCLR's next annual meeting, wants to let everyone know that the meeting will take place at the Hilton Harrisburg on Market Square from May 25 to May 27, 2011. Harrisburg is known, Yvonne writes, for its "smart conversations, gorgeous setting, venerable history, pretty parks, baseball, fine foods, and local brews and wines." More information will be forthcoming in the January newsletter. If you'd like to get in touch with Yvonne about the meeting, her email address is yjmilspa@hacc.edu.

Minutes of ISCLR's Annual General Meeting
June 30, 2010
Amsterdam
Submitted by Elissa Henken

Paul Smith called the meeting to order, and began by announcing that Eileen Collins, who has aided us throughout the years on the journal, sent a thank you note for the flowers ISCLR gave her upon her retirement.

Minutes: Approved without change.

President's report: Smith reported that President Cathy Preston had sent a report only about ISCLR's two awards, which would be presented later on the agenda.

Treasurer's report: Smith reported that we have $7,403 Canadian. We are solvent, but only barely, as we are committed to paying for the production and printing of future issues of *Contemporary Legend*.

Membership report: Elissa Henken reported that membership has gone down, from 82 in 2006 to 55 in 2010.

Contemporary Legend: Mikel Koven reported that CL 9 (2006) on Ghostlore is ready to be mailed and CL10 (2007) is already at the press. Both of these volumes should be sent out by the end of August. We will end the New Series with volume 10 and then start up again with Series 3 by the end of 2011. He is hoping for 10 articles for S3, 1(2011). Some articles that have already been submitted will be held over for that issue. Koven's last issue, in 2012, will be on contemporary legend and popular culture. The journal will be produced on a time table: articles submitted by October 1 (3-4 months after the conference); external reviews by December/January; revised copy by July 1; going to press by October 1.
Joy Fraser has been appointed Assistant Editor.

FOAFTale News: Libby Tucker reported that everything is perking along. She expressed gratitude for the personal statements people have written at the conference on how they became addicted to the study of legends. The publishing schedule for the newsletter is: January, announce conference plans; Spring, print abstracts; late August/September, forum for short articles, queries. Tucker also complimented Eda Kalmre for her wonderful work with the web site and Veronique Campion-Vincent for having contributed material from a wide, international array of scholars.
Smith announced that the Folklorists' Toolbox, which was initiated at the Dublin conference, will be available to the *FOAFTale News* audience beginning in August. Suggestions as to improvement will be most welcome.

Webmaster's report: Koven reported on behalf of Ian Brodie that setting up a new website was complicated by needing a new host. Brodie's University was not ready to serve as host, and since it is not good to change addresses repeatedly, Brodie purchased the domain name: www.contemporarylegend.org. This will temporarily be reached through a page off Brodie's own website (faculty.cbu.ca/ibrodie/ISCLR). Brodie has put in an index of *Contemporary Legend* by author and volume. He's adding many links. He is still tidying the site and has to redirect the page from the previous web address in Pennsylvania. He has made ISCLR an Amazon.com partner for McConnell Book Award winners; we will receive a small percentage for any books bought.
Campion-Vincent asks that a list of members be put on the website.
The Executive Council will consider any suggestions for improving the website.

David Buchan Award: Smith reports that we have not come to a final decision; he needs to check whether any submissions arrived at his office in his absence.

McConnell Book Award: no submissions.

Election of Member at Large, Early Career Scholar. We have two nominees, Lynne McNeill, nominated by the Executive Council, and Virginia Fugarino, nominated from the floor. Smith asked Tucker to speak for McNeill and

Carl Lindahl to speak for Fugarino. The vote by paper ballot: McNeill 5; Fugarino 12.

Setting of annual subscription rate: Smith explained that the rates have been stable for several years, the costs of producing the journal have not risen, and we no longer bear the cost of mailing the newsletter (now available electronically). Therefore, the Council is not recommending a change in the current rates. Henken proposed a new rate for retirees, to be the same as that for students, to begin in 2011. This was approved unanimously.

Future conferences:
2011, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, hosted by Yvonne Milspaw.
2012, Gottingen, Germany, hosted by Christine Shojaei Kawan. This will be the 30th anniversary of ISCLR and the 200th anniversary of the Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, both of which should be celebrated. It is also the year of the Olympics in London, which should be considered in setting a date.
2013. San Antonio, Texas, hosted by Preston and Diane Goldstein. Henken reports that Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoghby has offered to host in 2013 or 2015 in Kentucky.
2014. Jan Pohunek offered on behalf of Petr Janeček to host it in Prague, Czech Republic. Koven announced a standing invitation to meet in Worcester, England, which can serve as a back-up plan.

ISCLR Archive: Smith explains that ISCLR never archived its papers, which presented a problem when Bill Ellis retired and sent everything to Smith. Smith approached the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, which has agreed to take the papers.

Member at Large, Young Career Scholar amendment: Smith presented the council's proposed amendment to the constitution "that a second Member at Large (Early Career Scholar) position be added to the Council in a regular voting capacity" with the rationale "to ensure the involvement of our less established members, to ensure a regular injection of 'new blood' and to allow for the election of both a North American and a European scholar." This was approved unanimously. The proposal will next be sent to the general membership for a final vote.
Joel Conn moved that if the membership approves the first motion, then one Member At Large (Early Career Scholar) position be designated North American and one European. This will parallel the set up for the other Members at Large. This motion was approved unanimously and will next be sent to the general membership for a final vote.

Date of next Annual General Meeting: during May 25-27, 2011 in Harrisburg, PA.

Thank you's and valedictory comments: Smith thanked our hosts Theo Meder, Hetty Garcia, and Marianne van Zuylen. The group showed its hearty approval through extended applause. Smith also thanked those who attended and pointed out that ISCLR conferences are made especially enjoyable by our attitude. We go not to scold or browbeat our fellows, but to learn. That was clear from the very first meeting when people went away with questions as well as answers. The first meeting also taught him a most important phrase, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the bar is open."

Letter from the Editor of *Contemporary Legend*

Dear Subscribers,
I'm sure you, our members, are very aware of some of the difficulties we've had in producing *Contemporary Legend* on time. These delays have been for a variety of reasons, none of which are particularly relevant now. With the current volumes now being posted, *Contemporary Legend* New Series 9 (2006) and 10 (2007), we are concluding our New Series. Such a move is not unprecedented within ISCLR, as *Contemporary Legend's* first series also ran ten volumes.
With the conclusion of the New Series, we are very excited to announce *Contemporary Legend* Series 3, beginning with the 2011 volume. We have now reorganized our editorial procedures and with a new a more concrete production schedule, which should enable contributors to better predict when their papers

will actually appear, we are ready for the new challenges ahead with Series 3.
We are also very pleased and excited to announce the appointment of Joy Fraser in the role of Assistant Editor. Bringing Joy on board will further ensure our timely production of the journal. I'm sure you'll join me in welcoming Joy to *Contemporary Legend*.
Production of *Contemporary Legend* will follow the following schedule:

- October (papers submitted)—this date works out approximately 3-4 months after our annual Perspectives conferences, and should be sufficient time to work the papers into articles (between 5000 and 8000 words, please)
- December (external comments sent to authors)
- July (revisions due back with editor)
- September (copy-editing completed and author's proofs)
- October (final manuscript submission for printing/following issue's papers submitted)
- December (volumes printed and shipped out)

This schedule will also ensure that papers accepted by *Contemporary Legend* will actually be in print within 18 months. There is still time to submit a paper to Contemporary Legend Series 3 volume 1 (2011).
We look forward to hearing from you, our membership, and reading your submissions to the journal.

Yours,
Mikel J. Koven
Editor, *Contemporary Legend* (on behalf of the Executive Board)
mkoven@worc.ac.uk

Answers to a Question Posed at ISCLR's Annual Meeting in Amsterdam: "How did you become addicted to contemporary legends?" (With thanks to Paul Smith, who suggested this question)

Mikel J. Koven: When I started my Ph.D. programme at Memorial, Diane Goldstein introduced me to this study. While I was familiar with these stories, I wasn't aware that there were people who actually studied these. Paul Smith threw down the gauntlet to me, when he suggested that I present a paper I wrote, and that he hated, to ISCLR in Boulder (1996? 97?) I've been here ever since. Smith and Goldstein created this monster: I blame them.

David Clarke: While working as a news reporter on an evening newspaper in the north of England in the early 90s, I was aware of the Sheffield study of custom and belief but unfamiliar with the study of urban/contemporary legends—until I came across several 'foafs' who called the newspaper to report them. Examples overheard/discussed with callers to the newsdesk were the 'vanishing hitchhiker,' 'bodybags' locked in a secret room of the shopping mall, hypodermic needle scare in nightclubs, etc. I've been 'hooked' ever since!

Elissa R. Henken: I was fascinated by folklore from an early age, inspired in part by my parents' dinnertime conversations about things they were reading and studying, and I worked on religious legends and historical legends for my M.A. and Ph.D., but, despite taking Linda Dégh's class, I did not truly become engaged with contemporary legend until I began teaching and started seeing for myself the patterns in the wealth of legends my students told me.

Mare Kalda: I have to say that I am not addicted to contemporary legends. Once upon a time, I even hated the strange, silly, hard-to-believe stories I had heard sometimes. But the situation has changed, however. In my student years I studied the traditional legends and keep studying these ones now. So I have reached contemporary legends through traditional

legends. But certainly I am addicted to research on contemporary legends! I like to recognize the legend motives everywhere, as well as find out the new "modern" episodes in "old-fashioned" traditional stories. On the other hand, I always enjoy the good papers written by contemporary legend scholars. Thus, it's more about addiction to contemporary legend research.

Eda Kalmre: In the beginning of the 1990s, Finnish folklorist Leea Virtanen brought to the Estonian Folklore Archives one book: Jan Brunvand's Vanishing Hitchhiker. I read it and recognized: it is my subject. But I started my career with fairy tales.

Ginny Fugarino: Still qualifying as a "young folklorist," I am not sure that my response is as notable as those of other, more established folks. Nevertheless, I credit Carl Lindahl, Diane Goldstein, and Paul Smith for hooking me into contemporary legend. While studying under them, I became fascinated with how we live with contemporary legends—how they are part of our everyday lives—and how they are part of how we communicate issues that are interesting and important to us. I can't say there was a "lightbulb moment" during which I became interested in contemporary legends; it has been more of a developing love.

Peter Burger: Reading medieval literature at Leiden University and studying medieval bestiaries, I became fascinated by the phenomenon of stories and story chunks being transmitted through the ages and used to build ever new stories. At about the same time, I read Ethel Portnoy's book *Broodje Aap* ('Monkey Sandwich')—a real eye opener, which introduced me to the genre of urban legends. Then, Jan Brunvand's *Vanishing Hitchhiker* introduced me to legend studies as an academic discipline, and I started to collect legends too. The warm welcome and kind encouragement of Véronique Campion-Vincent, Bengt af Klintberg, and Jan Brunvand finally made me decide that I wanted to be a folklorist, too.

Gail de Vos: When I started to focus on telling stories to teenagers, I looked at the types of stories that may be of interest to them. I first turned to ghost stories but soon realized that contemporary legends were of extreme interest. At first I told the stories as part of my repertoire but soon was being asked the conduct workshops on contemporary legends in high schools. While I had included a few examples of contemporary legends in my book of stories for young adults, I soon realized I needed more information for myself—and my research monster turned into Tales, Rumors and Gossip. I was a member of this organization for access to the research but finally bit the bullet and attended my first conference in Copenhagen. I was very nervous to speak in front of so many people I had referred to and summarized articles by. I found myself warmly welcomed into the group. I now try to attend as many conferences as possible.

Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby: I have had an interest in contemporary legends since I began to study folklore in graduate school in the 80s. However, since my field of interest is Slavic, I could not indulge my desire for research on these texts. Because both traditional and contemporary legends were perceived to be destabilizing and inappropriate texts, no materials were published after the nineteenth century. That is not to say that material was not collected, but it was unpublished and unpublishable. To collect myself was also impossible, because of the limitations on contact between Soviet and United States citizens. After the fall of the USSR, I was immersed in my ongoing research on life-cycle rituals. When that project ended, during which I taught at a Russian university, I began to pursue my collection of both contemporary and traditional religious legends in Russia. The information and texts available are vast and will be the basis for my future research for as long as I can keep on collecting in Russia.

Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj: Although I have not written about contemporary legends, I follow sometimes these discussions as one part of the huge narrative tradition field. I have mostly written about traditional/older legends, personal experience stories and questions of

narrating, performance and variation in storytelling.

Carsten Bregenhøj: In 1968 I stumbled upon a small piece of news in the Danish daily Politiken about a dead grandma that was stolen. Right away it occurred to me that I had heard the story before. The story was first told to me by my father, probably in 1959-60 (I moved away from home in spring 1961). It seems to me it might have been after one of his yearly business trips to the USA. After my military service I started my folklore studies in 1964, February. I also began to work for the Danish Folklore Archives in Copenhagen. So for the Archives I pointed out to the Politiken editor that they had printed a legend. He was quite surprised. Following up on the incident, I conducted a small collection of more variants of the story. I also interviewed my father. Later I worked with two food scares, mercury in oranges and the false E-number list. On the oranges I published two articles; I'm not sure whether I gave a paper on the E-numbers or what. For years life has kept me busy in other areas of folklore, but for the Amsterdam conference I returned to the Stolen Grandma, this time the World War II material.

Aurore Van de Winkel: Addict or not addict? It is more qualified for me. I like to find contemporary legends and to tell them. Listeners are always delighted and curious to listen to these stories. I'm addicted to their reactions and their discussions about the truth or the fiction of the narrative. Contemporary legend allows us to question our own rapport with reality. The narration and the interaction following are sometimes more important than the story itself.

Véronique Campion-Vincent: In the early 1970s, I read in the weekly column reflecting on current events published in the reference daily Le Monde a dramatic story:

> A 12-year-old boy from an affluent family, left at home with his younger sister while their parents were dining with friends, called around 10 P.M. to say he had just shot dead an intruding masked robber. He had used his father's concealed gun. The adults show up. The masked robber is unmasked and revealed to be the hosts' son. The death is hidden from the police.

Many journalists had unsuccessfully tried to corroborate this story when I started to research it. I discovered a great number of oral variants, told with great conviction. The stories concluded with openly expressed moralistic remarks, both on generalized contemporary immorality (crime happens in the best families today) and the dangers of home-stored firearms (self-defense was then a topic of strong controversy in France). My study led to an article ("Les histories exemplaires [Exemplary Stories], Contrepoint 1976) and to years of research into contemporary legends.

Mereie de Jong: My interest in contemporary legends issued from an interest in stories in general. I was a student of language and literature who ended up doing a traineeship at the Meertens Institute (Amsterdam) as a (compulsory) part of my course. Due to several coincidences I became the wife of my traineeship's moderator/supervisor (Theo Meder) many years later. Since then, I regularly accompany my husband at conferences related to his work as a folktale researcher. Given the fact that I am presently active as a translator, I regularly get to translate articles, papers, and other writings about folklore and folktale topics.

Jan Pohunek: Well, I am not sure. It was a gradual process; my interest in folklore was probably ignited by my interest in landscape and history, Robert Holdstock's "Mythago Wood" series being one of the most important sources of inspiration. He influenced me enough to begin studying archaeology and folklore at university. In the late 1990s, I also began to visit various Internet discussions and noticed all the "urban legends" stuff on the Web. Since then, I have been collecting contemporary folklore too and always have tried to include this dimension in my research concerning history and the present state of various places or problems. Maybe. But maybe I am just trying to find a complicated explanation for a simple fact: contemporary legends are interesting, fascinating, and fun.

Pat Turner: In the early 1980s while attending grad school at UC Berkeley, I took a course from Bengt af Klintberg, who was the visiting folklore professor at the time. It was an excellent seminar. I recall disagreeing with Jan Brunvand's comment in *Hitchhiker* that urban legends were primarily a white genre. In 1985 when I was teaching at U Mass Boston, I was making a point in a non-folklore class using the Kentucky Fried Rat as an example. That prompted a recitation of the Church's fried chicken legend. After determining that no other folklorist was documenting it, I did. And I was hooked.

Libby Tucker: As a child, I discovered the bright-colored world of fairy-tale books. Each book had its own color – blue, lilac, yellow, green – and the stories described wondrous, magical events. One day I heard a very different kind of story from a friend of my mother's: someone had found a black finger with red nail polish inside a can of peaches. A red-nailed black finger floating in sweet, sticky syrup: what could this mean? Years later, as a graduate student at Indiana, I signed up for Linda Dégh's legend class. "Don't take that class," a fellow student told me, "it's too hard." The class wasn't too hard, and it helped me understand the story my mother's friend had told so long ago. I've been hooked on contemporary legends ever since.

On the Trail of *The Vanishing Lady*

Bonnie Taylor-Blake* and Garson O'Toole

> *"Mademoiselle," the inspector replied, with a pitying note in his voice, "[the grave] is not marked, you know."*

In 1929 Alexander Woollcott discussed "the Vanishing Lady" (TVL; also known as "the Disappearing/Vanishing Hotel Room") in three of his *Shouts and Murmurs* column for *The New Yorker* [1]. His last column described his attempts to track down a source for the legend and noted that an unnamed writer at *The Chicago Journal* had held that "[t]he tale, Mr. Woollcott, was invented thirty years ago in the editorial rooms of the Detroit *Free Press*, when Karl Harriman was the paper's facile young columnist." Woollcott dutifully contacted Harriman and reported back that "[i]t seems that he did publish the story in the Detroit *Free Press* back in 1898 or 1899." He also reproduced part of Harriman's reply, emphasizing a point with italics: "Whether I invented the story or *whether someone told it to me as an anecdote and I expanded on it*, I cannot for the life of me tell you after all these years."

Woollcott revisited the question of the source of TVL in his 1934 While Rome Burns [2],

> One day I received word of [the tale's] having been published as a news story in the *London Daily Mail* as early as 1911, the bare facts substantiated by affidavits from attachés of the British Embassy in Paris. Here, I said with relief, is the end of my quest, only to have Richard Henry Little point out in the *Chicago Tribune* that the entire story had been dashed off by Karl Harriman one hot summer night in 1889 to fill a vacant column in the next morning's issue of the *Detroit Free Press*. Closing in on my quarry, I called upon the blushing Harriman to tell me whether he had invented the story or, like the rest of us, heard it somewhere in his travels. He said he could not remember. Thereupon I feel free to consider the question still open, for, without wishing to reflect on the fecundity of his imagination, I beg leave to doubt if any man could invent a tale like "The Vanishing Lady" and thereafter forget that he had done so.

Karl Edwin Harriman (1875-1935) entered the University of Michigan as a part of the class of 1896, but did not receive his A.B. degree until 1910 [3]. He began his career as a journalist at *The Detroit Journal* in 1895 and went on to *The Free Press*, where he worked as an editorial writer from 1898 to 1899. In 1899 he was sent to England as a correspondent for the paper. Eventually abandoning the newspaper business, Harriman served as editor of the literary magazines *The Pilgrim* (1905-1912),

The *Ladies' Home Journal* (1912-1919), and *The Red Book*, *The Blue Book*, and *The Green Book* (1919-1927). He authored several books and numerous short stories, essays, and reminiscences [4-6].

Encouraged by clues left some 80 years ago by Woollcott and Harriman and armed with digitized databases of centuries-old American and British newspapers and periodicals, we began searching for forms of TVL that had appeared before publication of Marie Belloc-Lowndes's The End of Her Honeymoon (1913), which has for some time been considered the earliest printed version of the legend found so far.

Not only were we able to find examples that preceded Belloc-Lowndes's take on TVL, including a remarkable piece (told as true) that had appeared in *The Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1912 [7-9], but we also eventually unearthed Harriman's telling, buried within the pages of *The Detroit Free Press*. Our research, however, yielded some unexpected discoveries along the way, one of possible interest to scholars of Stephen Crane.

Back issues of *The Free Press*, digitized and organized by ProQuest, are now easily searched at the paper's website; for a small fee, one can obtain PDFs of articles of interest. Scouring the archives, we succeeded in locating not one, but two instances in which the paper published TVL in the late 1890s. We were puzzled to discover, however, that neither version bore Harriman's name.

One of these tellings, published on 18 September 1898 as "Porch Tales: The Disappearance of Mrs. Kneeb," is attributed to Kenneth Herford [10]. We tried to learn about Herford, but could capture only fleeting glimpses of him. Interestingly, his path paralleled Harriman's early career. Like Harriman, Herford attended the University of Michigan – we know this because one of his pieces appeared in the May, 1897 issue of *The Inlander*, the student-run literary magazine for which Harriman wrote and served as an editor. Both students seem to have preferred journalism to academics, showing up at *The Free Press* around the same time: at the paper Harriman worked as an editorial writer [11] and Herford wrote a literary column [12]. According to the newspaper's searchable archive, Harriman is listed as author on pieces written between January, 1898 and July, 1912; Herford's many columns were published between October, 1897 and January, 1900.

When Harriman traveled to England on behalf of the newspaper in the spring of 1899, Herford made the same journey [13]. During the months that followed, both became acquainted with Stephen Crane through visits to his home at Brede Place, Rye, East Sussex. Herford's rather romantic description of Crane was printed in the November, 1899 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* [14]; Harriman's similarly styled account of his lengthy visits with the Cranes was published in the April, 1900 issue of *The Literary Review*, appearing just two months before Crane's death at age 28 [15]. (Harriman also wrote a few notes on Crane's last days for the July, 1900 issue of *The Critic* [16].)

Curiously, however, around the time Harriman began his career as magazine editor, his shadow seems to have vanished; as far as we have been able to determine, Herford stopped publishing around 1904 or 1905, which coincides with Harriman's arrival at *The Pilgrim*.

In spite of Harriman's and Herford's obvious proximity at the University of Michigan, at *The Free Press*, and in East Sussex, we have been unable to find any instances in which one mentions the other. Nor have we found contemporaneous essays, newspaper columns, or the like that mention *both* Harriman and Herford. A conclusion that might be drawn from this exercise is that Karl Harriman and Kenneth Herford coexisted, but somehow never met. Given the lack of solid biographical information about Herford and considering the similarities between the two writers, however, we feel it more reasonable to conclude that Kenneth Herford was, in fact, Harriman, a "secret" known to Harriman's colleagues and friends. Consequently, we propose that the 1898 telling of TVL – and, in fact, all writings credited to

Kenneth Herford – should be attributed to Karl Harriman.

Harriman's "Porch Tales: The Disappearance of Mrs. Kneeb" is much like other known versions of TVL. A British mother and her two daughters stop at a hotel in Paris on the way home from Berlin. (The story is accompanied by an illustration showing Mrs. Kneeb – weary from the trip – sitting in her room, with the girls at her side.) Mrs. Kneeb dies overnight from "black smallpox" (a hemorrhagic form of the disease) and the hotel conceals her death to save its reputation. There is no mention of the Paris Exposition nor is there an assurance that the events described actually took place.

Not only has the quest for Harriman's treatment of TVL been hampered by his use of a pseudonym, but researchers searching for Harriman's telling have also been misled by what we suspect is a simple transposition of numbers in While Rome Burns: Harriman would have been about 14 in 1889, far too young to have published a form of TVL in *The Free Press*. The true year (1898) instead appears in Woollcott's third *Shouts and Murmurs* column: the 23-year-old Harriman would indeed have qualified as "the paper's facile young columnist" in 1898.

Neither Harriman nor his alter ego, however, was responsible for the slightly earlier and unattributed version of TVL we were surprised to discover in the pages of *The Free Press*. "Dropped out of Existence; A Strange and True Mystery of the French Capital" appeared on 14 November 1897 [17], ten months before the Herford/Harriman form was published.

This telling, tighter and much shorter than Harriman's and less reliant on dialogue, is similar to Harriman's in structure. It describes the arrival at a Parisian hotel of an American woman and her two daughters early during the course of the Exposition. They had traveled extensively, despite the mother's feeling ill the entire trip. After the mother vanishes, the girls wait for weeks for a sign of her. At the Exposition's close, a police inspector visits the daughters and reveals what he has discovered about their mother's disappearance. She had, in fact, died that night from black smallpox. Any trace of her presence, her illness, and subsequent death were erased so as to protect the city and prevent panic and financial ruin. After coming to terms with this terrible and shocking news, the girls ask to visit their mother's final resting place; the inspector sadly reveals that her grave is unmarked.

After some further tracking, we found that this telling had also appeared on the same date in at least three other big-city American newspapers [18] and was reproduced in several papers across the country into 1898.

The Philadelphia Inquirer's (unattributed) version from 14 November 1897 is identical to the others appearing the same day except for its first paragraph:

> The following remarkable story is true. The writer is personally acquainted with the persons who participated in the scenes which are described. That such a series of events happened in the nineteenth century merely goes to show that the spirit of romance stalks abroad just as boldly now as it did in the time of Richelieu.

Those in *The Free Press*, *The Los Angeles Sunday Times*, and *The Boston Daily Globe* instead have this as a first paragraph:

> Paris was like a scrap basket filled to overflowing. From every part of the world people and their baggage were deposited in the attractive catch-all offered them and, except for a continuous shifting of contents, in this state Paris was to remain for months until the end of the exposition came to straighten her disorder and empty her out.

Only the telling in *The Los Angeles Sunday Times* was linked to an author, "a Special Contributor to The Times," Nancy V. M'Clelland [sic]. (A display ad for the then-upcoming edition of the Sunday Times appeared on 12 November; it featured Nancy V. McClelland's "An Exposition Mystery," describing it as the "Remarkable Disappearance of an American Woman in Paris.") We believe that "Nancy V. McClelland" corresponds to Nancy Vincent McClelland.

In 1897 McClelland graduated from Vassar and began working for *The Philadelphia Press*, later going on to become a noteworthy advertising writer in the 1910s and a famous interior decorator by the 1930s [19, 20]. McClelland spoke French and lived for a time in Paris, suggesting a lifelong interest in the city. Additionally, we know that she authored several short stories as Nancy Vincent McClelland near the turn of the century [21, 22].

Although we have been unable to determine if this version, which we attribute to McClelland, had appeared in *The Press* in 1897, we do know that it was published, with the unusual introduction testifying to its veracity, in the cross-town *Inquirer*. Since the dateline of the story is 1897, the backdrop likely corresponds to the 1889 Paris Exposition, by 1897 the most recent major Exposition in the city. As suggested by the introduction in *The Inquirer*, McClelland may have heard the tale from travelers returning to the United States from Paris. Alternatively, she may have used the powerful skills of invention displayed in her short stories and her later successful careers to craft the compelling tale.

It is possible, of course, that Harriman had heard the TVL even before McClelland's version appeared in *The Free Press* (and other newspapers) on 14 November 1897. We do not know when Harriman wrote his version, published on 18 September 1898, but – because it is accompanied by an illustration appropriate to the legend's plot – we feel that it may have been in the works for at least several days and not, as Woollcott had been told, "dashed off by Karl Harriman one hot summer night in 1889 [sic] to fill a vacant column in the next morning's issue." It is unclear whether Harriman was aware that he was adapting a known tale or whether he had forgotten that he had been influenced by McClelland's piece (or by a still unknown version), but it at least seems unlikely that in late 1897 – while he was at *The Detroit Journal* – Harriman had not read McClelland's telling in the rival *Free Press*.

What we have stitched together perhaps makes Harriman's response to Woollcott's inquiry more interesting, because it allows one to read his reply – "Whether I invented the story or whether someone told it to me as an anecdote and I expanded on it, I cannot for the life of me tell you after all these years" – as perhaps slightly evasive.

Which just causes us to wonder, how would Nancy Vincent McClelland have answered had Woollcott only known to ask her the same question?

References

1. Woollcott, Alexander. "The Vanishing Lady," 6 July 1929, p. 32; "The Vanishing Lady – II," 13 July 1929, p. 36; "And Contents Noted," 21 September 1929, p. 48.
2. Woollcott, Alexander. While Rome Burns. New York: The Viking Press, 1934, pp. 87-94; footnote pp. 93-94.
3. "Karl Harriman, Noted Magazine Editor, Is Dead," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 October 1935, p. 25.
4. Wertheim, Stanley. A Stephen Crane Encyclopedia. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997; pp. 145-146.
5. "K.E. Harriman Dies; Retired Publisher," *The New York Times*, 2 October 1935, p. 23.
6. "Karl E. Harriman Claimed by Death," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 2 October 1935, p. 14.
7. "Parent Vanishes; Plague Victim? American Girl Gets Clues to Mother's Disappearance in Paris in 1900," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 November 1912, p. 2.
8. "A Page of Secret History," *The Star* [Christchurch, New Zealand], 10 October 1908, p. 2. Apparently reprinted from *Pearson's Weekly* [England]; authored by W.L. Stewart. Available online at http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=TS19081010.2.10
9. Eberle, Louise E. "The Wife Who Wasn't," *The Smart Set* [New York], February 1911, pp. 61-68.
10. Herford, Kenneth. *The Detroit Free Press*, 18 September 1898, p. C3.
11. Wertheim, *op. cit.*
12. Wertheim, Stanley and Sorrentino, Paul. The Correspondence of Stephen Crane.

New York: Columbia University Press, 1988; Volume II, p. 548.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Herford, Kenneth. "Young Blood – Stephen Crane," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 18 November 1899, p. 413.
15. Harriman, Karl E. "A Romantic Idealist – Mr. Stephen Crane," *The Literary Review* [Boston], April 1900, pp. 85-87.
16. Harriman, Karl E. Untitled comments in "The Lounger" column, *The Critic* [New York], July 1900, pp. 85-87.
17. *The Free Press*, 14 November 1897, p. 38.
18. "A Mystery of the Paris Exposition," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 November 1897, p. 28; "Disappeared in Paris; American Went to a Hotel with Her Daughters," *The Boston Daily Globe*, 14 November 1897, p. 20; "A Paris Mystery; The Remarkable Disappearance of a Woman from a French Hotel," *The Los Angeles Sunday Times*, 14 November 1897, p. 21.
19. Dille, Marie. "Women Who Lead the Way," *The Edwardsville* [Illinois] I*ntelligencer*, 31 December 1915, p. 4.
20. May, Bridget. Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959): Professionalizing Interior Decoration in the Early Twentieth Century. *Journal of Design History* 21: 59-74, 2008.
21. M'Clelland, Nancy Vincent. "Her Red-Letter Day," *The Washington Post*, 24 September 1901, p. 10. ["McClelland," the alternate spelling, appears at the end of the article.]
22. McClelland, Nancy Vincent. "The Face in the Watch", *The Logansport* [Indiana] *Pharos*, 29 July 1903, p. 6.

[* Corresponding author, taylor-blake@nc.rr.com]

REMINDER

Now would be a good time to check whether your membership is up-to-date. To renew your membership, send a check made out to "ISCLR" for US$40.00, UK£20, CAN $42.50, or E30 to Elissa R. Henken, Department of English, Park Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, 30602, USA.. Thanks very much for your support of ISCLR!

FOAFtale News (**FTN**) is the newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research. We study "modern" and "urban" legends, and also any legend circulating actively. To join, send a cheque made out to "ISCLR" for US$40.00 or UK£20 to Elissa R. Henken, Department of English, Park Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, 30602, USA. Institutional rates available upon request. Members also receive **Contemporary Legend**, a refereed academic journal. Some back issues of **FTN** are available on-line at http://www.folklore.ee/FOAFtale.

FOAFtale News is indexed in the MLA Bibliography.

This newsletter is called **FOAFtale News** for the jocular term current among legend scholars for over twenty years. The term "foaf" was introduced by Rodney Dale (in his 1978 book, *The Tumour in the Whale*) for an oft-attributed but anonymous source of contemporary legends: a "friend of a friend." Dale pointed out that contemporary legends always seemed to be about someone just two or three steps from the teller — a boyfriend's cousin, a co-worker's aunt, or a neighbor of the teller's mechanic. "Foaf" became a popular term at the Sheffield legend conferences in the 1980s. It was only a short step to the pun "foaftale," a step taken by a yet-anonymous wag.

The opinions expressed in **FOAFtale News** are those of the authors and do not in any necessary way represent those of the editor, the contributors, the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research, its Council, or its members.

ISCLR users' group isclr@folklore.ee
ISCLR website http://www2.hn.pau.edu

ISSN 1026-1001

CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME!

Please send contributions to ltucker@binghamton.edu