

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 454
By Cohen

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of noted Sherlockian scholar Walter P. Armstrong of Memphis.

221 B

By Vincent Starrett

Here dwell together still two men of note
Who never lived and so can never die:
How very near they seem, yet how remote
That age before the world went all awry.
But still the game's afoot for those with ears
Attuned to catch the distant view-halloo:
England is England yet, for all our fears---
Only those things the heart believes are true
A yellow fog swirls past the window-pane
As night descends upon the fabled street:
A lonely hanson splashes through the rain.
The ghostly gas lamps fail at twenty feet.
Here, though the world explode, these two survive,
And it is always eighteen ninety-five.

WHEREAS, for all those who forever dwell in 1895, it has been a very sad year because Three of the foremost Sherlockian Students of all time John Bennet Shaw, Jeremy Brett and, on March 5, 1996, our own Tennessee Scholar of the Three Pipe Problem, Walter P. ("Birdy Edwards") Armstrong, died; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Armstrong was the son of a prominent attorney. His father served admirably as president of the American Bar Association and his son was a distinguished graduate of Harvard University classes of 1938 and 1941; and

WHEREAS, like the always faithful, good Dr. Watson, a valiant member of the Northumberland Fusiliers, he served his country bravely in its time of need in the United States Army; and

WHEREAS, while in the Army, he published the first of several informative papers on Sherlock Holmes, and in 1994 he published a highly regarded collection of his many informative essays, article and toasts he cleverly entitled *Holmes Range*; and

WHEREAS, a member of the bar since 1941, Mr. Armstrong was a member of the prominent law firm of Armstrong, Allen, Prewitt, Gentry, Johnson and (of course) Holmes, for 56 years and had a large number of Illustrious Clients; and

WHEREAS, a brilliant lawyer, he carefully and meticulously prepared for each case, carefully following the axiom that "It is a mistake to theorize in advance of the facts."; and

WHEREAS, he was one among a select group of attorneys appointed as master by the United States Supreme Court to handle complex legal issues such as offshore rights for several states, including Mississippi and Louisiana and had been specially recognized professionally, with the bar association Lawyer's Lawyer Award; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Armstrong was a distinguished former member of the Memphis Bar Association Board of Directors and served on many special committees of the American Bar Association; and

WHEREAS, in the true spirit of the Volunteer State, Mr. Armstrong generously contributed his time and intelligence to a number of worthwhile endeavors, including admirable service as President of the Memphis Board of Education 1956-1961, as a valued member of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission 1967-1984, as Chairman of the Commission from 1974 to 1975, as President of Memphis Sinfonia, the foreunner of the Memphis Symphony and as President of Theatre Memphis. He also helped to establish the Memphis Arts Council, a group that has played an important role in promoting culture in the community. His diligent support of the arts earned him the illustrious Governor's Award; and

WHEREAS, he was a member of the prestigious Baker Street Irregulars (the world) and a charter member of both the Giant Rats of Sumatra (Memphis) and the Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem (Nashville); and

WHEREAS, he was a regular contributor to *The Baker Street Journal*, with the first of numerous scholarly, informative and entertaining articles appearing in the October, 1946 issue and his last in the September, 1994 issue; and

WHEREAS, his extensive library revealed that at 221 B, with more than 4,000 volumes, including autographed copies of works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, George Santayana, Eugene O'Neill, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Thomas Hardy and signed first editions from William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck; and

WHEREAS, a world renowned oenologist, Walter Armstrong naturally favored wines of a Comet Vintage, especially Chianti, Tokay, Montrachet, served with cold partridge, Sherry and of course, like many Englishmen, a good glass of Port, particularly when it was served at “Chequers”; and.

WHEREAS, to Sherlock Holmes “The Woman” was Irene Adler. In 1949, Walter P. Armstrong married The Woman of his love, life, respect and affection, Alice McKee, who preceded him in death. This happy union produced two successful children: a daughter Alice Kavanaugh Armstrong of Harare, Zimbabwe and a son Preston Sinnott Armstrong of Hanover, New Hampshire and three grand children, and

WHEREAS, Circuit Court Judge Robert Lanier, a long time friend and leader of the Rats, paid tribute to his colleague by stating: “I know it’s a cliché, but he was truly a man for all seasons.”; and

WHEREAS, United States District Court Judge Jon McCalla, who practiced with Mr. Armstrong from 1975 to 1987, said he was his mentor, generous with time and talent, and a “wonderful character and a never-failing compass. There are not many people who achieve as much as he did in so many areas”; and

WHEREAS, Circuit Court Judge Janice Holder said: “He was one of those people who I literally stood in awe of; a man whose integrity and intellect were legendary. I don’t know anyone who didn’t look up to him.”; and

WHEREAS, Circuit Court Judge Wyeth Chandler, a former mayor of Memphis, said: he was “one of our finest attorneys and our finest citizens, who received great national respect as a strong contributor to and advocate of the American Bar; and

WHEREAS, although there is an Empty House in Memphis, Heaven is a little better now that Walter P. Armstrong is with Christopher Morley, Vincent Starrett, Jeremy Brett, John Bennett Shaw and others sitting around a table having learned discussions and an occasional argument over the finer points of the Canon; and

WHEREAS, according to Stephen Doyle, noted Sherlockian and Editor of the *Sherlock Holmes Review*, those rare people, who are widely acknowledged to be true Sherlockians, keep the memory of the Master alive, study the Canon, explore the issues of the Canon and love Sherlock Holmes; Mr. Armstrong did each of these with exceptional intellect, vigor and enthusiasm and did them well; now, therefore;

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we honor the memory of Walter P. Armstrong “one of the best and wisest men we have ever known” whose merits we belatedly publicly recognize. We express our deepest condolences to his family and many friends.



BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That appropriate copies of this resolution be prepared for presentation to each family member named above, to Billy Fields, Chief Investigator, the Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem, in care of the Metropolitan Nashville

Juvenile Court, and to Judge Robert Lanier, Giant Rats of Sumatra, Memphis, with this final clause omitted from such copies.