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A Sleuth of Our Own: A Historical View of Nancy Drew, Girl Detective

By Jeannie A. Ferriss

“It was into this world that Miss Nancy Drew, a well-to-do plucky girl of the twenties, arrived on April 28, 1930, dressed to the nines in smart tweed suits, cloche hats, and fancy dresses... Even the Great Depression would prove to be no match for her” (Rehak as cited in Lefebvre, 2007, pp. 231-2).

She was and is the ideal young woman; smart, independent, fearless, thin, wealthy, athletic and invincible. Nancy Drew charged onto the juvenile literary scene when Edward Stratemeyer, of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, gave Mildred Wirt Benson the outlines for the *Nancy Drew* books just sixteen days before the stock market crash of October 1929 (Lefebvre, 2007). She would be a new kind of female character-independent, exciting, and in charge of her own destiny. Nancy Drew acted on her own and survived to tell about it. In her 1930 debut, Watson (1991) brags that the heroine “drives a convertible, pilots a speedboat, fixes a sprained ankle, repairs a motor, quotes Archimedes and finds a missing will in an old clock” (p.8), all in the first book. She changed forever the way girls looked at themselves and their abilities. No longer would female characters have to sit on the sidelines and wait for the man to rescue them, Nancy rescued herself. This study looks at the evolution of Nancy Drew and the people who created her from 1930 to the present. This is the story of the development and re-invention of a set of detective stories which have never been out of print between 1920 and 2013. Stories written by an old man, a feminist woman author, a CEO of a million dollar empire and more. Stories altered by the flow of historical changes and moral norms. Just who was this Nancy Drew?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the fictional Nancy Drew series including authorship, scholarly analyses, and collections.

Research Questions

- R1. What are the histories of the different authors involved in creating the Nancy Drew character?
- R2. What scholarly books and journal articles analyze the characters or plots of Nancy Drew?
- R3. What academic libraries or archives contain special collections of Nancy Drew books and related materials?

Importance of the Study

This study may assist scholars, librarians and others in understanding the importance of the character Nancy Drew to juvenile literature, both as one of the first independent female role-models for young girls and then as the first serial character in juvenile literature to retain her popularity in print for almost 83 years. This study seeks to understand the evolution of both the character and the authors in maintaining the success of the series for young readers and the market place, while breaking conventional molds of the stereo-typical female character. The study also includes a section on different collections of Nancy Drew books and resources on the Internet.

Literature Review

The Authors

The literature supports the writing of Nancy Drew as stemming from the ideas of Edward Stratemeyer, continuing with the writing of Mildred Wirt Benson, having a brief interlude with Walter Karig, and finally settling on the series author-editor, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams. There is some disagreement about the authorship of the first novel, whether it was Stratemeyer or Benson. Watson (1991) states that Stratemeyer wrote the first three Nancy Drew novels alone (p. 7); while Rehak (2005) presents a strong case that Stratemeyer outlined the main character traits and Benson did the writing for the first three books (p. 114). After Stratemeyer’s death in May 1930, Benson wrote twenty-three of the first thirty books-volumes 1-7, 11-25, and 30. When

Benson refused to write any more books due to the pay cut in ghost writer's salaries during the Depression, Walter Karig wrote volumes 8-11 (*Nancy Drew Sleuth*, p. 2, 2013).

While Benson defines the Drew character in the first 30 books, it is Stratemeyer's daughter Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, who has the longest and most influential effect on the series. *Contemporary Authors Online* (2002) explains that Adams became the senior partner in the Stratemeyer Syndicate in 1930 and continued until her death in 1982. During that time she was also a "designer, plotter, editor, reviser, writer" and more (p.1). After Adams died in 1984 the publishers Simon & Schuster purchased the rights to all of the Stratemeyer Syndicate characters and maintain control of them as of 2002 (p.3).

The most comprehensive source of information on the different authors and their lives is the book *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her* (Rehak, 2005). Rehak takes a detailed view of each of the major personalities and includes many interesting details about Stratemeyer's home life and marriage. According to Rehak, Stratemeyer married Magdalene Van Camp or Lenna as she was known, a bookkeeper with a wicked sense of humor and lively intellect (pp. 8-9). She also describes his brilliant business savvy in landing a salaried job with Street & Smith on the same day his daughter was born.

Watson (1991) takes a look at Edward Stratemeyer through the words of his characters as well as information on writing serials. Watson notes that "there are as many mysteries in Stratemeyer's life as in his stories" (p.3). With no official biography available at the time of Watson's writing, the author takes an informal look at the luckiest incident in Stratemeyer career. In 1898, just a few days after United States naval vessels streamed into Manila Bay in the Philippines, Stratemeyer completed his novel about two boys on a battleship. With just a few changes and the Spanish-American War on the front pages of almost every American newspaper, Stratemeyer released *Under Dewey at Manila*. The book sold out four printings and the publishers were demanding more (p.3).

Individual articles on Carolyn Keene, Edward Stratemeyer, and Harriet Stratemeyer Adams are available through *Contemporary Authors Online*. This source is consistent and precise in detailing the facts concerning individual writers. This source contains a complete listing of all *Nancy Drew* books as well as the complete writings attributed to Carolyn Keene (2007, p.1). The Fisher (2011) contains brief biographical information on the authors and includes pictures of the authors plus an informative timeline. The timeline presents information on events in the author's lives, photographs, illustrations, and important publishing events. It also presents brief information on the main book cover illustrators: Russell H. Tandy, Bill Gillies, and Rudy Nappi (p.2). It was also the only source other than Rehak (2005) to discuss the books by Walter Karig, author of three of the *Nancy Drew* books. Donelson (1978) provides a detailed look at the early publishing career of Edward Stratemeyer including his use of history in retaining the characters from his *Under Dewey at Manila* to create the "Old Glory" series from 1898 to 1901 (p.19).

Ewing (2007) provides a very thorough profile of the second author of the *Nancy Drew* books, Mildred A. Wirt Benson, providing both facts in her professional and private life. Fans of *Nancy Drew* may not realize that Benson also wrote *the Boy Scout Explorers*, *Dana Girls Mystery Stories*, *Madge Sterling series*, *Penny Nichols series*, *Ruth Fielding series*, *Doris Force series*, *Dot and Dash books*, *Flash Evans series*, *Honey Bunch series*, and *Kay Tracey series*; as well as a number of individual titles (pp. 1-3).

Harriet Stratemeyer Adams is the final and longest influence on the *Nancy Drew* series. The literature agrees that she was a remarkable woman with many skills and traits as both a writer and a businesswoman. Lefebvre (2007) discusses her absolute control over the syndicate and the characters. As she became more restrictive of the writing done for the *Nancy Drew* series in the mid-1950's, Adams decided that all writing and editing should be done in house without informing Benson that she no longer had a job (Rehak as cited in Lefebvre, p. 234). The other side of Adams is represented by Caprio (2006) when she states that

the watered-down Nancy Drew of the 1950's was the creation of an Adams who thought that she considered Nancy "too bold and bossy, too positive" (p.5). It is interesting that a woman, who was basically doing a man's job in the publishing world, would still be so ingrained with traditional ideas that she did not see the progressive side to Benson's girl detective. *Contemporary Authors Online* (2002) gives a complete listing of all of Adams's awards, committee positions, and accomplishments. Where normally these achievements would seem to mark a successful career, the fact that Adams was able to accomplish so much in the 1930's is remarkable. A woman's place was in the home, but the reality for Adams was, a woman's place was where Nancy Drew was; and that place was in control of the Stratemeyer Syndicate.

The Characteristics of Nancy Drew

It is her unique personality among fictional characters in children's literature that gives Nancy Drew a continuing place in the market today. Lundin (2003) says she "belongs in the same breath as civil rights and the golden commandment" (p.120). Lundin sees Nancy Drew as an "every girl" but with a unique personality resonating from her role as a female detective. She explores how young girls read, including the role mysteries play in their imagination, within the formation of their moral development, and how danger demands they resolve the roles and conflicts between good and evil (p. 123).

One of the more interesting aspects of the character of Nancy Drew is presented by James P. Jones (1971) in dealing with racial prejudice and the series. Jones makes a strong case for the strong stereotyping done within the books and its effects on young readers in their attitudes towards minorities, especially in Nancy's treatment of them.

Johnson (1994) compares her with the fictional heroine Elsie Dinsmore. She believes that Nancy Drew acquired many of her characteristics from Elsie, even though at first they seem nothing alike. Johnson compares their role as sexually pure "snow maidens, physical similarities, their lack of mothers or siblings and more (pp.1-4). Reid-Walsh and Mitchell (2001) see Nancy Drew in the light of psychological comparisons between the reader and the character.

They describe Nancy as "a knower and a doer", a "whistle-blower" who is in search of the truth" (p.17).

Marshall (2003, p. 203) makes the observation that Nancy Drew is like a time traveler who is periodically revamped and trotted out in various forms during certain eras. She states:

"The many incarnations of Nancy Drew suggest that she is less of a static heroine than a sort of cultural paper doll, who can be cloaked in a variety of lessons about gender and sexuality so that she might fit a particular historical moment and its ideas about girlhood and feminine adolescence."

Chamberlain (1994) sees Nancy as almost four different characters. The first Nancy is feisty, human, and down-to-earth in volumes 1-5. The second Nancy is far less described in the shortened versions of the 1950's volumes. The third Nancy comes with the revisions done by Adams in 1959 when the ethnic stereotypes were edited out along with almost all of the ethnic characters. Finally, the last Nancy is the contemporary Nancy of the 1980's who is concerned about weight loss and fitness (p.3).

It is fascinating that Bierbaum (1994) brings up the character of Nancy Drew and her fictional genre as a battleground for public libraries. She traces the division in library circles about allowing fiction of any type to be added to public library collections because it was not considered "real" literature. Bierbaum notes that series books were "notably absent from the lists (of best books) and awards" (p. 94). Serials were accused of everything from being trash that needed burned to wasting away the lives of young readers. Bad books were considered a bad influence on young readers, and mass production was bad because it limited that amount of time the writer had to give the work any sort of literary merit (p.95).

Boesky (2010) sees Nancy as caught between trying to survive adolescence and deal with the various aspects of modernity such as the Depression, crime, delinquency, career changes and industrial revolutions (p. 185). Forselius (2011) looks at Nancy from a Swedish perspective and compares the series with the popular Puck Larsson character of Swedish

children's fiction. She notes that in 2009 there were still 183 titles from the Nancy Drew series available in Swedish (p. 24). Forselius discusses the first books in both series and compares the characters in different references.

Hamilton-Honey (2012) examines the role librarians had in using their own prejudices against serial fiction to censor collections. She preferred the works of Louisa May Alcott and Martha Finley, with their traditional heroines to the modern heroines of the Stratemeyer series. She observes that in the serials, "children act like adults, make responsible decisions under their own power, and have voice and opinions that are often ignored in real life" (p.773). In a world where few women worked outside the home, children were expected to be seen and not heard, and the father's authority went mostly unchallenged; Nancy Drew was definitely not the normal girl.

Reid-Walsh and Mitchell (2001) observe that readers of *Nancy Drew* books often feel like they are outside watching her. She is an enigma of the adolescent who drives her own car, has no firm parental authority, always knows what to do, and yet is still only a teenager. They also noted that young readers who were asked to describe Nancy often say her as an adult and compared her to parents on television shows (p. 19). She is placed somewhere between 20 and 40 years old (p.20).

Caprio (2006) overview of the transition of Nancy Drew from 1930 through 1979, presents three very distinct personalities. Early Nancy Drew (1930-1940's), Transitional Nancy Drew (1950-1956) and Later Nancy Drew (1950-1979) are all reviewed and the characteristic changes noted in each era.

Rehak (2005) covers the characteristics and their changes through the years in great detail. The most interesting literature review feature is the amount of information on every aspect of Nancy Drew and her creators. There are varying opinions on small issues but the literature is constant in the argument that Nancy Drew is unique to children's literature, she shifted and adapted to the changing times, and she

makes a lasting impression on the young girls that read her.

Methodology

The methodology of this study began with a search on the following databases: *Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, Library Literature and Information Science Full Text, Literary Reference Center, Literature Resource Center, and Project Muse*. Searches on the Internet were also conducted under the terms: Nancy Drew, Edward Stratemeyer, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams and Mildred Wirt Benson. A subject search on the Cook Library catalog led to the discovery of the book *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her* by Melanie Rehak (2005), which was of great use in this study.

The information naturally divided into three categories. First, the historical information about the authors and their backgrounds discussed the different personalities that developed the Nancy Drew series. This information included the development of the Nancy Drew character based on the writing styles and beliefs of the writers who created her throughout the years 1930-2012. Secondly, the information about the character of Nancy Drew and her supporting friends divided into information about her physical characteristics, culture norms and abnormal traits, historical context and continuing evolution from a flapper from the 1930's into the modern girl of today. Thirdly, the information on current collections, historical information, online exhibits, fan clubs and title data were found on the Internet using the search terms listed.

The three sections of this study were then listed in chronological order within each of the first two areas and in order of types of information for the final section. All of the articles, books and Web sites were currently available as of March 2013. Several *Nancy Drew* mysteries were also read in order to understand the syntax of the writing and the continuous formula used in creating the characters.

Results

R1. What are the histories of the different authors involved in creating the Nancy Drew character?

Nancy Drew was the brainchild of Edward Stratemeyer, founder of the Stratemeyer Syndicate. Born in 1862, Stratemeyer was the son of German immigrants who settled in Elizabeth, New Jersey. When his uncle died during the cholera epidemic, his father married his Aunt Anna, who already had three boys. His father and Anna had three more children, including Edward. (Rehak, 2005). His first serious publication came in November 1889 when he published "Victor Horton's Idea" in a children's story paper. The story became a successful series which ran five weeks and helped set the pattern for the twenty-six year old Stratemeyer's writing style. Series became his mainstay, first with the "Old Glory" series and then the "Soldiers of Fortune" series, published from 1900 to 1906 (Donelson, 1978). After publishing five historical series, Stratemeyer turned to series based on working one's way up in the world. These included the *Working Upward*, *Bound to Succeed*, *Stratemeyer Popular* and *American Boy's Biographical* series. He then created several geography-based books that were never very popular. Sports series were his next topic, along with school life. Several of these sets were popular for many years and led to other popular series like the *Lakeport* series. Stratemeyer also created the *Rover Boys* and the *Bobbsey Twin* series around this time. The *Bobbsey Twins* were first published in 1904 and are still popular today. The only serious challenge to Stratemeyer's Syndicate came from Franklin K. Mathiews, Chief Scout Librarian, who opposed serials and created a list of better books for boys. The Boy Scouts of America approved booklist came out during "Safety Week" in 1913 and 1934 included more than 75 works by such authors as Jack London. This effected the Syndicate very little and the actually had a positive result in 1919, when Mathiews persuaded The American Association of Book Publishers to create "National Children's Book Week" (pp.3 5-36).

Watson (1991) calls Stratemeyer a "literary machine" who would churn out 125 different series consisting of 1,300 books between 1900 and 1930. His books sold at 50 cents a copy (down from \$1.25 at his

urging), and over his lifetime over 200 million copies were purchased (p.2). He founded the Stratemeyer Syndicate in 1905 and in 1906 came up with an idea to help work his hundreds of ideas into printable novels. Stratemeyer dictated up to 7,500 words in an eight hour day and yet still could not keep up with the many plots and characters his mind created. His solution was to develop detailed three-page outlines and send the sketches to young authors he met through placing classified ads. The authors then had one month to write the full novel, with Stratemeyer editing the finished product. Stratemeyer insured that none of his authors had a chance to meet by spacing out their appointments. This kept them from having a chance to exchange pseudonyms. The young authors were paid \$50 to \$250 a book but had to give up all rights to the Syndicate and agree never to reveal their true identities.

Into this scenario came a young newspaper reporter named Mildred Augustine Wirt Benson. According to Ewing (2007) Benson was born in Ladora, Iowa and published her first story at fourteen years old. In 1925, she graduated with a B. A. in English from the State University of Iowa. In 1927, Benson would become the first woman to graduate with a master's degree in journalism from the University of Iowa. Her first book for Stratemeyer is the opening volume of the Ruth Fielding series in 1927 under the pen name Alice B. Emerson. In 1928 she married an Associated Press reporter named Asa Wirt and moved to Ohio. From 1930, when she penned the first Nancy Drew novel and the early 1960's, Benson wrote almost 140 children's and young adult novels under her own name in addition to the books she was writing for Stratemeyer. She even initiated several of the series herself, including the *Honey Bunch* books and the *Dot and Dash* series (p.4).

Benson's vision of Nancy Drew was according to Fisher (2011), the embodiment of the feisty spirit of independence. Benson was tired of the "namby-pamby" characters and writing styles of previous children's books. She wanted to create a character that emanated her own beliefs that girls could do anything boys could do. It was the way she lived her life and it reflected in the adventures of her most

popular character. The fact that she wrote the first Nancy Drew book at the age of 24 cannot help but add a youthful, independent side to her writing and her characters.

Ewing (2007) continues to explain that she acquired the name Benson after her husband died and she married the editor of the *Toledo Times* (George Benson) for whom she was working. Benson was inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame, the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame and received the University of Iowa Distinguished Alumni Award in 1994. In acknowledgement of her contributions to the development and creation of Nancy Drew, Simon and Shuster along with Grosset and Dunlap, the owners of the Nancy Drew franchise; officially, legally and publicly announced that Mildred Wirt Benson was the original Carolyn Keene. Benson passed away on May 28, 2002 at the age of 95.

For a brief interlude, Walter Karig became Carolyn Keene. Fisher (2011) shares the brief history of the journalist who served in World War I and wrote volumes 8-10. He wrote other books for the syndicate, including the *Perry Pierce* mystery series but fell out of grace with the Stratemeyer Syndicate when he revealed his authorship to the Library of Congress in the 1930's. It was a strict policy among the authors that all ghostwriters would be paid a one-time fee for their work and would never reveal their true identities. It was in their contracts and these releases provided the Stratemeyer Syndicate with all rights to the stories they wrote. According to Rehak (2005) Harriet Stratemeyer, who was in control of the syndicate at the time, was furious. When Karig demanded credit for the Nancy Drew books he had written, the Library of Congress assumed he had written all the books in the series. Stratemeyer provided the Library of Congress with the outlines of the books as proof that the syndicate had written the books. Through her persistence, she was able to convince the Library of Congress that the true identity of Carolyn Keene would remain a secret. Rehak states "unable to explain the complicated process that brought a Stratemeyer book into being, Harriet simply wrote Karig out of the production chain altogether" (p. 188).

Harriet Stratemeyer Adams was the oldest child of Edward Stratemeyer and his wife Lennie. Rehak (2005) accounts that Stratemeyer felt as if she grew up in a "story-book house" with her father trying out his ideas on both of his daughters throughout the day (p.12). Stratemeyer attended college and found herself in a horrific situation when the College Hall caught fire on March 17, 1914. Stratemeyer went into the burning building with several other students and began caring out valuables. This was a real life Nancy Drew adventure and Stratemeyer was praised by the local press for her behavior. After graduating from Wellesley College in 1914, Stratemeyer married Russell Vroom Adams, an investment banker in 1915. She had been offered several teaching positions, including one at Wellesley, but her father insisted she turn them down. He saw a much more traditional role for her as a wife and mother. The couple had four children and Adams compromised her wish for employment by working from home for her father. According to *Contemporary Authors Online* (2002) she became a senior partner at the Stratemeyer Syndicate when her father died in 1930. She held many positions there, including writing multiple volumes for the *Tom Swift*, *Hardy Boys*, *Bobbsey Twins*, *Dana Girls* and *Nancy Drew* series.

Adams received many honors and awards during her lifetime. According to *Contemporary Authors Online* they included a certificate of appreciation from the New Jersey Congress of Parent and Teachers in 1978, an honorary doctorate from Kean college and Upsala College, Annual Alumnae Achievement Award from Wellesley College, the Mother of the year Citation, National Mother's Day Committee, a special Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America and two citations from New Jersey Institute of Technology besides a certificate of merit from the American Red Cross.

But it was her love of Nancy Drew that most interested Adams. As head of the Stratemeyer Syndicate from 1930 to 1982, she had uncontrollable power in changing the character and plots of all the serial books under her control. It was due to her extensive revising that Nancy Drew remained in print

as a modern detective, but it was also her revising that tamed Nancy into a more traditional female character who depended on her boyfriend for help and was not nearly as risk-taking. Adams often referred to her as her “daughter” and once told *People* magazine that “her fictional daughter always does and says what I tell her to” (*People* as cited in *Contemporary Authors Online*, 2002, p.3).

In 1959 Adams undertook to update Nancy Drew and edit out old racial stereotypes. She updated basic elements as cars, speech, historic data and fashion giving the characters a fresh and modern look. It was Adams who saw the need to include different media forms such as movies and television shows. She expanded the series to include board games, cookbooks, and paperback books featuring *Nancy Drew* and the *Hardy Boys* among others. It was also under her leadership that the company negotiated with Simon & Schuster to create new books for her most popular characters. When Adams passed away of a heart attack in 1982, while watching the *Wizard of Oz*, the publishers bought the syndicate, insuring the continuation of America’s most popular children’s series.

R2. What scholarly books and journal articles analyze the characters or plots of Nancy Drew?

She could have been Stella Strong, Diana Drew, Diana Dare or Nan Nelson, but Nancy Drew won out and a girl detective is created. According to Rehak (2005) Edward Stratemeyer saw her in his original outline, as a 16 year old girl, the daughter of an older, widowed District Attorney who let her listen in on other detectives and his cases. She is to be a modern American girl “at her best, bright, clever, resourceful and full of energy” (p. 1). Mason (as cited in Carolyn Keene, 2013) describes her as “immaculate and self-possessed as a Miss America on tour. She is as cool as Mata Hari and as sweet as Betty Crocker” (p. 11).

Caprio (2006) explains that even her name speaks to young readers of power. “Drew”, as in drawing a bow, a salary, or draw and quarter someone; connotes competition and power. It also brings to mind grace as when someone drew a picture or drawing someone like a bee to honey. Her name is

powerful and emanates control. Would Nancy Drew really be the same quick-thinking super heroine if her name were Honey Smith or Muffy Jones? Everything about her is crafted to illustrate that this is no ordinary girl. Forselius (2011) states that her independent spirit and fearlessness made the Nazis ban all Nancy Drew books in Norway during the occupation.

Forselius also compares the best traits of the original Nancy Drew which inspired the Swedish girl heroine Puck Larsson in the 1940’s. According to Forselius (2011) both girls are the same age, live at home, are self-sufficient, smart, pretty, and beat the authorities every time in solving the cases (p.32). Chamberlain (1994) calls her “intelligent, confident, capable, talented, and attractive.” But she contends that all of these traits make her almost perfect and cause a very negative effect on young readers. She states that Nancy Drew readers have the unrealistic message of “have your cake and eat it too.” Chamberlain says that girl readers are told they can be “independent and dependent without drawbacks, help the disadvantaged and remain capitalists, be both elitist and democratic, be both adult and child, and be both “liberated” women and “Daddys’ little girls (p. 3). There is literally nothing Nancy cannot do. In *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Nancy repairs a boat, fixes a flat tire, drives safely through a thunderstorm, gives first aid to an injured character and offers a psychological diagnosis (Keene as cited in Chamberlain, p. 3).

The portrayal of such an independent young woman resonated with thousands of young girls in the 1930’s. However, not everyone agrees with the presentation of such a popular character. Marshall (2003) states that the literary construction of Nancy Drew during the first five years of publication reduced Nancy, the All-American girl to a “slim, white, middle-class, and heterosexual body” (p. 203). Marshall also states that the 1930’s were a decade “in which the fears about homosexuality caused a social panic” (p. 207). In that cultural climate, how could Nancy Drew be anything but a heterosexual girl and expect to be published in a series for children?

It is Boesky (2010) that offers an interesting analysis on the popularity of Nancy Drew. Even during the height of the Depression, Nancy Drew books sold briskly. They were an escape from the cruelties of the worst economic times the world had yet to experience. Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys were “idealized adolescent protagonists with phenomenal yet recognizable skills; they were competent problem-solvers able to set a disordered world right again” (p. 189). Bad people are bad in the books and the good people always catch them. Nancy is always able to use her intuition to identify criminals by bad posture, foreign accents and lower class vocabulary. Just as the Mounties always get their man, Nancy Drew always solves the crime and brings the criminals to justice.

One of more unpleasant sides of the original Nancy Drew is presented in her relationships with ethnic characters in the books. According to Jones (1971) the series presents ethnic characters in a very negative light such as “negroes are menials who speak incorrect English” and are “inclined toward crime, strong drink, and they ‘shuffle’” (p. 121). Jones explores the representation of ethnic characters in a series that was read by thousands of impressionable young girls while acknowledging the culture in which the series was created. His focus is on the first 17 books published between 1930 to 1941. In these books, seventeen Negroes are identified, many of them insignificant characters that are merely background padding. Only four of them participate in the action and only four are given names. The majority of the characters are portrayed as servants or have menial jobs such as elevator starters or porters. The language of the ethnic characters is filled with slang, slurred or dropped endings, double negatives and portray their speakers as stupid, childlike or slow. Nancy often finds her dealings with them almost as an encounter between master and servant or they are the criminals in the plots. While the white villains are evil they are never involved with strong drink, whereas the character of Jeff Tucker is arrested multiple times by the sheriff for drinking. Jones also states that it would be simple for a child reader in 1935 to be terrified of a black Negro woman who resembled the “old negress” who

had threatened blond, blue-eyed, brave Nancy Drew (p.125).

Chamberlain (1994) notes that Nancy Drew represents the “white, upper middle-class world” that her readers either occupy or want to occupy. She thinks in terms of clear-cut morality and thrives in her material world of fast cars, fashionable clothes and strict social strata. There is a right and wrong side of the tracks in her world and those on the wrong side will never socially cross paths with Nancy and her friends, except in a negative or sympathetic light. As the series progresses class distinctions are less obvious but they remain by the very nature of the newer books settings. The later books are often set in expensive private schools, riding stables, or vacation resorts. Chamberlain states “the message is clear; poor people and menial workers are outcasts from “reputable” society and legitimate objects of suspicion” (p. 7).

In the 1950’s, people were changing and felt the Nancy Drew books were dated and old-fashioned. The treatment of minorities was out of place with the many Americans who had fought in the Second World War and saw racial hatred first hand in the concentration camps. Adams decided to revise the first books and bring them into the current culture. There were differing opinions on the affect Adams had on the character of Nancy Drew and her relationship with ethnic characters Her solution was to write them out of the books. Rehak (2005) states that she just “got rid” of any ethnic characters and feels that it may have been the easiest way to deal with the racial bias; but it was not the most appropriate. It may have been easier but it watered down the diversity necessary to reach any type of realistic plot. America was and is a country of many different types of people. Nancy Drew suddenly lived in a very dull world. Rehak does state that it was time constraints which forced Adams to remove the ethnic characters but seems a missed opportunity that she did not revise the stories to include new and more modern ethnic characters. Because of their popularity, the books could have made headway in disseminating racial stereotypes instead of perpetuating them. Jones (1971), states that this

series offers a prime example of the role of children's literature in "the enforcement of adult attitudes toward minority groups" (p. 125).

Caprio (2006) describes the changes made in the 1950's as "transitional Nancy". This time period covers 1950-56 when Benson only wrote one of the eight books issued, Tandy withdrew from illustrating the covers and several changes are created to bring her into the post-war world. It is during this time that she is allowed to drive legally by turning 18, changes her appearance into a svelte bobbysoxer and learns to do a lot of gasping at the villains.

Chamberlain (1994), states that the later Nancy Drew of the 1950's and after "ended up as more of a line drawing instead of a fully realized portrait." Adams shortened the plots by sometimes as much as 40 pages and softened Nancy from the "bold and bossy" character she thought Benson had made her. Chamberlain laments that the changes resulted in "weaker literature but stronger potential for myth" (p. 4). Readers of Nancy Drew have always been young girls setting on the edge of young adulthood. Nancy's complete confidence and ability to be in control of every situation, and yet always have adult protection when needed, is an ambiguous state most teenagers would love to be in. Chamberlain feels that most young readers are so comfortable with Nancy Drew because she is both adult and child, protected and free. Her mysteries are solved but she will go on forever to the next case.

Ludin (2003) says that the continuing appeal of Nancy Drew comes from her constant "enactment of the defeat of evil by good" (p. 125). The reader is guaranteed that Nancy will get her man, or woman, in the end. The implausibility of the plots does not matter, for the reader is along only for the adventure. The fact that in *The Secret of the Old Clock* (as cited in Ludin, p. 125), Nancy Drew saves a little girl, who is almost run over by a speeding van that later is found to contain stolen goods, is just all part of the fun. Reality is not essential to series fiction, only the illusion of it is.

R3. What academic libraries or archives contain special collections of Nancy Drew books and related materials?

While many children's collections contain volumes of the Stratemeyer series, there were several Web sites and collections of particular interest to Nancy Drew fans. The first is the Nancy Drew Sleuth site (www.nancydrewsleuth.com/) under the direction of Jennifer Fisher. Fisher is a writer and historian of Nancy Drew, along with being the consultant on the 2007 Warner Brothers movie *Nancy Drew*. The Web site consists of Nancy Drew trivia, histories of the books and authors, information on book identifications and values, and fan club membership information. It is set up not only for children but also contains information useful to an adult collector.

The University of Southern Mississippi Cook Library is home to the De Grummond Children's Literature Collection is located in Hattiesburg, Mississippi (http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/degrum/public_html/html/aboutus-welcome.shtml). Along with housing over 185 original books from the 1930's, one of the more interesting items of Nancy Drew memorabilia is the work of George Edward Stanley, who wrote #155 of the *Nancy Drew* series, entitled *Mystery in Tornado Alley*. The collection also includes the original book typescript, revised versions of the book, and the contract for the book. One of the items preserved in the collection is a copy of the writing guidelines for the Nancy Drew series in the year 2000.

Another unique Nancy Drew collection is housed in the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa Libraries in (<http://collguides.lib.uiowa.edu/?!WA0093>). This Web site includes a finding guide, biographical note on the collection and content description. The physical collection contains videocassettes of the 1993 conference on Nancy Drew, programs, newspaper articles, posters, and artifacts.

University of Maryland Libraries Special Collections department has created a Web page to showcase their exhibition *Girls Series Books Rediscovered: Nancy Drew and Friends*

(<http://www.lib.umd.edu/RARE/SpecialCollection/nancy/collection.html>). The collection is based on the Rose and Joseph Pagnani Collection that was donated to the University of Maryland Libraries Special collections in 1998. The exhibit was created in 2005 to celebrate the 75th year of publishing of the Nancy Drew series. The Web page hosts links on formula fiction, the authors of Nancy Drew, and photographs of the actual exhibit.

Conclusion

Nancy Drew is a continuing heroine to thousands of young girls 83 years after the publication of her first book. She represents everything a modern young woman strives to be: independent, feisty, smart, analytical, beautiful, athletic and intelligent. For girls in the 1930's, she empowered them with her fearless sense of adventure and free spirit. The authors who shaped her were themselves cultural trend setters, from Edward Stratemeyer's boundless imagination to Mildred Wirt Benson's fiery independence, Nancy Drew was created to lead others. When Harriet Stratemeyer Adams took over the Nancy Drew character, she tamed her but did not destroy her spirit. Nancy flows through time, changing with each generation, and inspiring new future detectives in the year 2013.

The testament to her endurance continues in university and college collections, public libraries, book stores, and online celebrations of her creators and books. Conferences are held in her honor and new media continue to introduce her to new readers, in the form of movies, DVD's, games, series and more. Nancy Drew is eternally young and always on the case. She changed the way young girls saw their cultural limitations. She defied girls to be more than society would let them be and rejoice in their own unique place in the ever-changing world around them. Though banned by librarians for not being "real literature"; Nancy Drew lives on in the world today, still inspiring those who love her.

References (Annotated)

1. Bierbaum, E. G. (1994). Bad books in series: Nancy Drew in the public library. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 18(1), 92-102.

This article is an interesting history of the validity of serial books in children's literature and in children's collections within public libraries. Bierbaum discusses the effects of fiction on children from 1876 to the present and the case of the *Nancy Drew* series in particular. The article notes that the *Nancy Drew* books were "notably absent" from the normal lists of awards and were considered "nonbooks" by many library professionals and parents (p. 94).

History, as shown in this writing, paints the books as everything from bad books to destroying the ability of children understanding right from wrong. It is a fascinating look at early library censorship through non-purchase of materials and the power children's librarians hold over collection development. It also includes data charts concerning the number of *Nancy Drew* books in libraries throughout the country by date and in comparison to other children's fiction books.

2. Boesky, A. (2010). Solving the crime of modernity: Nancy Drew in 1930. *Studies in the Novel*, 42(1/2), 186-201.

Boesky focuses on the first three *Nancy Drew* novels published in the early 1930's and the role that adolescence as an age group played in their formation. According to Boesky, youth between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four were not considered a separate population category until psychologist and educator Stanley Hall invented this unique phase of life.

The author argues that the biggest factor separating this age group from other ages was the creation of American high schools combined with the raising of the mandatory attendance age for school age children to sixteen. By the 1930's this shift removed a large number of teenagers from the workforce at a time when adult men were unable to find jobs to support their families. The link between teenagers and delinquency is discussed in detail along with the first three volumes in the *Nancy Drew* series.

3. Caprio, B. (1992). *The mystery of Nancy Drew: Girl sleuth on the couch*. Trabuco Canyon, Calif.: Source Books.

Caprio discovers the differences in the character of Nancy Drew as the series progresses over a seventy year period. She traces the earliest version of Nancy, written from the outlines of Edward Stratemeyer, by Mildred Wirt (Benson) to the Nancy of the 1990's. The author is an admirer of the early novels but presents the later versions as "watered-down shadows of the original character" (p. 1). Caprio also discusses the different spinoffs of Nancy Drew available to modern readers.

4. Carolyn Keene. (2007). *Contemporary Authors Online*. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale.

This information contains a complete listing of all writings attributed to the authors using the name Carolyn Keene, including those written with Frank Dixon. The article gives a short history of the Stratemeyer Syndicate series "stars" as well as a history of the character of Nancy Drew. Features include the use of Nancy Drew as a role model for young girls, the evolution of her character and a section on the relationship between Nancy and her father. A bibliography at the end of the article lists books and articles for further reading. A paragraph on media adaptations is also helpful as it not only includes titles of movies and television series, but also the release dates for the public.

5. Chamberlain, K. (1994). The secrets of Nancy Drew: Having their cake and eating it too. *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature*, 18(1), 1-12.

Chamberlain states that Nancy Drew has in fact "fossilized over time" while her books began creating disturbing images of class and gender that continue today (p.2). The author argues that the character of Nancy Drew has not really changed since the first mystery was published in 1930 except with cosmetic changes such as fashion, language, hairstyles and cars. The majority of the article concentrates on the dual personality of Nancy and how readers may have

any point of view they wish to create about her. Chamberlain writes that readers may have both: independence and domestic protection, freedom and security, a father who provides finances and security but never interferes with her cases, and a housekeeper who handles all of the daily chores has no authority as a parent. The author examines how these scenarios affect the plots, the readers and the myth of being Nancy Drew.

6. Donelsen, K. (1978). Nancy, Tom and assorted friends in the Stratemeyer syndicate then and now. *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association*, 7, 14-44.

Donelsen creates a lengthy history of Edward Stratemeyer and his syndicate, which includes a history of the development of the *Nancy Drew* series. One of the most interesting characteristics of this article is the use of extended quotations from individual books within the series the author is discussing. The quotes enhance the arguments the author makes about the changes each series undergoes during the time span of its publication. An example of this are the small changes in Nancy Drew's world such as the metamorphosis of the Black caretaker into a tall skinny white man, the aging of Nancy from 16 to 18, and the altering of Nancy's personality to conform more to ideals of Harriet Stratemeyer Adams. The article also touches on the fight between librarian Margaret Heckman and the readers, when she announced three major reasons that no *Nancy Drew* book deserves a place in a public library.

7. Ewing, J. (2007). Mildred A. Wirt. *Guide To Literary Masters & Their Works*. Toledo, OH: Great Neck Publishing.

More than just a basic biographic entry, Ewing includes small details about Wirt, later Mildred Benson, that help define the woman who wrote more than 140 juvenile and young adult books. One example of his detailed account is the fact that Benson gave up her writing career in order to work full-time as a court reporter. The entry includes a listing of all of Benson's books, as well as the pen

names under which they are written, as well as information about her personal life. It is an impressive resume for someone who never received more than \$250 a book from the Stratemeyer Syndicate or any right to royalties of any type.

8. Fisher, J. (2011). Nancy Drew History. Retrieved from <http://www.nancydrewsleuth.com/>

This Web site is named in many of the articles used in this paper, even though it is maintained and operated by the president of the Nancy Drew Sleuths, a fan club. Fisher appeared on *Good Morning America*, speaks around the country, edits *The Sleuth* (the official magazine of the fan club) and was the coordinator for the Nancy Drew 75th/Stratemeyer Syndicate 100th Conference in New York City. This Web site includes a history of the series, collecting Nancy Drew books and collectibles, blogs, links and research, and a variety of categories for Nancy Drew fans. Also included is a detailed timeline of major events in the Nancy Drew world.

9. Forselius, T. M. (2011). Probing pioneer girl sleuths: Puck Larsson and Nancy Drew in 1950s girls' book series in Sweden. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 35(1), 24-46.

Taking Nancy Drew to a more global level, Forselius discusses the similarities between Nancy Drew and her Swedish counterpart, Puck Larsson. The character of Puck Larsson was published in Sweden and was the first teenaged girl detective series written originally in Swedish, a year after the first Nancy Drew book appeared. Forselius is interested in "both the method of impact and in the 'machinery' of the subgenre and the reader appeal" (p. 25). This article gives a detailed comparison of both characters from the point of view of both a fan and a scholar.

10. Hamilton-Honey, E. (2012). Guardians of morality: Librarians and American girls' series fiction, 1890-1950. *Library Trends*, 60(4), 765-785.

According to Hamilton-Honey, there was a contentious relationship between the "first few generations of librarians and series fiction for girls"

(p. 765). This article traces the relationship of these institutions, such as the American Library Association, which see themselves as the keepers of proper literature for young girls, and the writers of series such as the *Nancy Drew* books, who were creating daring heroines which did not reflect conservative ideals. The article contains a revealing history of the relationship between girl's serial fiction, and the concerns of the newly created profession of librarianship.

11. Harriet Stratemeyer Adams. (2002). *Contemporary Authors Online*. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2002.

This article is a basic biographical entry on Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, the daughter of Edward Stratemeyer, and the controlling force behind Nancy Drew's character after her father's death. It contains personal information, including the fact that she passed away at from a fatal heart attack while watching the "Wizard of Oz" for the first time in her 80's. It contains a listing of awards, career writings, and highlights of her life and a copy of her obituary. Further readings are listed in both books and periodicals. It is also interesting to note she was a member of many press and professional organizations, in addition to her writing and raising four children.

12. Johnson, D. (1994). Nancy Drew -- A Modern Elsie Dinsmore? *Lion and the Unicorn*, 18(1), 13-24.

Johnson compares the "assertive super sleuth" Nancy Drew to the pious, passive character of Elsie Dinsmore. Johnson compares both characters relationships with their fathers, lack of mothers in the home, physical appearance, suffering for righteousness and lack of siblings. Referring to both characters as "snow maidens", Johnson discusses the lack of interest in romance or sex as well as their abilities to "have everything, do everything and outshine everyone" (pp. 4-5). Although both fictional characters seem to have nothing in common at first glance, Johnson provides a winning argument that they share a great deal in common.

13. Jones, J. P. (1971). Negro stereotypes in children's literature: The case of Nancy Drew. *Journal of Negro Education*, 40(2), 121-125.

It is Jones' contention that the *Nancy Drew* books written between 1930 and 1941 portrayed Negroes (Jones' word) as "menials who speak incorrect English" and were almost always criminals who drank strong liquor and shuffled everywhere they went (p. 121). The article also points out numerous examples of ethnic stereotyping of other groups, which influenced young readers devoted to the books. The author focuses in on the seventeen books where "Negroes" are specifically identified noting that only four are given names (p. 121). The characters are represented as maids, porters, cooks, criminals and other subservient and undesirable types. It is interesting that the author makes no mention of the fact that these stereotypes were not confined to the *Nancy Drew* series but were, unfortunately, common representations of African-Americans in all forms of media from films to radio programs.

14. Lefebvre, B. (2007). Writing and rewriting Nancy Drew, girl detective. *Children's Literature*, 35, 230-238.

Although the article is a review of *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her* by Melanie Rehak, it is included because of the information the author provides about the more controversial areas of the book. The book is used as a resource for many of the articles about Nancy Drew and Lefebvre brings up areas of frustration in the book citations and references that affect the volume as a source for researchers. For example, Rehak blends two well-known reviewers as "one critic" and refers to Nancy Pickard, a respected mystery writer as "another adoring fan" (p. 237).

15. Lundin, A. H. (2012). Everygirl's good deeds: The heroics of Nancy Drew. *The Lion and the Unicorn: a Critical Journal of Children's Literature*, 27(1), 120-130.

Lundin seeks to discover the effects of *Nancy Drew* books on the reading patterns of young female

readers and the influence of the books on future reading choices made by the same audience. She looks at the roles mysteries play in the imagination of young female readers as well as the effect, if any, on their moral development. Lundin sees the heroine's benevolence toward the circle of victims as a way which "leads her to unravel the mystery through the providence of Good Deeds" almost as a knight in shining armor (p. 124). Lundin also studies the role of community service and how it resonates with mystery-series readers of mid-elementary age. She explores the role Nancy Drew plays in helping children see the "concrete enactment of the defeat of evil by good" and her power to "remedy wrongs that exemplify the idealism of youth" (p. 125). This is an excellent source on the character, morality, and personality that became the fictional Nancy Drew.

16. Marshall, E. (2002). Red, white, and Drew: The all-American girl and the case of gendered childhood, *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 27(4), 203-211.

Marshall states that her essay focuses on "the lessons learned about gender and sexuality, the girlhood pedagogies, which inform the representation of Nancy Drew during the first five years of the series, from 1930-1935" (p. 203). She then proceeds to discuss Nancy's weight, sexuality, size, racism, personality and friends. There is a detailed section on the relationship between Nancy and the other characters as well as an assessment on the role of Carson, her father, and Ned, her boyfriend.

17. Rehak, M. (2005). *Girl sleuth: Nancy Drew and the women who created her*. New York: Harcourt, Inc.

This book is a history of Nancy Drew and the two women who created her: Mildred Wirt Benson and Harriet Stratemeyer Adams. Taking the creating of the series from the first outlines of Edward Stratemeyer, to the revisions of the 1950's, to the seventy-fifth birthday of the first book release; Rehak traces the evolution of both the authors and their creation. The book is well documented, but the reference information is all included at the end, causing the reader to look back and forth for

information on the sources. At the same time, the placement of the research information causes the book to be read almost as a novel. Overall it contains an excellent overview of the history and creation of the *Nancy Drew* series.

18. Reid-Walsh, J., & Mitchell, C. (2001). The Case of the whistle-blowing girls: Nancy Drew and her readers. *Textual Studies in Canada*, 13/14, 15.

This article focuses on the readers, past and present, of the *Nancy Drew* series. The authors concentrate on female readers between the ages of seven and nine who are referred to as “whistle blowers” because they say what they think. This article’s approach gives an interesting look at what readers really think about the books.

19. University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa Women’s Archives. (2005). Nancy Drew Collection. Retrieved from <http://collguides.lib.uiowa.edu/?IWA0093>

This Web site is a finding guide to the *Nancy Drew Collection*, a part of the Special Collections department of the Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries. The collection includes three different sections: Mildred Wirt Benson, Conference files, and Nancy Drew Ephemera. The materials contain information, speeches, etc. from *The Nancy Drew Conference* hosted by the University of Iowa in 1993. Information on the contents of the archive is in standard archival format. The contents of this archive are of great use to researchers but clearly not intended for recreational browsing. The site now includes biographical notes on the conference and Mildred Wirt Benson.

20. University of Maryland, Special Collections. (2008). Girls series books rediscovered: Nancy Drew and friends. Retrieved from <http://www.lib.umd.edu/RARE/SpecialCollection/nancy/collection.html>

Nancy Drew is just one of the characters featured in this special collection of girl’s series, *The Rose and Joseph Pagnani Collection: Girl’s Series from 1917 to the Present*. The collection contains over 300 books

from 33 different girl’s series. This Web site also features numerous online exhibits covering different aspects of Nancy Drew from *The Evolution of Nancy Drew* to *Girl Sleuth: Formula Fiction*. Online exhibits include original book covers, author information, links and original illustrations.

21. University of Southern Mississippi Libraries, de Grummond Children’s Literature Collection. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/degrum/public_html/html/aboutus-welcome.shtml

One of the more interesting items of Nancy Drew memorabilia is housed in this collection is the work of George Edward Stanley, who wrote #155 of the *Nancy Drew* series, entitled *Mystery in Tornado Alley*. Included in his papers is the original typescript, revised versions of the book, the contract for the book, and a piece of information very exciting to researchers and historians. One of the papers contained in Stanley’s collection is a copy of the writing guidelines for the series in the year 2000. The de Grummond Collection also houses 185 books, including copies of several *Nancy Drew* books from the 1930’s.

22. Watson, B. (1991). Tom Swift, Nancy Drew and pals all had the same dad. *Smithsonian*, 22(7), 50-59.

This article chronicles the career of Edward Stratemeyer, author and creator of the Nancy Drew character. Stratemeyer became the head of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, which turned out inexpensive children’s serials by the hundreds, including *Tom Swift*, *Nancy Drew*, and the *Bobbsey Twins*. Descriptions of all of his major characters are included as well as a view of his strategy for successful serial publishing. The article also includes photographs of various characters and the author.

Works cited by others

Keene, C. (1930). *The secret of the old clock*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap.

Mason, B. A. (1995). *The girl sleuth*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.