

The Patriot Ledger

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Weymouth's piece of whodunit history gets a new home

The Tufts Library has loaned a hidden gem to Boston College to add to its collection of the papers of Rex Stout, who wrote 46 detective books between 1934 and 1975..

WEYMOUTH – Famed detective Nero Wolfe is wrapped up in another mystery more than four decades after the man who created him died.

In 1943, an anonymous donor gave the Tufts Library in Weymouth a typed manuscript of author Rex Stout's "Black Orchids" featuring the slow-footed but quick thinking sleuth and his legman Archie Goodwin.

The manuscript remained locked away for decades, its existence unknown to anyone save for a handful of library employees. That is, until Friday when the library loaned the manuscript over to the Burns Library at Boston College to add to its collection of Stout's papers.

"It wasn't cataloged. It just sat here for decades," Weymouth Library Director Rob MacLean said. "This will bring it out of the shadows and have a spotlight on it in the premiere collection of Rex Stout papers in the world."

Stout authored 46 books featuring the overweight detective and his wisecracking sidekick between 1934 and 1975. Wolfe and Goodwin foiled murders, Nazi spies and even the FBI. The books sold more than 45 million copies by the time Stout died a month after publishing the detective team's final appearance.

"Black Orchids" was published in 1942. The following year, the typed manuscript was a prize at a War Bonds rally at Quincy High School, which Stout attended as part of his energetic efforts to support the war effort. The person who won the prize lived in Weymouth and donated it to the library.

The 206 thin typewriter paper pages sat in a manila envelope tied with a red ribbon since then. The envelope also contained a hand-drawn mockup of the book's cover and a typed list of Wolfe and Goodwin's other adventures to be printed on the inside cover.

Last spring, MacLean started looking for a better home for the manuscript. A quick Google search turned up the Burns Library's collection of Stout's papers and he reached out to the Burns' librarian Christian Dupont. After several months of discussion, the two sides worked out an agreement for a 25-year loan of the manuscript to the Burns Library.

Dupont said the library was unaware that the manuscript existed.


"We were quite surprised," he said. "We don't want things like this sitting in a vault where nobody knows about them. It's great to let experts and people with an interest see them."



PHOTO/ GARY HIGGINS/THE PATRIOT LEDGER

Tufts Library Director Rob MacLean shows a typed manuscript by popular 1940s detective story author Rex Stout. The manuscript was auctioned off as part of a War Bonds rally in Quincy in 1943. The manuscript will be loaned to Boston College, which has a collection of the author's works, Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2016.





Rob MacLean
Tufts Library Director

Dupont said Stout isn't as well known as some of his contemporary whodunit writers like Agatha Christie, but Wolfe and Goodwin have held onto a dedicated fan base.

Of particular interest to Stout devotees will be whether there are any differences between the manuscript and the final published version, Dupont said. The manuscript should be available for public viewing at the Boston College library soon.

As for who originally gave the manuscript to the Weymouth library, that's likely to remain a mystery worthy of Wolfe's formidable investigative prowess.

"We have no idea, not even whispers among the staff of who donated it," MacLean said. "If anyone out in Ledgerland knows, it would be interesting to find out."

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