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CHE-NA-WAH-WEITCH-AH-WAH.

in Her Wedding Dress

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Cover image: Che-na-wah Weitch-ah-wah (Yurok), also known as Lucy Thompson, is featured in the book she authored, *To the American Indian* (Cummins Print Shop, 1916). This is one of the first books written by a Northwest Native woman. For more information about this book and other books written by indigenous authors, see Robert Walls' article beginning on page 6.

Identifying Rex Stout First Editions: What happens when the conventional wisdom is flummery?

By: John Kaperick

Introduction

I've been a collector of Rex Stout books for over 40 years now, an incredible journey that was initially analog and migrated to digital as the technology and resources advanced and got organized. In the early days it was visiting the Tacoma Public Library locations near our home and the Waldenbooks at the Tacoma Mall. The early days were mostly focused on paperback books, which is what was most widely available. I had no knowledge of independent bookstores, whatever processes were available at the time for finding books, nor did I have any real ability to devote as much time to it as would have been needed. My main focus was on school and grades and hanging out with friends. I honestly wasn't even aware that Rex Stout had passed away a few years earlier, nor did I have any idea about the magnitude of the body of work he had shared with the world. Socrates said, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.", and I certainly knew little about collecting books. All I had was a willingness to learn.

I remember searching for information in the days before the Internet, using card catalogs and other resources at the library, and finding Archie (the search) in the early days of computers being available for general use, as well as the early days of my career with the federal government. Dialog and other systems were available, if you knew how to use them, and some information could be found about what books were published. It wasn't until the mid-90s that the Internet (World Wide Web) was available and web browsers like Mosaic and others came to existence. Sherlock Holmes said, "The game is afoot.", and that was certainly true when the search engines came to life and more and more information became available online. Finding information about Rex Stout, his books, and what a first edition was, and how to identify it, still took some time to develop.

I had some very frustrating, and often entertaining, learning experiences in my yearning for Rex Stout books over time. My daughter still remembers some of those times when I was talking about how this person or that person was selling things that aren't what they say they are. In most cases it probably wasn't deliberate, but rather the lack of useful knowledge and guidance that I hope to supplement for the betterment of booksellers, book collectors, and book lovers everywhere. The profit in this adventure is not in monetary, but rather knowledge expansion, efforts. The goal is for anyone who wants it to have the ability to be certain what they are buying, selling, or collecting is what they thought it was. Pain shared is pain lessened, or so they say. I can hear my sister, watching me from heaven, saying, "Stop complaining and do something about it."



Rex Stout Novels Part I

The author's collection of Rex Stout novels.



Rex Stout Short Story Collections

Short stories...



Rex Stout Novels Part II

omnibus volumes...



Rex Stout Omnibus Volumes

Rex Stout Other



Rex Stout Later and Book Club Editions



Rex Stout Viking Novel Book Club Editions

and book club editions.



Rex Stout Short Story Collection and Omnibus Volume Book Club Editions

Rex Stout published books with many different publishers in his lifetime, but his main three publishers in America were Vanguard Press, Farrar & Rinehart, and Viking Press. There were other publishers for limited volumes, British versions, etc. I am covering only the main three and a few others in this article as I have little to no information on the rest. The primary focus is on Viking Press, which is the greatest body of work for Rex Stout. The guidance is provided through a variety of sources, which are all listed in the references at the end of the article.

Conventional Wisdom vs. Reality

Hillary Austen said, "When your efforts run in the face of conventional wisdom and accepted mastery, persistence can look like madness. If you succeed in the end, this extreme originality reformulates into a new level of mastery, sometimes even genius; if you fail in the end, you remain a madman in the eyes of others, and maybe even yourself. When you are in the midst of the journey... there's really no way of knowing which one you are."

There are many different guides, web pages, and resources regarding the identification of first editions for the various and sundry publishers of the world. The guidance is sparse in places, detailed in others, and varying degrees on the spectrum of unofficial to official. It can be easy to understand to very complicated, but most of all it may not be of much use at all. I will show examples that are very clear, those that require more investigation, and those that can only be applied if you have the volumes available to compare.

Conventional wisdom is generally followed by the vast majority of people and is often successful. Benjamin Franklin said, "Experience is the best teacher, but a fool will learn from no other." In the case of Rex Stout first editions, conventional wisdom does not equal reality. Applying the conventional wisdom will result in buying a lot of things that aren't what you think they are, arguing about details nobody has actually investigated before, and feeling like you lost your mind. Reality is a great teacher if you are willing to learn from it. I chose to learn the lessons rather than continue to repeat them.

The following section is organized by publisher and shows the books that fall under that umbrella, the conventional wisdom regarding first editions from that publisher, and evidence to either concur with that wisdom or explode it completely. Put on your seatbelt because it's going to be a wild ride!

Publishers

Vanguard Press

This is the first publisher of Rex Stout books, from 1929 to 1931, a total of three books.

- How Like a God
- Seed on the Wind
- Golden Remedy

The criteria regarding this publisher is that if only one year is shown it is a first edition. I have confirmed this information through comparison of two editions

of the same title so I concur with the conventional wisdom for Vanguard Press books.



Vanguard Press first edition and later edition comparison.

Farrar & Rinehart

This was the second publisher of Rex Stout books, and the first publisher of Nero Wolfe books, and they published a total of 22 volumes (19 novels and 2 short story collections by Stout, and 1 poetry collection that included Stout in it) that are totally or partially Stout.

The criteria regarding this publisher is to look on the copyright page for the 'FR' colophon, which denotes the first edition, which has proved true in my limited investigation as I only had access to three non-first editions. It is very clear the colophon is present, or not present, as the conventional wisdom suggests, so I concur.

- Forest Fire (1933)
- The President Vanishes (1934)
- Fer-de-Lance (1934) – First Nero Wolfe Novel
- The League of Frightened Men (1935)
- The Bedroom Companion (1935) – Poetry
- O Careless Love! (1935)
- The Rubber Band (1936)
- The Red Box (1936)
- The Hand in the Glove (1937)
- Too Many Cooks (1938)
- Mr. Cinderella (1938)
- Some Buried Caesar (1938)
- Mountain Cat (1939)
- Double for Death (1939)

- Over My Dead Body (1939)
- Red Threads (1939) – Published in The Mystery Book
- Where There's a Will (1940)
- Bad for Business (1940) – Published in The Second Mystery Book
- The Broken Vase (1941)
- Alphabet Hicks (1941)
- Black Orchids (1942)
- Not Quite Dead Enough (1944)

Alfred A. Knopf

This was not a regular publisher for Rex Stout but he did have two volumes of note.

- The Illustrious Dunderheads (1942)
- Butcher, Baker, Murder-Maker (1954)

These volumes actually say “First Edition” on the copyright page, as shown in the example below, so I concur with this guidance.



Farrar & Rinehart first edition and later edition comparison.

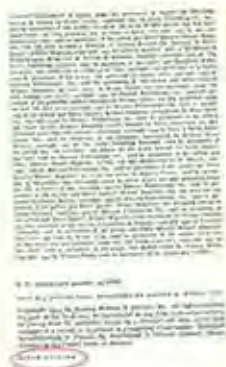
World Publishing

This was not a regular publisher for Rex Stout but he was involved in one volume of note.

- The Nero Wolfe Omnibus (1944) – The First Nero Wolfe Omnibus

This volume states “First Printing”, and the date, on the copyright page. I also have a copy that is a second printing, and clearly states that, so I concur with this wisdom.

First Edition



Alfred A. Knopf first edition.

First Edition



World Publishing first edition.

Copyright 1946 by Rex Stout and John H. Johnson
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without written permission except in the case of brief quotations included in critical articles and reviews.

Creative Age Press first edition.

Creative Age Press

This was not a regular publisher for Rex Stout but he was involved in one volume of note.

- Rue Morgue No. 1 (1946)

This volume only shows one printing date, which denotes the first edition. The absence of any other information is assumed to be a first edition, I have no evidence to refute this guidance, or reason to not believe it, so I concur.

Mysterious Press/Otto Penzler

This publisher released this book after Stout's death.

- Under the Andes (1984)

This volume actually says "First Edition" on the copyright page, which is easy to concur with.

Carrol & Graf

This publisher released this book after Stout's death.

- An Officer and a Lady and Other Stories (2000)

This is a book club volume, with no other apparent hardcover version.

Severn House

This publisher released these books after Stout's death.

- Her Forbidden Knight (1998)
- A Prize for Princes (1999)

Viking Press

This was the third, and final, regular American publisher of Rex Stout books, starting in 1946, and they published a total of 47 volumes (25 novels, 12 short

First Edition



Mysterious Press first edition.

Carrol & Graf book club edition.

Severn House.

story collections, 8 omnibus volumes, 1 edited volume, and 1 cookbook) either written by, or edited by, Rex Stout. I have both the first edition and the book club edition in 44 of these 47 volumes, giving me a unique opportunity to attempt to validate the conventional wisdom for this publisher.

The conventional wisdom centers around:

- the copyright page says “First Published in...”; OR (most accepted theory)
- the copyright page says “Published by Viking Press”; (second most accepted)

I performed a comprehensive investigation to carefully examine both the book club and first editions of each Viking volume I had available, 47 in all. Here are the results of that research:

We will take them one at a time for clarity's sake, utilizing the table on the next page for reference. The first is “First Published” on the copyright page. The official Viking standard, regarding the use of the words “first published”, is actually only uniquely present in 4% of the first editions examined (only two books), making this impossible to apply with any meaningful success. Both editions say the same thing, so how do you differentiate?

The second choice is “Published by Viking” on the copyright page. Only 7% of the volumes (only three books!) have this statement on the first edition, but not the book club edition. There is also no indication of the book club edition being a different printing or edition on the copyright page. These tests are useless with these two editions.

One source made reference to the first edition and the book club editions being different sizes, which is a good clue, but how do you know what size you are looking for without having both volumes to compare? Also, reference is made to the printing materials being different, but it's not always intuitive to see the difference without a comparison.

	Novels	Short story volumes	Omnibus volumes	Total	Percent
Total volumes examined	25	14	8	47	NA
First editions that say "First Published"	23	3	3	29	62%
Book Club Editions that say "First Published"	21	3	3	27	57%
First editions that say "First Published" when Book Club edition does not	2	0	0	2	4%
First editions that say "Published by Viking" when Book Club edition does not	3	0	0	3	7%

Results of investigation of Viking standards for identifying first editions

Nero Wolfe said, "Pfu. That is flummery.", which I agree with after deeply investigating this guidance. As you can clearly see, no one standard, applied equally to both the first edition and the book club edition, resulted in higher than 7% positive results. The official Viking standard, regarding the use of the words "first published", is actually only uniquely present in 4% of the first editions examined, making this impossible to apply with any meaningful success. Essentially, there is no one standard for Viking Press volumes by Rex Stout to reliably separate the first edition from the book club edition if the dustjacket is not available. As such, conventional wisdom is complete flummery.

The Solution Appears

Once I realized the conventional wisdom was flummery, I developed a new process for making these determinations and I created a web site and posted the results there (<https://www.rexstoutfirsts.com>) with a book-by-book reporting of characteristics for identifying the first editions, including scans of the dustjacket cover, back, front and back flaps, physical book cover, title page, and copyright page. There is no one criteria that fits every case (not even close) and with the omnibus volumes there is often no difference between the criteria provided. This is a huge diversion from the conventional wisdom and certainly very important for both collectors and sellers of Rex Stout books.



Rex Stout First Edition Identification Guide web site banner

The new wisdom is to painstakingly compare the first edition with the book club edition, point-by-point, by examining the front, back, and flaps of both dustjackets, the physical book cover, the title page, and the copyright page, noting any differences between them, and providing scans of them all for comparison. I have developed a simple PowerPoint slide that I save as an animated-GIF that I include for easy reference in examining the differences.

These are the Viking Press books by Rex Stout:

- The Silent Speaker (1946) – First Viking Press book
- Too Many Women (1947)
- And Be A Villain (1948)
- The Second Confession (1949)
- Trouble in Triplicate (1949) – First Viking Short Story Collection
- In the Best Families (1950)
- Three Doors to Death (1950) – Second Viking Short Story Collection
- Murder By The Book (1951)
- Curtains for Three (1951) – Third Viking Short Story Collection
- Prisoner's Base (1952)
- Triple Jeopardy (1952) – Fourth Viking Short Story Collection
- The Golden Spiders (1953)
- The Black Mountain (1954)
- Three Men Out (1954) – Fifth Viking Short Story Collection
- Before Midnight (1955)
- Full House (1955) – First Viking Nero Wolfe Omnibus
- Might As Well Be Dead (1956)
- Three Witnesses (1956) – Sixth Viking Short Story Collection
- Eat, Drink, and Be Buried (1956) – Edited by Stout
- If Death Ever Slept (1957)
- Three for the Chair (1957) – Seventh Viking Short Story Collection
- Champagne for One (1958)
- And Four to Go (1958) – Eighth Viking Short Story Collection
- All Aces (1958) – Second Viking Nero Wolfe Omnibus
- Plot It Yourself (1959)
- Too Many Clients (1960)
- Three at Wolfe's Door (1960) – Ninth Viking Short Story Collection
- The Final Deduction (1961)
- Five of a Kind (1961) – Third Viking Nero Wolfe Omnibus
- Gambit (1962)
- Homicide Trinity (1962) – Tenth Viking Short Story Collection

- The Mother Hunt (1963)
- A Right to Die (1964)
- Trio for Blunt Instruments (1964) – Eleventh Viking Short Story Collection
- The Doorbell Rang (1965)
- Royal Flush (1965) – Fourth Viking Nero Wolfe Omnibus
- Death of a Doxy (1966)
- The Father Hunt (1968)
- Death of a Dude (1969)
- Kings Full of Aces (1969) – Fifth Viking Nero Wolfe Omnibus
- Three Aces (1971) – Sixth Viking Nero Wolfe Omnibus
- Please Pass the Guilt (1973)
- The Nero Wolfe Cookbook (1973)
- Three Trumps (1973) – Seventh Viking Nero Wolfe Omnibus
- Triple Zeck (1974) – Eighth Viking Nero Wolfe Omnibus
- A Family Affair (1975)
- Justice Ends at Home (1977) – Twelfth Viking Short Story Collection



Comparison of Viking physical books.



Comparison of Viking book flaps.



Comparison of Viking copyright pages.

Summary

Much has been written regarding the identification, classification, and points to consider regarding first edition books. Decades of valuable wisdom is contained within and used all over the world. In most cases it defines the world and keeps it organized. My efforts in collecting Rex Stout first edition books put me in the crosshairs of conventional wisdom, questioning my thoughts and eyesight as $A + B$ didn't equal C and $2 + 2$ didn't equal 4 . I sought guidance and deeper understanding and kept getting referred to the same expert guidance. Unfortunately, the guidance directly from the publisher of the books is incorrect. Is it incorrect for all Viking Press books? I can only address the books I have examined myself, those being Rex Stout first editions and book club editions from Viking Press. These definitively do not follow the guidance from the publisher itself, nor the experts, and it resulted in extraordinary action being taken to address the void.

The Rex Stout First Edition Identification web site (<https://www.rexstoutfirsts.com>) is a very valuable resource for collectors, sellers, and lovers of Rex Stout books. The guidance contained there can be found nowhere else and represents the most accurate, by far, guidance with regard to identifying Rex Stout first editions. One can also view all the covers for close to 100 books, as well as the title pages of most of the magazine versions, a most delicious meal for those who appreciate the volume of work Rex Stout produced in his lifetime.

Conventional wisdom is proven to be flummery and new wisdom has been gathered to bring order to a world grasping for the true meaning of first editions for Rex Stout enthusiasts. Nero Wolfe said, "The avoidance of idiocy should be the primary and constant concern of every intelligent person," and this site will help you avoid idiocy as it relates to first edition identification of Rex Stout volumes.

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John Kaperick was born and educated in Tacoma, worked 30 years in Seattle, and now lives in retirement in Kent, Washington, where he spends quality time with his books and his wife. Check out <https://www.rexstoutfirsts.com> if you want to see what he has been up to lately.