

Dashiell Hammett Society of Studs (DHSOS) San Francisco International Headquarters

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Minutes of Special Event

Dottie's True Blue Café and Dashiell Hammett Tour

Sunday, July 22, 2012

Very Special Day!

Actually, all days are special for us, because we get to live in the best city in the world. But today was a **very** special day! Today, we got to experience Don Herron and his Dashiell Hammett tour.

Dottie's True Blue Cafe



The day began with brunch at Dottie's True Blue Café on Sixth Street. As the PoV told us, this was a risky venture, because Sixth Street between Market and Mission is reported by the SF Police Department as the toughest and most crime laden block in San Francisco. If you have a concealed weapons permit, he warned, this is the time to use it.

But the PoV assured us that Dottie's True Blue is a real gem amongst hard rocks. The place is so popular that the line at that time of day is often an hour long. So the PoV got there early to secure a place in line. He then awaited the arrival of the rest of the crew for a seating at 10:30.

Standing outside Dottie's, we were surrounded by bars, pawn shops, and used clothing stores. The smell of urine was prevalent, and the ratio of wheelchairs to people was as high as anywhere in the City. As we waited in the line with South of Market yuppies, the locals walked and rolled by, hardly giving us a glance.

Our wait was about 45 minutes, and when we entered the small restaurant the odor changed to freshly-baked bread. Every seat was taken, waiters and waitresses buzzed around, and customers filed in and out. The brick walls and oversized black-and-white photos of musicians made for an interesting atmosphere.

We thoroughly enjoyed our meals and hated to leave, but Don was waiting. So we paid up and filed out into the sunshine, local riffraff, and the smell of urine.

Up and Down these Mean Streets



We could tell who he was from a block away. The Czar had contacted him weeks ago and arranged to have him guide us around the parts of San Francisco where Dashiell Hammett lived, worked, and wrote. And there he was, standing in front of the historic Flood Building on a sunny Sunday afternoon.



Don Herron looks to be around 60; his hair and beard are gray, and his attire is appropriate – a well-worn tan fedora and open tan overcoat over a black shirt, tan slacks and brown shoes.

Don was born in Detroit, moved to San Francisco from St. Louis in the 1960s, and taught literature at San Francisco State University. He originally started this tour for his college students.

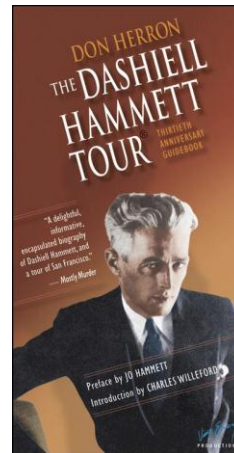
In 1977, he recognized the value of the tour; copy-righted it, quit teaching, and began operating the tour for a living. Since then, he has conducted the tour "hundreds of times."

Today, Don lives in San Jose, drives a San Francisco cab part-time when he isn't giving the tour or lecturing to clubs, and manages a website and blog on Dashiell Hammett and other San Francisco and mystery writers.

Don is a wealth of knowledge about Dashiell Hammett, San Francisco, and 20th-century American literature. He talks nearly non-stop throughout the tour, relating stories about San Francisco, Dashiell Hammett, Sam Spade, and other mystery writers. He's unique and (if you like Dashiell Hammett) fascinating!

Today, Don lives in two distinct worlds: the high-tech, instant communication world of the 21st century, and the hard-boiled, shadowy world of Dashiell Hammett's Roaring '20s. He seems to thrive in both.

Dashiell Hammett Tour

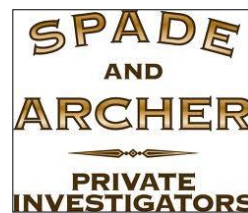


Don runs a great tour (see http://www.donherron.com/?page_id=51) and has a companion guide (http://www.amazon.com/Dashiell-Hammett-Tour-Anniversary-Collection/dp/0982565089/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1343185995&sr=1-1&keywords=don+herron). The DHSOS was highly entertained by his knowledge and his willingness to share it with us.

He started the tour in front of the Flood Building, where Dashiell worked as a detective for Pinkerton's (and where the PoV now maintains a ManCave).

He toured us past the buildings where Dashiell lived, those where he wrote his most famous stories, and many sites from Dashiell's classic novel, *The Maltese Falcon*.

Standing just down the block from John's Grill, Don asked us to look across the street and up. There, in a fourth-floor window was stenciled "Spade and Archer," just like in the opening scene of *The Maltese Falcon*. We had been past this site many times, and none of us had noticed that. It was going to be that kind of day.



We learned that Hammett lived in San Francisco from 1921 to 1929. During that time he worked as a detective, an advertising copywriter for Samuel's Jewelers, and as a writer. During his time in San Francisco, Dashiell wrote almost all the stories and all three novels in his series that featured the Continental Op, as well as *The Maltese Falcon*.



"Keep that gunsel away from me while you're making up your mind. I'll kill him!"

As we toured, Don kept up a steady stream of stories about Dashiell, his life, and his books. He told us when Dashiell lived in each building, and about the hotels and restaurants in

his books. He ran through a chronicle of Dashiell's detective career and writing life, and listed the stories and novels that were written in each location.

Don suggested the DHSOS read some of Dashiell's early works, which featured the "Continental Op," including the *The Big Knockover* and some of the short stories that were originally published in the *Black Mask*. He also suggested we read *Our Lady of Darkness*, by Fritz Leiber, and he referred us to the blogs on Don's website for May 27, which has a link to *The Black Lizard Big Book of Black Mask Stories*, edited by Otto Penzler, which includes the original version of *The Maltese Falcon*.

We stopped for a beer at the HaRa Bar, where we learned about the old-time San Francisco boxers (Harry and Ralph) the bar was named for.

We paused at the Crawford Apartments at 620 Eddy, where Hammett and his wife, Josephine, lived for nearly five years, and where Dashiell often suffered from bouts of tuberculosis. Don told us how Hammett sometimes had to line up kitchen chairs from his bedroom to the bathroom, to support himself, and allow him get to the bathroom.

It was at 811 Geary that Sam Spade lived, and we enjoyed listening while Don ran through some of the action that took place there. It was the location where Spade (twice) took a gun away from the gunsel, Wilmer, and where Spade and Gutman waited for Da Burd to arrive.

At 1309 Hyde, Don told us that in 1926, Dashiell sent his family to Marin County so he could hole up and write the *Big Knockover*.

Don pointed out Hotel Vertigo at 940 Sutter Street. This hotel is an updated version of the Empire Hotel, which was made famous



by Alfred Hitchcock's movie, *Vertigo*, which starred James Stewart and Kim Novak. When Don mentioned Miss Novak, Duh Prez's head snapped up, his eyes

bulged out, and he stared at the hotel with heightened interest.

We paused at the Charing Cross Apartments at 891 Post Street, where Hammett lived (after separating from his wife), and where he wrote *The Maltese Falcon*, and Don told us how Dashiell gave up his Continental Op series of detective stories, and created Sam Spade, a much better-looking and confident hero. We bowed our heads in tribute.

Adjournment

It had been a very special day, with an appropriate mix of fine food, good knowledge, and noble friends.

We issued hearty handshakes to our new friend, Don Herron, and all around, and walked off into a beautiful, sunny day.

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