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OUR COMMITMENTS TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

“The very ink with which all history is written is merely fluid prejudice.”

— Mark Twain, Following the Equator

The Mark Twain Circle affirms the courageous citizens who are risking their health and safety to protest police brutality. We stand in solidarity with the Black and Brown communities whose suffering under systemic racism exposes the vicious underbelly of American culture. We call on government agencies to uphold the social contract—to defend, not attack, the citizens who have trusted them for protection. And we embrace CHANGE: change in the training and culture of U.S. policing, change in the education system of our future citizens, and not least, change in our own hearts and minds as we constantly reevaluate our own basic assumptions.

We repeat the names of the recent dead, despite understanding that they represent only a fraction of those wrongfully killed by the authorities pledged to protect them: George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Nina Pop, Monika Diamond, Sandra Bland, Eric Gardner, Freddie Grey, Trayvon Martin, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Pamela Turner, Tamil Rice. In repeating the names, we keep them with us, reminders that it is our constant duty to struggle against injustice.

We are confident in our ability to change ourselves and our systems because, as teachers, scholars, and readers of Mark Twain and of American culture, we know that change is possible. Twain himself provides a model. Growing up as the son of slave owners, firmly rooted in the tumultuous environment of the nineteenth-century United States, he was also a world traveler and, most importantly, a world thinker. In our efforts to understand him, we have learned that he struggled to understand global change, from germ theory to electronics, U.S. racial conflicts to worldwide rebellions against imperialist domination. In the process, he changed: the Mark Twain of the 1900s, who vociferously protested the U.S. annexation of the Philippines and satirized King Leopold’s rape of the Belgian Congo, was not the same person who snarled about the “infernal abolitionists” in a letter to his mother in 1853. Over the years he had become, as Philip Foner has written, one of America’s foremost social critics, speaking up against injustice—whether perpetrated by individuals or by their governments.

The Mark Twain Circle of America has and will continue to pursue educational programs designed to uncover and interrogate systems of racism and racist violence in American culture. Our panel at the 2019 American Literature Association conference evoked the memory of the transatlantic slave trade in a session on “Mark Twain and Racial Identity,” and members of our organization have spearheaded the Elmira Center for Mark Twain Studies’ upcoming Quarry Farm Symposium on “American Humor and Matters of Empire,” which aims to honor the rhetorical, ideological, and historical distinctiveness of African American comic traditions. The teachers among us routinely interrogate American racial assumptions as they and their students wrestle with Twain’s writings and their legacies. These strategies, long our practice, will continue, and we invite all those interested in Mark Twain and in American cultural history to join with us as we strive to contribute to the struggle for racial justice in America.

Let me say first that I am delighted at the chance to do my stint as president of the Mark Twain Circle. I’ve been a member since, I think, the founding—I dimly remember an organizational meeting at the 1986 MLA. Everett Emerson presided, and Alan Gribben, Lou Budd, and other luminaries were present. The Circle was formed, officers elected, and plans laid to get MLA affiliation. It was a heady afternoon.

That was 34 years ago! And we are still going strong, thanks to a long line of able officers and enthusiastic members. Under the strong leadership of Larry Howe, Jarrod Roark, Jim Caron, James W. Leonard, and Kerry Driscoll, the Circle is in admirable condition to tack through the Covid-19 storm: we have revised by-laws, a workable bank account, and a trajectory for the future. I know I speak for everyone when I say a heartfelt “thank you.” In these days of enforced isolation, it is even more important to know that communities of similar interests are alive, thriving, and reaching out.

It’s the reaching out that I hope to focus on as President. According to the Circular for January, 1987, over 100 people attended the Mark Twain session at the MLA that year. It’s been a long time since we’ve had that kind of attendance at a conference session, and the attendees tend to be gray-heads like me. I’m hoping to launch a membership drive aimed at a broadly diverse, young audience. Stand by: I’ll be asking for volunteers for an outreach committee! Very much in line with membership outreach, we need to redesign our web page. And given the pandemic, there’s the possibility that we will have to rethink our operations, shifting to online meetings and conferences on a more permanent basis. If so, we’ll be joining the rest of the intellectual world in reconceiving the public aspects of our research—how to give papers, conduct roundtables, and otherwise swap information in cyberspace. Not to speak of socialize. The Circle’s social hours are one of its most appealing aspects. I’m sure we can figure out how to do happy hour online!

And a word about myself: I’ve been a Twain scholar since I completed my dissertation in 1977; I’ve published four books on Twain (the latest one here), I’ve taught at Queens College, CUNY; Penn State, University Park; and the University of Kansas. I retired in 2014, and I live in Brooklyn, N.Y.
Began: 12:01 p.m. (22 total attendees)
Meeting adjourned 1:23 p.m.

President Lawrence Howe, Vice President Susan K. Harris, Executive Coordinator Jarrod Roark (and recording secretary).

I. Larry opened with Elections: Kerry Driscoll, Nominating Committee Chair.

All candidates were unanimously elected to these positions by visual confirmation on Zoom.

1. President: Susan K. Harris
2. Vice-president: Henry Wonham
3. Executive committee (2):
   a. Regular member (2-year term): Judith Yaross Lee
   b. Emerging scholar member (3-year term): Rebecca Nisetich

Larry then deferred to the new president, Susan K. Harris, to run the remainder of the meeting. Susan thanked him for his service and leadership.

II. Susan moved to old business:

Grant application to Mark Twain Foundation
Because the 2019 application was not funded, the Executive Committee has been strategizing a re-application and how to make this application more competitive. Susan offered to visit the Foundation in person in NY once the pandemic is over. She lives near the offices. Joe Lemak has worked with the Foundation and also is willing to help. Judith offered to help write or edit the grant. She has grant writing experience. Nathaniel Williams also offered to help. He teaches grant writing at UC-Davis. Moving forward, Susan will lead the initiative to gather information from the Foundation and to write the grant or appoint members to draft the grant application.

III. Susan addressed new initiatives:

1. For some time, the Executive Committee has discussed aligning more closely the Center for Mark Twain Studies and the Mark Twain Circle of America. A chief method seems to be redesigning the MTC website to be visually related to the CMTS website and to collaborate on content. Some points raised:

   a. made possible by collaborative funding (the CMTS and the MTC could share expenses to design a new website)
   b. design the MTC site to visually represent our affiliation with the CMTS, while maintaining independence
James W. Leonard, Editor and Webmaster, discussed designing the website and providing the Executive Committee with a trial version to see if members wish to proceed. The website could contain small notes and content of interest (not fully realized articles or essays), the *Mark Twain Circular*, our own member portal to pay for memberships and renewals and to donate to the CMTS, images, and perhaps the discussion forum. He noted the *Circular* must be hosted on site and not as an attachment.

Susan then asked for Joe Lemak, Director of the Center for Mark Twain Studies at Elmira College, to comment on the relationship between the CMTS and the MTC. For the websites, Joe expressed the desire to share information but a desire to keep the PayPal accounts separate. James and Jarrod agreed with this desire. Joe and James think that maintaining two separate portals or sites would reduce or eliminate confusion about which organization should receive the donation.

At this point, the discussion returned to the MTC website and ideas about how to improve it. James discussed simplifying PayPal and its control features for our website. Judith suggested color schemes to differentiate the two entities. James suggested using notes or bits of interesting pieces to promote ideas on MTC website that differed from what the CMTS posts. James noted that he is redesigning the MTC logo to distinguish it from the Center’s logo and color scheme. Susan suggested creating a section to address teaching MT online during the pandemic and beyond. This could be especially helpful for teachers and younger scholars who are still in the classroom, which could also be a way to attract younger members to the MTC.

IV. Susan then moved to a discussion of relationships between the MTC and locations for Mark Twain studies.

She discussed the ability to donate funds to these entities due to the cancelation of ALA. (The MTC is not paying travel stipends this year). A letter to each place with donation would be a nice gesture, suggested Larry. The Committee voted to make $500 donations to each of the MT sites:

- Center for Mart Twain Studies
- Mark Twain Papers, Berkeley
- Mark Twain House in Hartford
- Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum in Hannibal: John Bird suggested we donate in the name of Henry Sweets.

Larry suggested we contact these centers to express our willingness to collaborate and assist their operations.

V. Susan requested a discussion of the history of the awards so that we all understand what they are and where they come from. Some are given by the Circle; others by the Center for Mark Twain Studies at Elmira College.

There was a desire to create a committee to develop a process and criteria for awards and how to distinguish among awards. Volunteers for the committee: Linda Morris, Kerry Driscoll, John Bird,
Jim Leonard, Bruce Michelson. Joe Csicsila suggested we reach out to past award recipients to ask for their help.

a. Tom Tenney Service Award (MTC). Jim Leonard and John Bird are past recipients.
b. Louis J. Budd Mark Twain Circle Certificate of Merit (MTC)
c. Olivia Langdon Clemens Award (MTC)

Committee would:

i. call on past recipients
ii. develop criteria
iii. develop a process for nominations, deliberations, & selection
iv. strategize to distinguish our awards from CMTS awards:
   - Henry Nash Smith Award (Center)
   - John Tuckey Award (Center)

VI. Reports

1. Jarrod Roark, Executive Coordinator

   a. Willing to write letters to organizations for donations. Discussed saving of funds due to no ALA travel.

   b. Membership status: 143 active national members and 13 active international members.

   c. Financial status: $14,346.40

   d. 2019 1099 from Penn State University: $3,395.12

2. Ben Click, Editor, & Joe Csicsila, Associate Editor, *Mark Twain Annual*.

   a. Two pedagogical pieces and a number of critical essays from established and emerging scholars — varied areas, which is good. Tracking readership: 13,500 hits for *Annual* articles (and can track which articles have been downloaded).

   b. Penn State 1099 is $1300 more than last year because of success of *Annual*.

   c. Joe discussed special issue for *Roughing It*, and time in the West, for 1872 anniversary issue of the *Annual* arriving in 2022.

   d. Susan suggested reaching out to western literature societies and organizing the issue to coincide with ALA in California. John Bird commented that the special issue on eco-criticism is great and that the MLA bibliography continues not to include *Mark Twain Annual*. Ben noted that he’s asked MLA numerous times to include *MT Annual*. Susan offered to go to MLA offices. Judith suggested we reach out to EBSCO.
3. James W. Leonard, Editor and Webmaster
   a. *MT Circular*. For the winter issue, James hopes to interview James Lundgren, the new Executive Director for the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum in Hannibal, Missouri.
   b. Mark Twain Circle website/social media. Returned to discussion with desire to work on the website and possibly to create merchandising.

VII. Announcements

1. Joe Lemak: lectures are currently online due to pandemic. CMTS is considering live-casting lectures on Zoom and placing them on website.

2. Quarry Farm Symposium on Humor and Empire, October 2020. Judith discussed the process of creating a symposium and history — includes nine speakers, John Lowe is keynote speaker — info on Center’s website. Concerns about the symposium due to the pandemic — perhaps the symposium will be outside, but Joe is concerned about people’s desire to travel, or their inability to do so.

3. Quarry Farm fellowships — applications due in November. Joe says fellowships will be awarded despite the pandemic. Ben commented that fellowships are a good opportunity to cultivate essays for the *Annual* and thanked Joe.

4. MLA 2021 in Toronto—MTC panel, Susan K. Harris (chair)
   Title: Gender/Power/Twain
   
   Bill Hunt (panelist)
   Presentation Title: Demography, Gender, and Political Power in “The Great Revolution in Pitcairn”

   Benjamin James Murphy (panelist)
   Title: Gender, Quantification, and the Motive for Lynching in Mark Twain and Ida B. Wells

   Edward A. Shannon (panelist)
   Title: “Bessie” or “Becky”? Becky Thatcher’s Literary Half-Life

5. ALA 2021, MTC panels. Larry: two panels for 2020 — move these to 2021. Panelists have agreed to present then.

   Session 1: Mark Twain Reading/Reading Mark Twain, Larry Howe (chair)
   Robert Arbour (panelist)
   Title: Reading the Postbellum in Twain’s “Whittier Birthday Speech”

   Myrial Holbrook (panelist)
   Title: Freud’s Mark Twain

   James W. Leonard (panelist)
   Title: “Absolutely Fresh”: Revising Francis Galton in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*
Session 2 (Round Table): Where is Mark Twain?: Challenges and Opportunities for International Audiences
Chair: Hal Bush

Participants
Hal Bush, Kerry Driscoll, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Tsuyoshi Ishihara, Bruce Michelson.

Respondent: Caroline Levander

6. 2021 Quadrennial conference in Elmira — Joe Lemak informed the group that Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Tracy Wuster will co-chair the conference. The theme: Growth. He discussed a need for help finding a keynote speaker. Joe C. suggested pursuing grants to fund speakers at Elmira.

7. Mark Twain Annual 2022 special issue on Roughing It & Mark Twain and the American West (possible Quarry Farm Symposium 2021).

Meeting adjourned 1:23 p.m.
Not to drift too far toward “The Turning Point of My Life,” but do you recall any early experiences with Mark Twain that contributed to your later scholarly interests?

There was no single moment when the light bulb came on. In fact, it’s a bit embarrassing how long it took me to figure out that I might dedicate a lot of time and energy to studying Mark Twain. Not that there weren’t signs along the way. Long before I got into this business, in the hazy 1970s, I was living in Boston. A friend, who had taken a PR job at Elmira College, gave me some photographs of Mark Twain at Quarry Farm—copies of ones that we’ve all seen. At the time I thought, “how thoughtful, thanks.” But I had no idea why he thought a college dropout should have them. A year later, my girlfriend (now wife), saw that the Hartford house had recently opened and suggested we drive down to tour it. I went because she thought it was a good idea, but was mesmerized. A year later, she bought us tickets to see Hal Holbrook at the Music Hall in Boston; again, amenable boyfriend that I was, I happily went and was happier still after the fact. Fast forward about 6 or 7 years, we moved to California and I enrolled at Berkeley to finish a BA and was lucky enough to stay for the grad program. In my first year of grad school, I heard Henry Nash Smith give his farewell lecture, and of course he talked about Mark Twain. As I was casting about for a dissertation topic, my father-in-law, who grew up in St. Louis and had a lifelong love of Mark Twain, would periodically ask me what I thought about America’s greatest writer. Finally, I was assigned to be a graduate student assistant to Mark Winokur, an advanced graduate instructor, in an English composition course, and Mark assigned me to run two weeks devoted to Life on the Mississippi. There’s nothing like the responsibility of teaching a text to motivate you, and, thanks to Mark, I was hooked. The dawn broke, and I decided I’d write on Faulkner and Mark Twain, following advice to avoid a single-author dissertation. Because I’d already done quite a bit of work on Faulkner, I dove in to get up to speed on Twain studies. What intrigued me about Twain’s texts took over. I ignored the advice about avoiding single-author studies, and the Faulkner plan fell by the wayside. I guess you could say that I’m a slow learner.
What was your dissertation topic, and who directed your dissertation?

The dissertation was a first run at what would become my book Mark Twain and the Novel: The Double-cross of Authority. I had taken a couple of courses with Mitch Breitwieser and was inspired by his command of literary and cultural theory. So I pitched the idea to read Twain’s experiments with the novel through a handful of contemporary narrative theories—Said, Lukacs, Bakhtin, Girard, D. A. Miller among others. Proposing to work with Mitch was somewhat unorthodox because his work up until that time had focused primarily on 18th century American culture. But I thought that his guidance through challenging theoretical material would be important. I also had terrific support from Eric Sundquist, and later Fred Crews took an interest in my work as well, offering some useful and pointed criticisms. I still stand by most of the argument, though some of the writing makes me cringe. Not all of it, but I wish I had seen the excesses and flaws of expression back when I was working on it. When I read the prose of colleagues who write well, I’m envious.

As some of us know, your work on American humor extends to other artists. Your collaborative exploration of Charlie Chaplin’s filmography (with James Caron and Ben Cline) comes to mind, as well as your editing Studies in American Humor. Did your focus on Twain stem from a more general interest in humor, or did Twain inspire you to branch out?

I’ve always admired Twain’s humor, most of it, because it’s often very courageous. Trying to be funny is a risky proposition, and though he doesn’t always hit the target (at least not for me some 100-150 years later), he does often enough and usually when it matters most. So much of his humor depends on a skillful use of voices, which is really hard to achieve. The Chaplin project was a bit of a left turn and grew out of teaching some of Chaplin’s films in American studies courses, and then later in film courses. The idea to do the book grew organically out of a panel that Jim, Ben, and I formed for the 2010 MT Circle-AHSA joint conference. The positive response to the panel encouraged us to seek contributors to that volume. It was the first collaborative project that I’d ever done, and it could not have gone better. Everyone involved really stepped up. Although I didn’t pursue that project because I perceived similarities between Twain and Chaplin, there are striking parallels in that they each have an iconic cultural standing, and both sought expanding control over their industries. My particular interest in Chaplin centered on representations of economics, which dovetailed with what I’ve been investigating in my work on Twain. That focus on the intersection of economics, rhetoric, and narrative led to the collaboration with Harry Wonham, who was really the lead on Mark Twain and Money, and another amazing group of contributors. I’m currently at work on the issues that brought me into that project in a manuscript on Mark Twain and property. I’m not focused primarily on humor, but there is certainly an entertaining playfulness in Mark Twain’s take on ownership.

Editing Studies in American Humor was also not something that I’d planned or even anticipated. I admired the journal for some time and had been on the editorial board for a few years when Judith Lee and Jim Caron asked if I was interested in the editor’s job. I was a bit surprised and thought that I wasn’t really qualified because I don’t have a deep background in humor theory. But I knew that the opportunity to work with Jim would be a good one. David Gillotta is the third member of the editorial team, and Sabrina Fuchs Abrams is
Have your impressions of Twain and his work changed at all over the years? Has your perception of his contribution to the broader world of American humor changed?

Any change in my impressions of Twain’s writing and Clemens’s life stem from changes in my interests and my own experiences. My research into his ideas on property has put me more closely in touch with the short works, which my earlier emphasis on the novel had downplayed. I’m repeatedly amazed at the complexity of how he thinks about ownership and how inventive he is in expressing and testing out those ideas. But even more important than what concerns me in my little corner of Mark Twain studies is that his writing opens up opportunities to engage with it in new ways. John Bird’s recently released volume Mark Twain in Context, and the work of his 31 contributors—of which you are one—exhibits the range of Twain’s curiosity and the influence of his writing. I can’t help but be drawn to a mind like that.

What common misconceptions about Twain do you strive to correct?

What brought Harry and me together on Mark Twain and Money was our distrust of the recurring notion that Sam Clemens was a bad businessman and a fool when it came to economics. I understand where that notion comes from, and why it took root, but I think it’s a simplistic claim that doesn’t hold up to scrutiny. It’s certainly true that he invested a huge sum in the ill-fated Paige typesetter among other schemes and that he went bankrupt, but those isolated facts have been spun and re-spun into a biographical narrative that lacks clarifying context. Bruce Michelson’s book Printer’s Devil offers a lot more insight into the Paige story and places Clemens’s confidence in the Paige machine in the context of an era of accelerating technological change. Even more pointedly, Joe Csicsila’s chapter “ ‘These Hideous Times’: Mark Twain’s Bankruptcy and the Panic of 1893” in Mark Twain and Money re-frames Clemens’s financial difficulty as a consequence of a chaotic and turbulent economic system. Joining in this conversation, Matt Seybold brings a deep knowledge of economic theory and history. Matt has introduced very insightful critical commentary, both in print and online at MarkTwainStudies.org, that upsets the mythology of Clemens’s economic deficiencies. Indeed, beyond the biographical facts of Sam Clemens’s financial affairs, Mark Twain’s writings show an astute awareness of the evolving economic practices of the nineteenth century.

What, if anything, have you grown to dislike about the man?

This is a tricky question because I don’t think that any of us really knows the man. Instead, we know an image of him that we’ve derived from what others have said about him, what he’s said about himself (indeed, how he marketed himself, as Judith Yaross Lee has shown us), the literature he wrote, and our own interpretations and inclinations. The adjective in the title of Howells’s My Mark Twain is a good reminder that we each have an image, and those images say as much about ourselves as they do about Sam Clemens/Mark Twain. To be
sure, he was as flawed as any of us, maybe more than some and not as much as others, and he was a person of a particular era and place. So his attitudes about race and gender, for example, early in his life were less than admirable by our contemporary values, though hardly out of sync with prevailing notions of the time. What I find admirable was his ability to change and to put his changed attitudes to the test. We can credit much of these changes to his wife, his daughters, and his friends. But by saying that he changed, of course, I mean he adapted, not completely transformed, and I’m suspicious of attempts to idolize him. The autobiography and his letters show us that he could be cantankerous and particularly mean-spirited when he felt that he had not been well served. In the end, though, the image that I have of him is one that I can live with.

What do you consider your most important contribution to Twain studies?

There’s nothing I’ve done that’s any more important than the contributions of many others in our dedicated community of scholars. But I take a small measure of pride not just in adding my two cents to the ongoing discussion about Mark Twain but also in having been as supportive of others in the field as I could. Being engaged in the Mark Twain Circle has been a fully gratifying experience, one that has brought me not just intellectual stimulation but warm and lasting friendships.

How do you hope to see the field (of Twain Studies) evolve over time?

I’m reluctant to predict or call for a particular kind of inquiry for future scholars. In the last twenty years we’ve seen some new lines of investigation, particularly with respect to race, gender, and Twain’s international observations, that have energized the critical conversation. I’m thinking of colleagues like Kerry Driscoll, Susan Harris, Peter Messent, Linda Morris, and Ann Ryan, to name just a few (it’s risky to name-check a mere handful because it overlooks so many others). Last year’s Quarry Farm symposium on Mark Twain and the Natural World, which Ben Click organized, was another example of bright young scholars bringing new perspectives on the history of science and environmental rhetoric into the discussion. I don’t think anyone from the previous generation would have predicted any of these newer developments. So if I have a hope for the field it’s that we’ll continue to be surprised by the methods and topics that emerging scholars bring to it.

As our current president, what are your main hopes for the Mark Twain Circle’s evolution, and what can our members do to get more people involved in Twain Studies?

I’m coming to the end of my term, but as past president I’ll continue to have an active role on the executive committee. I’ll be as useful as I can to help grow and strengthen the organization, especially to attract and support the next generation of scholars to the field. We need their participation and energy to sustain the mission of the Mark Twain Circle. Current members can help by spreading the word about our sponsorship of conferences, our publications, and our close collaboration with the Center for Mark Twain Studies at Elmira College.
Finally, what is your best advice for someone just starting in the field?

This is probably the most sensitive question given the challenges that those of us in the humanities face now and for the foreseeable future. Some of the erosion in the standing of humanities stems from a misguided public impression that our kind of study is ephemeral, and some of the arcane topics and jargon of academic study have partly fueled that impression. But if we have any hope of altering that perception by demonstrating the relevance of critical engagement with American history, literature, and culture, it may rely on our emphasizing the cultural importance of a figure like Mark Twain. The number of people who come from around the country and around the world to visit sites like the Mark Twain House and Museum in Hartford and the Mark Twain Boyhood Home show the durability of his influence. We can capitalize on the public interest by promoting the literature of Mark Twain as rich material for understanding the complexities of life in the United States. We can continue to learn a lot from paying close attention to his insights as a writer who was keenly attuned to the contradictions of American politics and society. And it’s also worth noting that a lot of interesting work on Mark Twain is being done by independent scholars. For example, Kevin Mac Donnell and Kent Rasmussen are not professors, but they are professional scholars. And Pat Ober, a physician, always delights audiences with his discoveries of Twain’s commentary on nineteenth century notions of medicine. So whether one holds a university appointment or earns one’s keep in other ways, there are lots of opportunities to participate in this joint enterprise.

The Mark Twain Annual

The Journal of the Mark Twain Circle of America

Ben Click, Editor
Joe Csicsila, Associate Editor
Nathaniel Williams, Book Review Editor

*The Mark Twain Annual* focuses on critical and pedagogical articles about Mark Twain’s works. Founded in 2003 by the Mark Twain Circle of America, this annual fall publication is sent to all members of the Mark Twain Circle and published by Penn State University Press.

For submission inquires and information about the journal please contact Ben Click at baclick@smcm.edu

Shortly after Grace King wrote her first stories in post-Reconstruction New Orleans, she entered a world of famous figures and literary giants greater than she could ever have imagined. … King’s correspondence with the Clemens family reveals incomparable affection. As a regular guest in their household, she quickly distinguished “Mark,” the rowdy public persona, from “Mr. Clemens,” the loving husband of Livy and father of Susy, Clara, and Jean, all of whom King came to know intimately. Their unguarded, casual revelations of heartbreaks and joys tell something more than the usual Twain lore, and they bring King into sharper focus. All of their existing letters are gathered here, many published for the first time.


In the summer of 1876, Mark Twain started to write Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as a detective novel surrounding the murder of Huck’s father, Pap Finn. The case is unresolved in the novel as it exists today, but Twain had already planted the clue to the identity of the killer. It is not the various objects ostentatiously left around Pap’s naked body; they are not the foreground of the scene, but actually the background, against which a peculiar absence emerges distinctively—Pap’s boots, with a “cross” in one of the heels, are gone with his murderer.

The key to the mystery of Twain’s writings, as this book contends from a broader perspective, is also such an absence. Twain’s persistent reticence about the death of his father, especially the autopsy performed on his naked body, is a crucial clue to understanding his works. It reveals not only the reason why he aborted his vision of Huckleberry Finn as a detective novel, but also why, despite numerous undertakings, he failed to become a master of detective fiction.


This fascinating book documents Mark Twain's life story from Hannibal, Missouri, through to his death in Redding, Connecticut in 1910. Along with a biographical sketch of his career are the descriptions Twain wrote of the great American cities and their buildings—photos of these places from the 19th and 20th centuries are matched with a modern-day viewpoint, so that readers can see how many of the sights admired (or pilloried) by Twain are with us today.
Recent Publications
Scholarly Books & Novels


This book is a literary exploration of Mark Twain's writings on crime in the American West and its intersection with morality, gender and justice. Writing from his office at the Enterprise newspaper in the Nevada Territory, Twain employed a distinct style of crime writing—one that sensationalized facts and included Twain's personal philosophies and observations. Covering Twain's journalism, his fictional works and his own personal letters, this book contextualizes the writer's coverage of crime through his anxieties about westward expansion and the promise of a utopian West. Twain's observations on the West often reflected common perceptions of the day, positioning him as a "voice of the people" on issues like crime, punishment and gender.


From the Mark Twain Project comes a freshly informed look at Twain’s controversial Civil War story “The Private History of a Campaign That Failed.” Twenty years after Appomattox, Twain published a highly fictionalized account of his two-week stint in the Confederate Army. Ostensibly this told what he did (or, in his own words, why he “didn’t do anything”) in the war; but the article was criticized as disingenuous, and it did little to address a growing curiosity about the nature of his brief military service. The complex political situation in Missouri during the early months of the war and Twain’s genius for transforming life into fiction have tended to obstruct historical understanding of “The Private History”; interpretations of Samuel Clemens’s enthusiastic enlistment, sedulous avoidance of combat, and abandonment of the rebellion have ranged from condemnation to celebration. Aided by Twain’s notes and correspondence—transcribed and published here for the first time—Benjamin Griffin of UC Berkeley’s Mark Twain Project offers a new and cogent analysis, particularly of Clemens’s multiple revisions of his own war experience. A necessity for any Twain bookshelf, Mark Twain’s Civil War sheds light on a great writer’s changeable and challenging position on the deadliest of American conflicts.


Mark Twain In Context provides the fullest introduction in one volume to the multifaceted life and times of one of the most celebrated American writers. It is a collection of short, lively contributions covering a wide range of topics on Twain's life and works. Twain lived during a time of great change, upheaval, progress, and challenge. He rose from obscurity to become what some have called “the most recognizable person on the planet.” Beyond his contributions to literature, which were hugely important and influential, he was a businessman, an inventor, an advocate for social and political change, and ultimately a cultural icon. Placing his life and work in the context of his age reveals much about both Mark Twain and America in the last half of the nineteenth century, the twentieth century, and the first decades of the twenty-first century.
Recent Publications
The Mark Twain Journal (Spring 2020)

Volume 58: Mark Twain in Redding, Connecticut

Readers tend to shy away from the final years of Samuel Clemens\'s life, presuming them to be gloomy and devoid of any creative satisfaction. That logical expectation stems from the deaths, during Clemens\'s last decade, of his beloved wife and one of his two remaining daughters. However, in an Italianate home built especially to his taste in the hilly woods of Redding, Connecticut, Clemens achieved a rewarding measure of peace and contentment. In that tranquil setting he was able to resume his writing, socialize with flocks of visiting friends, and conceive a lasting benefit for his new neighbors.

This Spring issue of the Mark Twain Journal examines that Redding period, including his effort to devise a legal will that would withstand the tests of time, his determination to found a community library with books and funds he would donate, and his (largely successful) resolve to leave behind a literary image highlighting the autobiographical aspects of his writings.

JOE B. FULTON contributes another name to the Stormfield Scholars series the Mark Twain Journal commenced in its Spring 2019 issue to recognize individuals no longer living who made significant contributions to our knowledge of Twain, his family, his associates, and his literary works. Archibald Henderson encountered Twain in 1907 and thereafter became an increasingly important factor in his life and his posthumous reputation. As Fulton helpfully reminds us, Henderson tangibly augmented Albert Bigelow Paine\'s impressions of Twain\'s personality and writings.

HENRY S. COHN and ADAM TARR have studied in detail the provisions of the legal will that Clemens drew up at Stormfield and they also reveal the twisting and tweaking this legal document underwent as Clemens\'s only surviving daughter gave birth to a daughter, lived in Detroit, became a widow, moved to Hollywood, and married a second husband. What Cohn and Tarr reveal is enough to make one wonder if any celebrity or any attorney, however astute, can ever adequately peer into the future.

SUSAN B. DURKEE, a noted Redding artist and knowledgeable local historian, shares with the Mark Twain Journal her "Mark Twain Trail," a guide she made for visitors interested in the sites associated with Twain\'s residency in Redding.

From its archives the Mark Twain Journal reprints an updated and revised version of KEVIN MAC DONNELL\'S virtual tour of Stormfield, a still-much-requested item that took up the entire Spring/Fall (44.1-2) issue in 2006. No one else has ever looked at the structure and its furnishings in such discerning detail.

A painful chapter in Clemens\'s biography was the ruptured friendship with his private secretary Isabel V. Lyon and the dismissal of his financial advisor Ralph Ashcroft. In 2011 CHARLES L. CROW wrote a review-essay about two biographies of Clemens that reached differing interpretations of this cataclysmic event which shook the Stormfield household.
The Mark Twain Journal reprints an excerpt from Crow's excellent appraisal as a starting-point for those trying to understand Clemens's furious belief that his trust had been betrayed.

The current Director of the Mark Twain Library at Redding, BETH DOMINIANNI, and JENNIFER WASTROM, a trustee and former president of the Mark Twain Library Association, have sketched out (for the first time in print) a history of the splendid library that Clemens endowed.

The issue of where and how Mark Twain received the inspiration for his famous pen name may never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, but KEVIN MAC DONNELL responds to GARY SCHARNHORST'S "Mark Twain's Nom de Plume Redux: A Reply to Kevin Mac Donnell" (Fall 2019). The Mark Twain Journal feels privileged to serve as a host venue for this stimulating and important debate about the origins of a name beloved to millions of readers.
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