



## Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies



### The Trouble Begins at Eight

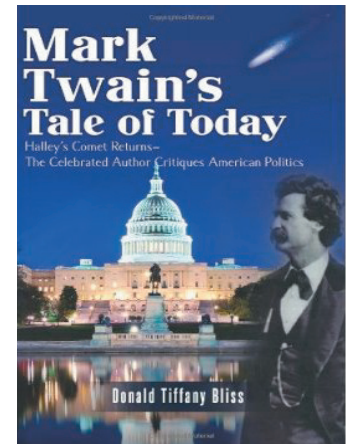
Spring 2013 Lecture Series

Wednesday, May 8th in the Barn at Quarry Farm 8 p.m.

#### Mark Twain on the State of American Politics Today

Donald Tiffany Bliss *Ambassador (Retired)*

As America's first global celebrity, Mark Twain was a much-sought-after-commentator on politics and public policy. He warned against politicians who put loyalty to party above the national interest, the corrupting influence of money in elections and the legislative process, the irrelevance of political campaigns that sidestep issues of voter concern by resorting to platitudes and demonizing the opposition, and the false patriotism that rallies support for unjust wars. Sound familiar? The great-grandson and grandson of Mark Twain's publishers, Don Bliss, has written a book about Twain's commentary on American-style representative democracy, drawing parallels between the Gilded Age and today. *Mark Twain's Tale of Today, Halley's Comet Returns - The Celebrated Author Critiques American Politics*, suggests that Twain's observations have continuing relevance in dealing with a dysfunctional Congress, the perpetual campaign, and partisan gridlock and brinksmanship.



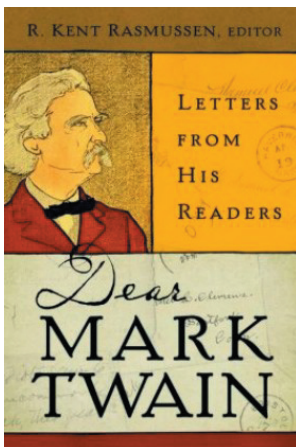
**Ambassador Donald Tiffany Bliss** (Retired) has spent 13 years in the federal government and over thirty years practicing law in Washington D.C. for an international law firm. A former Peace Corps Volunteer lawyer and graduate of Harvard Law School, Bliss was appointed the first Executive Secretary to the Department of Health Education and Welfare by the Honorable Elliot L. Richardson. He also served as General Counsel (Acting) of the U.S. Department of Transportation and as a special assistant at the Environmental Protection Agency and the US Agency for International Development. From 2006 to 2009, he served as the U.S. Ambassador to the International Civil Aviation Organization in Montreal, Canada, the United Nations-affiliated organization that regulates international aviation.

Doors open at 7:30. *The Trouble Begins at Eight.*

Wednesday, May 15th in the Barn at Quarry Farm 8 p.m.

#### Dear Mark Twain: Letters from His Readers

R. Kent Rasmussen *Independent Scholar*



A voracious pack-rat, Mark Twain hoarded his readers' letters as did few of his contemporaries. *Dear Mark Twain* collects 200 of these letters written by a diverse cross-section of correspondents from around the world ~ children, farmers, schoolteachers, businessmen, preachers, railroad clerks, inmates of mental institutions, con artists, and even a former president. It is a unique and groundbreaking book ~ the first published collection of reader letters to any writer of Mark Twain's time. Its contents afford a rare and exhilarating glimpse into the sensibilities of nineteenth-century people while revealing the impact Samuel L. Clemens had on his readers. Clemens's own and often startling comments and replies are also included.

R. Kent Rasmussen's extensive research provides fascinating profiles of the correspondents, whose personal stories are often as interesting as their letters. Ranging from gushing fan appreciations and requests for help and advice to suggestions for writing projects and stinging criticisms, the letters are filled with perceptive insights, pathos, and unintentional but often riotous humor. Many are deeply moving, more than a few are hilarious, some may be shocking, but none are dull.

**R. Kent Rasmussen** is a prolific and widely respected scholar of Mark Twain. Among his many books are *Mark Twain A to Z*, *The Quotable Mark Twain*, *Bloom's How to Write About Mark Twain* and *Critical Companion to Mark Twain*. He is also the editor of the recently published Penguin Classics edition of *Mark Twain's Autobiographical Writings*.

Doors open at 7:30. *The Trouble Begins at Eight.*

(More on reverse side.)



# The Trouble Begins at Eight

Spring 2013 Lecture Series



Wednesday, May 29th in the Barn at Quarry Farm 8 p.m.

## The Boomerang Effect: Mark Twain's Response to French Anti-Americanism

Daniel Royot *Emeritus Professor of American Literature, The Sorbonne*

Professor Royot comically warns us that “Anyone expecting Mark Twain to be deconstructed in this lecture will be shot.” Such a caution merely echoes Twain’s own threatening dislike of literary theory, sophisticated typology and fake ethical standards in the prologue to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain’s humor was prone to smash to pieces the so-called “most intelligent nation in the world” as represented by the dogmatic sacred cows of the French bourgeoisie. The Paris pundits would often liken Twain to a boisterous Westerner, a philistine, a beaotian and a barbarous populist. Except for his devastating satire of Paul Bourget’s travel narrative *Outre Mer* (1894), Twain mostly indulged in debunking false ideals and ethnocentric statements through hilarious evocations of the French *comédie humaine*. In his time, Twain observed that when a Duke’s dog caught a cold in the head, the alleged democratic French press made it a scoop in a semi-feudal society remaining under the spell of Louis XIV, the Sun King. Twain playfully replied to concepts, categories and generalizations waved by anti-Americanists, and his fiction explored at random a new world too unpredictable to be grasped by overweening though narrow European imaginations. To string incongruities and absurdities together in a deapan manner was thus a welcome antidote to Cartesian dialectics. However, Twain’s irony was selective as he also recognized where brave hearts were in history, as exemplified in his praise of Joan of Arc.



From *A Tramp Abroad*, Chapter Eight

Daniel Royot, *Emeritus Professor of American Literature and Civilization at the Sorbonne in Paris and past President of the American Humor Studies Association (1999)*, was awarded Fulbright and Canadian Research Council scholarships and two fellowships of the International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello. His book, *Divided Loyalties in a Doomed Empire. The French in the West from New France to the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, was distinguished by *Choice Magazine* as an Outstanding Academic Title for 2007. He was a visiting professor in American literature at San Diego State University; California State University, Los Angeles; Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville; University of Texas, Austin; Boston University; and the University of Delaware, Newark. Aside from thirty-five books on various aspects of American society, culture and literature, some of them translated into six foreign languages, he has published extensively on American Humor as author, co-author and editor in Europe and the United States.

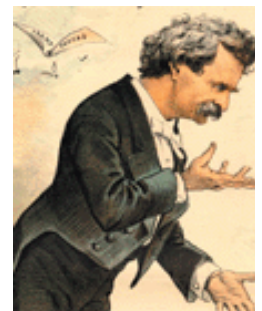
Light refreshments will precede this concluding lecture of the Spring series.  
Doors open at 7:15. *Les ennuis commencent à huit heures.*

### Unable to attend our lecture series? Visit online, instead.

The *The Trouble Begins at Eight* lectures are now available on Elmira College youtube. Go to [elmira.edu](http://elmira.edu), Quicklinks, Mark Twain Connection, Lecture Series, and choose “Watch” or “Listen.”

#### Directions to Quarry Farm for local attendees:

From Elmira College, head east on Washington across the Clemens Center Parkway to Sullivan Street. Turn right on Sullivan. Turn left on East Avenue. Turn left on Crane Road. Quarry Farm will be on your left. Please park on the grassy area behind the Barn. Quarry Farm is a fragile, natural environment. Please exercise care. For GPS: 131 Crane Road Elmira, NY 14901



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