



# Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies



## The Trouble Begins at Eight Spring 2011 Lecture Series

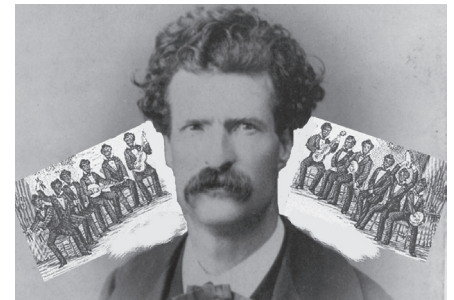
Wednesday, May 11th in the Barn at Quarry Farm 8 p.m.

### Anything But Inoffensive: Mark Twain, the San Francisco Minstrels, and the Unsettling Legacy of Blackface Minstrelsy

Sharon McCoy *University of Georgia*

Mark Twain's love of the blackface minstrel show has seemed puzzling and even downright painful, because few aspects of American popular culture have been more offensive ~ and more enduring. In the past year alone, blackface has shown up again on Broadway, in dance competitions, on late-night television, and even in cupcake ads. Blackface, it seems, will not go away.

Mark Twain recognized its painful and enduring power almost 150 years ago. He shared the advertising line that marks these lectures, "The Trouble Begins at Eight," with the San Francisco Minstrels, a white blackface troupe that Twain, for over 40 years, singled out as exemplary. While the San Francisco Minstrels invoked racial stereotypes, they also challenged and subverted them. They specialized in a rollicking, ambiguous, improvisational, and often satirical humor that lampooned pretension, corruption, or the ridiculous in current events and contemporary culture. Exploring Twain's love of their performances and his use of the minstrel mask can help us understand why blackface is here to stay, and why it remains anything but inoffensive.



**Sharon McCoy**, an academic free agent, is president of the American Humor Studies Association and executive coordinator of the Mark Twain Circle, and teaches writing and American literature at the University of Georgia. She is researching and writing a book on Mark Twain and post-bellum blackface minstrelsy, *Anything But Inoffensive*.

Wednesday, May 18th in the Barn at Quarry Farm 8 p.m.

### Mark Twain on the Brain

Randall Knoper *University of Massachusetts Amherst*

"Unconscious cerebration," "unconscious plagiarism," "mental telegraphy" ~ Mark Twain had various names for what the brain seemingly does beyond our consciousness. Tom Sawyer mutters in his sleep the truth about the murder of Doc Robinson. Tom Canty, the pauper disguised as the prince, reveals his identity to his mother by his uncontrollable reflex action of shielding his eyes when startled. Hank Morgan, the Connecticut Yankee, delights in what he calls "prophecy," which issues from his mouth when he disengages his conscious mind from his talk. Mr. X, a steamboat pilot in *Life on the Mississippi*, navigates a tricky part of the river while sleepwalking and does it more surely and skillfully than if he had been awake. Pudd'nhead Wilson can't figure out why the fingerprint record for Tom Driscoll changes until he falls asleep, and his unconscious mind supplies the realization that Tom and Chambers were switched in their cradles. This talk will survey Mark Twain's ideas about the unconscious actions of the brain, situate these ideas in the burgeoning physiological psychology of his time, and suggest how Mark Twain can serve as a guide for us, as we encounter new, neuroscientific conceptions of the mind and the unconscious.



**Randall Knoper** is the author of *Acting Naturally: Mark Twain in the Culture of Performance* and of various essays about Mark Twain and other authors from the period of American literary realism. He teaches English and American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is currently researching and writing about late nineteenth-century American literature and sciences of the brain and nervous system.

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

(More on reverse side.)



# The Trouble Begins at Eight

Spring 2011 Lecture Series



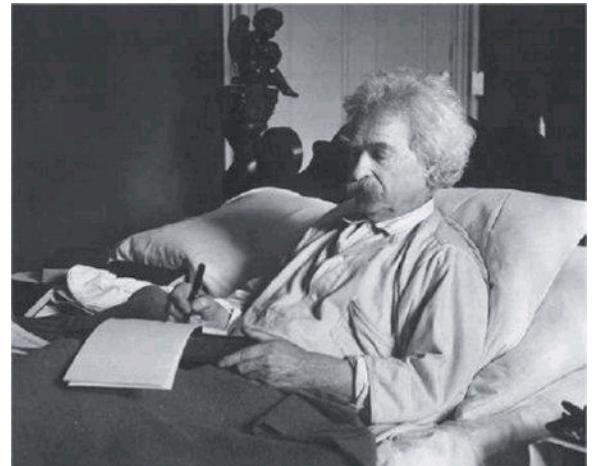
Wednesday, May 25th in the Barn at Quarry Farm 8 p.m.

## Work and Play in Mark Twain

Henry Wonham *University of Oregon*

Mark Twain was unquestionably among the most prolific and hardest working authors of his era. But did Twain ever really “work” at writing? He consistently identified his creative activities more closely with “play” than with “work” and may even have conceived of writing as antithetical to labor. In this lecture, Professor Wonham will examine Twain’s understanding of these sometimes opposed, sometimes interchangeable categories as they operate in and through his fiction.

**Henry Wonham** is Professor and Head of the Department of English at the University of Oregon. He is the author of several books, including *Mark Twain and the Art of the Tall Tale* and *Playing the Races: Ethnic Caricature and American Literary Realism*, both published by Oxford University Press.



*Light refreshments will precede this concluding lecture of the Spring series.*

Doors open at 7:15. *The Trouble Begins at Eight.*

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

Go to <http://www.elmira.edu/twain>. Click on The Center for Mark Twain Studies and then on *The Trouble Begins at Eight*. Scroll down and click on the link for the appropriate video recording of the lecture (done with individual speakers’ permission).

### 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.



*The Trouble Begins at Eight* is made possible by the support of the Mark Twain Foundation and the Friends of the Center.

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