



# 2024 Park Church Summer Lectures

Wednesday, July 10 at The Park Church (7:00pm)

Charline Jao, Cornell University

“Langdon’s Pencil: The Infant Voice in Mark Twain’s Letters”

Between November 7, 1870 and June 2, 1872, Samuel and Olivia Clemens’s letters became absorbed with reports on the condition of their firstborn son Langdon, whose premature birth and constant sickness filled both parents with constant anxiety. The couple’s worry would eventually prove true, as Langdon died of diathermia at nineteen-months old – a death made even more tragic for the Clemens’s inability to travel to Elmira for Langdon’s burial. Following Barbara E. Snedecor’s work on this period, Joseph Csicsila points out that Langdon has often been a “curious gap” in Twain scholarship, especially when the deaths of Clemens’s brother Henry, his daughters, and his wife have been given a comparatively large amount of critical attention. Clemens’s struggle with Langdon’s uncertain health over this two-year period oscillates between hope, happiness, and anxiety. These feelings are especially prominent in the handful of letters where, curiously, Clemens ventriloquizes his son in written correspondences to friends and family. These invented scenes of infant writing and speech comically undermine the etymology of infant – the *enfants* which literally means “without speech.” The tone of these messages ranges from informative (“At birth I only weighed 4 ½ pounds with my clothes on—&; the clothes were the chief feature of the weight, too, I am obliged to confess”), silly (“I am as red as a lobster”), and defiant (“I do not wish to have any words with you, old man, father”). Narrative and the imitation of infant “language” function as literary and social experiments in these letters. Thus, Clemens’s first experience with parenthood provide a less-explored archive and insights into studies of Twain and childhood.



Portrait of Langdon Clemens. Photo taken in Elmira, New York, 1871. Courtesy of the Mark Twain Archives, Elmira College.

Charline Jao is a PhD candidate in the Department of Literatures in English at Cornell University. Her dissertation “Early Lost” examines scenes of child death and separation in nineteenth-century American women’s writing. She is the creator of two digital humanities projects: *Periodical Poets*, which examines poetry in nineteenth-century Black-edited periodicals, and *No Stain of Tears and Blood*, which compiles material from the free produce movement. She was previously a Brown Family Collection Short Term Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society and a Trouble Begins lecturer at Quarry Farm. Her work has been published in *American Periodicals* and the Cornell Rural Humanities Pamphlet Collection.

Wednesday, July 17 at The Park Church (7:00pm)

Mary Lemak, University at Albany

“‘Making of a Woman Minister’: Rev. Annis Ford Eastman and Elmira, New York”

The author of Twain’s eulogy, the Reverend Annis Ford Eastman, is known today as the mother of two of the most notable political minds of the twentieth century. However, her career as one of the first female ministers in the United States, complicated by Elmira’s almost unique political and socioeconomic situation and her relationship with her husband, was exceptional in its own right.

Mary Lemak recently graduated from the University at Albany’s undergraduate history program. Her honors thesis “‘Making of a Woman Minister’” focused on the Reverend Annis Ford Eastman and her tenure at the Park Church. She is an Elmira native and worked for the Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies from 2018 to 2023. In the Fall 2024, she will attend the University at Buffalo School of Law.



Portrait of Thomas Beecher (left), Annis Ford Eastman (middle), and Samuel Eastman (right).



Portrait of Annis Ford Eastman.

**Wednesday, July 24 at The Park Church (7:00pm) Edward Guimont, Bristol Community College “The Cosmic Mark Twain”**

This talk will explore the fascination Mark Twain had for Halley’s Comet during his lifetime, along with the wider public fascination with the expansion of astronomical discoveries in the nineteenth century, along with the development of cultural themes that still resonate today, such as fear over cometary impact, searching for planets beyond Neptune, and curiosity over alien life visiting Earth.

Edward Guimont received his PhD in history from the University of Connecticut, and is currently Associate Professor of World History at Bristol Community College in Fall River, Massachusetts. His first monograph, *When the Stars Are Right: H. P. Lovecraft and Astronomy* (coauthored with Horace A. Smith) was published by Hippocampus Press in 2023; he is working on his second book, *The Power of the Flat Earth Idea*, for Palgrave Macmillan. He participated in the 2023 Quarry Farm Symposium and is a 2024 Quarry Farm Fellow, researching Twain’s interest in astronomy for a forthcoming publication. His work has appeared in *Contingent Magazine*, *The Lovecraft Annual*, *Quest: The History of Spaceflight*, and *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*.

**Wednesday, July 31 at The Park Church (7:00pm)  
Barbara Snedecor, Former Director of the Center for Mark Twain Studies “the dearest little woman in the world’:  
Letters of Olivia Clemens to her Sister, Susan Crane”**

While Susan Crane’s relationship with her famous brother-in-law, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, is known, exploring the bond between Olivia and her older sister creates a new perspective. Drawing from Olivia’s letters to Susan, we experience her emotions as a parent of four children, enjoy descriptions of summers at Quarry Farm and of family travels, and view glimpses of her intimate thoughts. Selected excerpts illuminate the warm relationship between the two sisters, both members of Elmira’s Park Church, and reveal Olivia’s feelings at ordinary and defining moments in the Clemens family biography.

Barbara E. Snedecor served as director of the Center for Mark Twain Studies and as Assistant Professor of American Literature at Elmira College. In addition to editing the second edition of *Mark Twain in Elmira*, she has contributed pieces to the *Mark Twain Annual and American Literary Realism*. She is the editor of *Gravity: Selected Letters of Olivia Langdon Clemens* (University of Missouri Press, 2023).



1986 Turks and Caicos stamp of Twain riding Halley's Comet



Portrait of Susan Crane.  
Photo taken in Berlin, Germany, possibly 1891.  
Courtesy of the Mark Twain Archives, Elmira College.

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