

The 11th Annual Quarry Farm Symposium



GILDED AGES

Humor, Literature, and Society

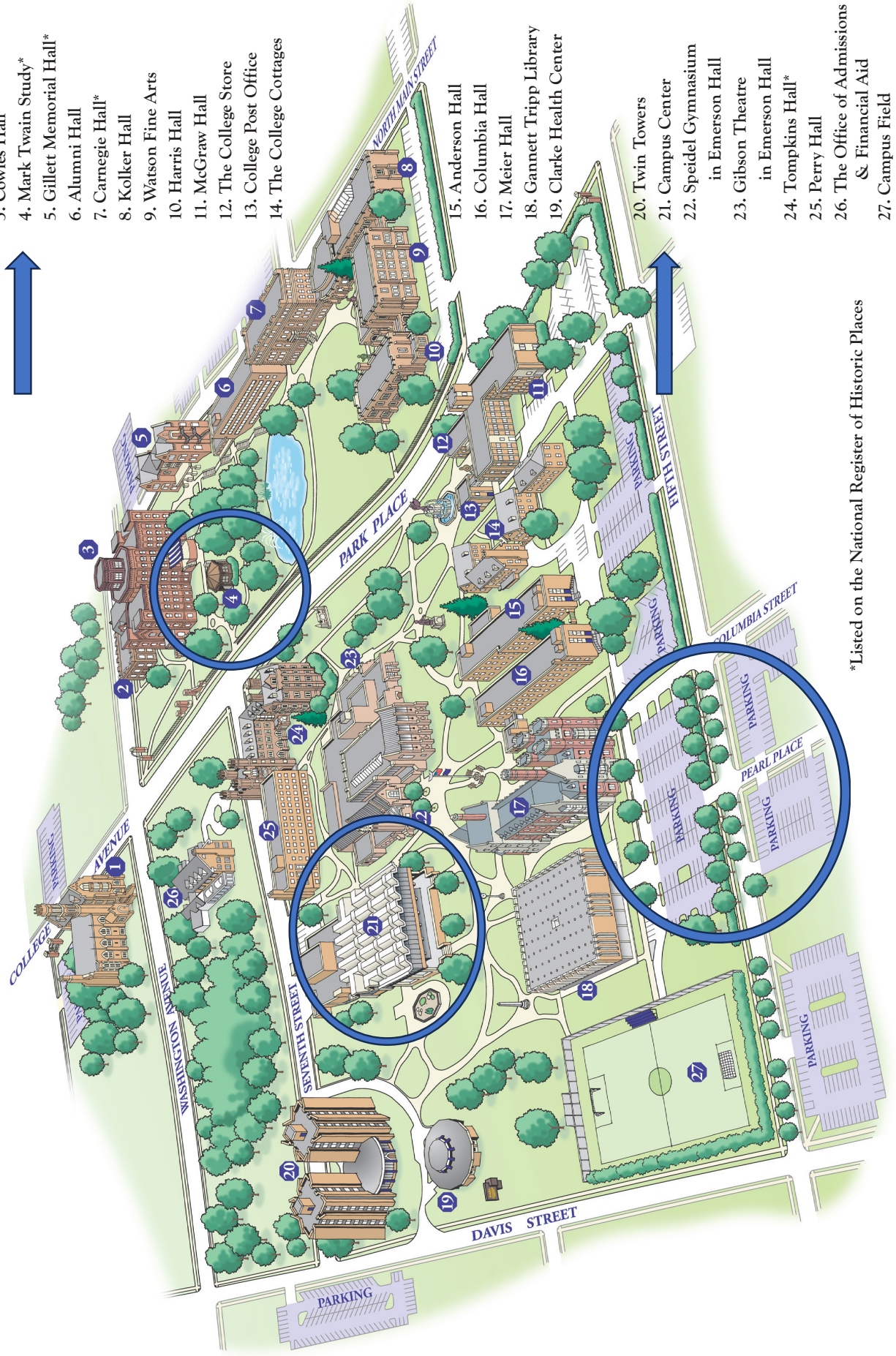


*Illustration 33: Tail Piece from Chapter VIII of Mark Twain's *The Gilded Age**

Friday, October 11
& Saturday, October 12, 2024



- 1. Hamilton Hall*
- 2. Fasset Commons*
- 3. Cowles Hall*
- 4. Mark Twain Study*
- 5. Gillett Memorial Hall*
- 6. Alumni Hall
- 7. Carnegie Hall*
- 8. Kolker Hall
- 9. Watson Fine Arts
- 10. Harris Hall
- 11. McGraw Hall
- 12. The College Store
- 13. College Post Office
- 14. The College Cottages



- 15. Anderson Hall
- 16. Columbia Hall
- 17. Meier Hall
- 18. Gannett Tripp Library
- 19. Clarke Health Center
- 20. Twin Towers
- 21. Campus Center
- 22. Speidel Gymnasium
in Emerson Hall
- 23. Gibson Theatre
in Emerson Hall
- 24. Tompkins Hall*
- 25. Perry Hall
- 26. The Office of Admissions
& Financial Aid
- 27. Campus Field

*Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

The Center for Mark Twain Studies Presents:

***Gilded Ages:
Humor, Literature, and Society***

The 11th Quarry Farm Symposium
October 11 & 12, 2024

Symposium Organizers:

Joseph Lemak, *Elmira College*

Matt Seybold, *Elmira College*

Presenters:

James E. Caron, *University of Hawai'i, Mānoa*

Joe Conway, *University of Alabama in Huntsville*

Christopher J. Gilbert, *Assumption University*

Lawrence Howe, *Roosevelt University*

Charline Jao, *Cornell University*

Megan McNamara, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Teresa Prados-Torreira, *Columbia College Chicago*

Stephen Rachman, *Michigan State University*

Ann M. Ryan, *Le Moyne College*

Matt Seybold, *Elmira College*

Bruce Simon, *SUNY at Fredonia*

Barbara E. Snedecor, *Elmira College*

Kyhl Stephen, *Cornell University*

Todd Nathan Thompson, *Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

Nathan Wolff, *Tufts University* (Keynote)

GILDED AGES: Humor, Literature, and Society

11th Annual Quarry Farm Symposium

Schedule of Events



Friday, October 10 – Tifft Lounge, Campus Center, Elmira College Campus

3:00PM Tour of Mark Twain Study and Woodlawn Cemetery

5:00PM Opening Reception

6:00PM Dinner and Keynote Address

“First as Farce: Structures of Feeling in *The Gilded Age*”

In my previous work on Twain and Warner’s *The Gilded Age*, I argued that the often-troubling incoherence of the novel hinges on questions of political emotion. Avowedly opposed to sentimentality, the authors ultimately model a style of hard-headed cynicism that does not oppose but rather mirrors the sentimental reduction of politics to questions of feeling. Explicitly focused on the corruption and speculation that produce widespread apathy, the authors turn with alarming regularity to a rejection of all popular passion as a sign of the stupidity and passivity of the electorate.

In this paper, I revisit and reframe these claims through the lens of Raymond Williams’s concept of “structures of feeling.” Subtitled *A Tale of Today*, the novel undertakes the difficult task of theorizing an emerging present in the middle of its unfolding. In doing so, it invites consideration in dialogue with Williams’s important but contested term, which describes how nascent forms of consciousness and social relations can be sensed viscerally before they take shape as formal ideologies, explicit norms, or settled historical periodization. Embracing a degree of incoherence as inevitable in Twain and Warner’s hyper-present project, this paper thinks about the ways the novel reverses Marx’s famous formula about history repeating itself “first as tragedy, then as farce.” “*The Gilded Age*” debuted as a potent if imprecise satire of inchoate historical processes, registered affectively, that continue to redound tragically into our own Gilded Age.



“Colonel Sellers Despondent.”
Drawing from Mark Twain and Charles
Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age* (1873).

Nate Wolff is Associate Professor of English and Director of Graduate Studies at Tufts University. He is the author of *Not Quite Hope and Other Political Emotions in the Gilded Age* (Oxford University Press, 2019), which uses readings of Mark Twain's *The Gilded Age* and *The American Claimant* to frame a literary prehistory of today's emotional politics: the cynicism and exhaustion of democratic life in an age of inequality and corruption. He is currently working on a new book, *Disentangled: Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature's Political Ecologies*, contesting the influence of New Materialist ecocriticism on Americanist literary studies. Two pieces from this project—the first on Twain and Charles Chesnutt, the second on Frank Norris and W.E.B. Du Bois—have been published in *American Literary History*. His writing has appeared in other venues including *English Literary History*, *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists*, *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies*, and *The Washington Post*. A second new project, tentatively titled *Dirty Jobs*, looks to nineteenth-century literature for lessons about the formation of, and alternatives to, the American work ethic.

Saturday, October 11 – Quarry Farm

8:30 – 9:00AM Breakfast in the Maid's Cottage

9:00 – 10:30AM Session #1: The Gilded Age in the Marketplace

Joe Conway, "Wildcats, Shinplasters and Fips: The Vernacular Life of Money"

Stephen Rachman, "Buying Siberia: Fraud, Speculation, and Revolution from *The Gilded Age* to *The American Claimant*"

Matt Seybold, "Colonel Sellers, Doc Rockefeller, & The Technofeudal Enclosure of Everything"

Kyhl Stephen, "Twain, Humor, and the Fashioning of Gilded Age Consumer Society"

10:45 – 12:30PM Session #2: The Gilded Age in the Home

Charline Jao, "Mark Twain's False Alarms"

Barbara Snedecor, "'She is the best girl in all the world': Gilded Age Domestic Humor and Resilience in Olivia Clemens"

James Caron, "Marietta Holley's Samantha Allen, Humorous Housewife, Satiric Suffragette"

12:30 – 1:15PM Lunch in the Maid's Cottage

1:15 – 2:45PM Session #3: The Gilded Age on the Page

Christopher J. Gilbert, "Dear God, Let Us Praise Mark Twain's Satanic Sense of Humor"

Ann Ryan, "Gilding Jim and Nat: Mark Twain and the Specter of the Angry Black Man"

Bruce Simon, "Rereading Jim's Coat of Arms: The Badge of Servitude and the Device of Race in Mark Twain and Nathaniel Hawthorne"

3:00 – 4:30PM Session #4: The Gilded Age on the Comedy Stage

Teresa Prados-Torreira, "The Comic Lecturer in the Gilded Age"

Lawrence Howe, "Skewering Gilded Age Corruption: The Visual Satire of Thomas Nast"

Megan McNamara, "Mr. Dooley: The Immigrant's Advocate"

Todd Thompson, "Mr. Seward's Real Estate Transactions': Comic Imperialism in the Reconstruction Era"

4:45 – 5:30PM Recap/Q&A

6:00PM - 9:00PM Closing Reception on the Quarry Farm Porch and Dinner in the Barn

James Caron

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“Marietta Holley’s Samantha Allen, Humorous Housewife, Satiric Suffragette”

My talk will update Marietta Holley’s status in the American Comic Tradition by considering her writings within the framework of Judith Lee’s matters-of-empire thesis (2020) and by answering three questions: 1) what is Holley’s comic pedigree?; 2) what are her comic tactics?; 3) what are her politics?

Previous scholarship has placed Holley in the vernacular frontier tradition, though she can also usefully be placed within the regional humor often called *local color*, which flourished in the Gilded Age. However, these labels elide Holley’s national ambition and so fall short of contextualizing her achievement: employing earlier traditions and their comic tactics to advocate persistently for a nationally-debated, public sphere issue, woman’s rights. In Lee’s terms, Holley should be tagged post-colonial, which not only acknowledges how the vernacular tradition breaks away from its English roots, but also implies America’s domestic imperium and the subaltern status of Native Americans, Black Americans, and women within its political economy.



Photograph Portrait of Marietta Holley by C.M. Bell (c.1888)

Using Holley’s first book, *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s* (1873), as a case study, I will discuss how Holley deploys the vernacular tradition’s trope of the country bumpkin who functions as truth-teller. Also, how does the fact that Samantha consistently calls herself “Josiah Allen’s Wife” fit into Holley’s suffragette agenda? For Holley, what Nancy Walker calls *women’s humor* is always *women’s satire*, directing comic ridicule at those who would keep women second-class citizens.

James E. Caron retired as Professor of English at the University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa, where he taught American literature for thirty-six years. He has published articles on satire, the tall tale, antebellum comic writers, laughter and evolution, Mark Twain, George Washington Harris, Frank Norris, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Faulkner, Charlie Chaplin, Hunter S. Thompson, and Bill Watterson. In addition, he has published *Mark Twain, Unsanctified Newspaper Reporter* (2008), co-edited a collection of essays on Charlie Chaplin, entitled *Refocusing Chaplin: A Screen Icon in Critical Contexts* (2013), and authored *Satire as the Comic Public Sphere: Postmodern “Truthiness” and Civic Engagement* (2021). His new book is *The Modern Feminine in the Medusa Satire of Fanny Fern* (January 2024). He is the former president of the American Humor Studies Association and former senior associate editor of its journal, *Studies in American Humor*. He is the recipient of the 2023 Charlie Award from the American Humor Studies Association, given for lifetime achievement in service to the AHSA and for research in American humor.

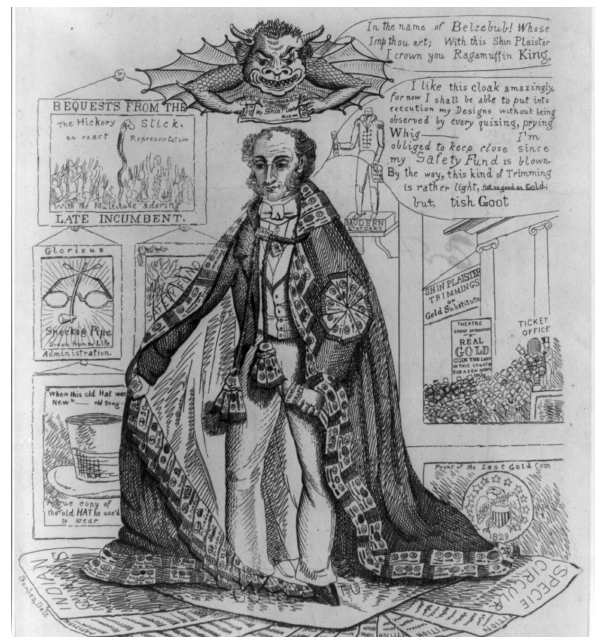
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“Wildcats, Shinplasters and Fips: The Vernacular Life of Money”

In *A Treatise on Money*, James Maynard Keynes argues that the modern state alone “determines what thing corresponds to the name” of money. In effect it holds the “right to re-edit the dictionary.” Keynes uses a familiar metaphor of “language = money,” while casting state authority as Noah Webster. I argue, however, that rather than submit to a monologic, monopolistic system of state power, the strange currencies of antebellum America functioned as a series of dialects encountering one another in socioeconomic contest described by Alabama humorist Joseph Glover Baldwin in Bakhtinian terms as a “hell carnival.” Before Lincoln’s 1863 National Bank Act asserted federal power to “re-edit the dictionary,” a system of decentralized banking reigned in the U.S. In the absence of strong authority issuing official notes from above, both the “things” that passed for legal tender and the “names” that made them socially legible were crowdsourced from below.

Preoccupied with odd linguistic and economic forms, the frontier humor of Baldwin, Johnson Jones Hooper, Caroline Kirkland, and William Wells Brown is suffused with demotic energy. Though rarely read by literary critics in tandem with one another given their scattered political commitments, the carnivalesque texts of these authors abound in tall tales of “wildcat” banks and the semi-worthless “shinplaster” currencies sometimes called “blue pups” or “red dogs” that “close-shaving” individuals and institutions had the right to privately issue. To further contextualize the racial and class politics of these texts, I read them alongside John Russell Bartlett’s 1848 colloquial lexicon, *Dictionary of Americanisms*, and the essay “Slang” by Charles Dickens (reprinted in *Little’s Living Age* in 1853), which blames U.S. finance for the decay of English on both sides of the Atlantic.

Though this chapter largely focuses on the genre of frontier humor, I begin by analyzing Frederick Douglass’ account of his raising white suspicions while working in New Bedford. His “mistake” was publicly using the word “fip” to count his money, a shibboleth betraying his Maryland roots. Mid-Atlantic merchants, unlike New England ones, used a non-decimal way of counting cash. When Douglass utters “fip,” a white man tells him: “You don’t belong here.” This exclusionary phrase that threatens to erase Douglass’ right to social life echoes in some form or another throughout the antebellum writing tradition I call wildcat literature. Baldwin, Kirkland, Brown and Hooper represent the frontier as an unregulated space of persons and cash of unverifiable provenance competing with one another for the right to pass freely. To manage this social chaos, each writer develops a specific set of formal strategies for judging those in the hell carnival who will be saved by the march of civilization and those whose creative labors and expressive voices will be stamped as irredeemable.



“Capitol Fashions for 1837.” Satirical image of a devil speaking to Martin Van Buren: “In the Name of Belzebul! Whose Imp thou art; with this Shin Plaster I Crown you Ragamuffin King.” Etching published by F.J. Winston (1837).

Joe Conway is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. His work engages with questions of monetary representation in literature, film, and television. His articles address economic themes from the Puritans to Black Mirror and have appeared in journals like *Early American Literature*, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, *Studies in American Humor*, *Women's Studies*, *LIT*, and *CR: The New Centennial Review*. This presentation is drawn from a manuscript-in-progress, *Strange Currencies: The Social Life of American Money (1832-1863)*.

Christopher J. Gilbert

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“Dear God, Let Us Praise Mark Twain’s Satanic Sense of Humor”

The eleven letters Satan composed and delivered to the archangels Gabriel and Michael are nothing if not celebrations of possible joy in the face of assured sorrow. The so-called “Letters From the Earth” were, of course, written by Mark Twain. When Twain wrote them in 1909, and everything from disease through death to despondency inspired the satanic sense of humor in his letters. Twain used the figure of Satan to characterize a sense of humor for living life as “a fever-dream made up of joys embittered by sorrows, pleasure poisoned by pain,” and a general “confusion of spasmodic and fleeting delights, ecstasies, exultations, happinesses, interspersed with long-drawn miseries, griefs, perils, horrors, disappointments, defeats, humiliations, and despairs.” This presentation will take up the relation of human endurance to how we direct, redirect, or misdirect, in Twain’s words, the “throes of enjoyment.” It will therefore dwell on Satan’s notion that a “Moral Sense” is precisely what deludes us in the face of political corruption and economic disparity. Such a delusion troubles what could be a Comic Spirit for dealing with life as it is by turning us into “misery-machines”—a case that will be made with continual reference to the singular metaphor of a red spider and an elephant.

Christopher J. Gilbert, PhD. Chris is Associate Professor of English (in Communication & Media) at Assumption University. He is author of *Caricature and National Character: The United States at War* (2021) as well as the forthcoming book, *When Comedy Goes Wrong* (April 2025). He is co-editor of the forthcoming volume *Pleasure and Pain in US Public Culture* (November 2024). In addition, he has also published many articles in various academic journals and contributed numerous book chapters in edited volumes.



Image of Satan from *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1985)

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“Skewering Gilded Age Corruption: The Visual Satire of Thomas Nast”

Hailed as the “father of the American political cartoon,” almost to the point of cliché, Thomas Nast did indeed produce influential satirical depictions of notorious American figures. However, Nast did not begin his career as a satirist but as an illustrator, relying on his formal art training in historical painting. This training would serve him well in his coverage of both Garibaldi’s campaign to unify Italy and the US Civil War and its immediate aftermath, both of which he covered as a staff illustrator for *Harper’s Weekly*.

In this talk, I will concentrate on Nast’s evolving technique after the Civil War, during which he combined the historical technique and classical allusions of his art training with the art of caricature to critique notorious political figures and controversial events. His artistic fusion was inspired by the rise of the Gilded Age, which moved him to challenge the many schemes of corruption, which Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner explored in their novel that gave the era its name.

After examining a few, representative examples of Nast’s work from the earlier years of illustration, we’ll look at his vivid critiques of political power brokers, such as Boss Tweed of the infamous Tammany Hall political machine. In addition, we’ll discuss some of Nast’s disparaging depictions of immigrants, which fueled some of the divisive rhetoric of the era. I aim to show that Nast’s Gilded Age cartoons forge a new visual comic discourse, producing political satire that stands on its own in provoking public awareness of political, social, and economic abuses of the era.

Lawrence Howe, Professor Emeritus of English in Film Studies at Roosevelt University, is a past editor of *Studies in American Humor* and author *Mark Twain and the Novel: The Double-Cross of Authority*, and co-editor of *Mark Twain and Money: Language, Capital, and Culture*, and *Refocusing Chaplin: A Screen Icon Through Critical Lenses*, as well as numerous articles on a wide range of topics in American studies. In 2014-15, he was the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in American Studies in Denmark, and in 2020-2022 he was president of the Mark Twain Circle of America. He has enjoyed the generous support and recognition of the Center for Mark Twain Studies for more than a decade, including being honored with the Henry Nash Smith Award in 2022.



Thomas Nast Self-Portrait from the front cover of *Harper’s Weekly* (December 2, 1876)

Charline Jao

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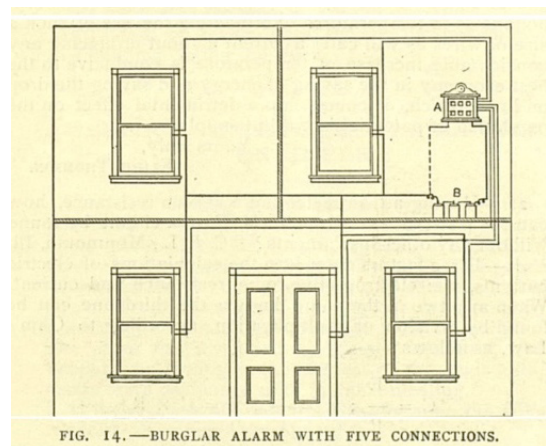
Cornell University

“Mark Twain’s False Alarms”

Mark Twain’s various frustrations and annoyances with the burglar alarm, a new technology introduced to many homes from the 1870s onward, were well-documented. The “costly and complicated contrivance,” as he called it in one letter, played a key role in two farcical short stories. The first, “The McWilliamses and the Burglar Alarm,” details the expensive efforts of the McWilliamses family to burglar-proof their house, only to be faced with constant false alarms, pricey updates and fixes, and, humorously, an exponentially growing number of home intruders. Poking fun at the supposed sophistication of this new technology, Twain undercuts the efficiency of the nascent home security industry. In the second story, “Wapping Alice,” Twain again uses the burglar alarm as a plot point, as some tripped alarms suggest that an unwelcome guest is entering or leaving the Jackson family’s home at night.

This paper analyzes the failure of the burglar alarm in these two stories. I suggest that Twain purposely foils the alarm’s promises of authoritatively protecting, controlling, and exercising mastery over the interior domestic space and its boundaries. Rather than simply making a joke out of the burglar alarm’s inefficiency (a narrative that I also find pervasive in newspapers of the late-nineteenth century), “Wapping Alice” scrutinizes the fears and desires often indexed by home invasion. Though scholarly examinations of “Wapping Alice” often focus on the so-called same-sex marriage that occurs at the conclusion, a “false” marriage that overwrites Alice’s sexual manipulation, I inspect instead Alice’s justification that her actions answered the family patriarch’s complaint that “the outcome of the original episode wasn’t theatrical enough.” Ultimately, I argue that Alice is a conspirator rather than invader, who makes visible and “corrects” the defects (a term Twain uses for both the burglar alarm and the narrative) of this security network.

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 the Michael J. Kiskis Fellow at Quarry Farm last summer. Her work has been published in *American Periodicals*.



“Department of Elementary Education.”
Image from *Electrical Age* (February 1, 1896).

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“Mr. Dooley: The Immigrant’s Advocate”

While the Irishman had been a frequent comic target throughout the nineteenth century, he was usually the butt of the joke. With the character of bartender Martin Dooley, Finley Peter Dunne toys with Irish stereotypes, making Mr. Dooley walk the line between laughing at his audience and at himself. The humorous language in which he speaks is ultimately Dooley’s saving grace. As Dunne stated, he used satire so that he could voice his social criticism without great personal risk: “It occurred to me...that while it might be dangerous to call an alderman a thief in English no one could sue if a comic Irishman denounced the statesman as a thief...if I had written the same thing in English I would inevitably have been pistoled or slugged.” Dunne’s Dooley advocates for immigrants and presents a confrontation with the national ideal of innocence, and pokes fun at everyone—even himself—when they naively embrace an ahistorical mythos. Dunne himself directly connected humor and American innocence, begging his Gilded Age audience to retain their sense of the absurd: “Humor... especially political humor, is a privilege of the innocent and the secure. As a nation we have lost both our innocence and our security.”



“I SEE TH’ PROGRAMME IN TH’ PA-APER”

“I see th’ programme in th’ pa-aper.” Frontispiece from E.W. Kemble, *Mr. Dooley’s Philosophy* (1900).

Megan McNamara (also published under M. M. Dawley) teaches in Writing, Rhetoric and Professional Communication Program at MIT in Cambridge. She earned her doctorate from the American & New England Studies program at Boston University. Her work focuses on the literary history of the Gilded Age in the United States with an emphasis on satire. She was named to the inaugural cohort of Affiliated Faculty at BU’s Center for Antiracist Research and collaborated with Gene Andrew Jarrett on the creation of the African American Studies module for Oxford Bibliographies Online. Her writing appears in *American Literary Realism* and the *Edith Wharton Review*, and she is the book review editor for *The Mark Twain Annual* as well as the executive coordinator of the Mark Twain Circle of America.

Teresa Prados-Torreira
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“The Comic Lecturer in the Gilded Age”

In the decades after the Civil War, rural communities were happy to be entertained and amused by outsiders of varying degrees of notoriety. Touring lecturers, minstrel shows actors and traveling troupes, connected farming areas to the outside world. Humorists, trying to expand their popularity and supplement their income, were among those who visited small towns, their arrival eagerly anticipated by young and old. During this period, characterized by marketplace upheaval, the visiting humorist existed in a boundless social space, as his persona easily shifted from that of an advertiser, whose wit helped quack doctors sell their patent medicines, to that of a circus-like performer, to that of a respectable lecturer. My paper attempts to understand the interaction between the humorous lecturer and his audience at a time of great social fluidity.



“Comik Lektüre.” Cartoon by Thomas Nast from *The Complete Works of Josh Billings* (Henry W. Shaw) (1876)

Teresa Prados-Torreira is Professor of America History at Columbia College Chicago. She was President of the American Humor Studies Association through most of the pandemic (June 2020-June 2022). She is the author of multiple articles on U.S., and Spanish history and culture, as well as of two books on Cuban history.

Stephen Rachman
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Michigan State University

“Buying Siberia: Fraud, Speculation, and Revolution from *The Gilded Age* to *The American Claimant*”

Gregg Canfield points out that Twain’s writings about money, finance, and economics are puzzling in many respects one being that while other similarly minded authors (like Howells) gravitated toward social realism, Twain’s “typical mode when writing about” financial fictions “was to use some combination of burlesque, allegory, and melodrama” (97). In my ongoing project on Mark Twain and money, I account for this generic mélange by working from the basic premise that Twain’s economic thinking has less to do with coherent ideas about political economy than with a quirky monetary imagination that is at the heart of his humor and creativity. As part of this project, this paper explores how these generic choices signal imaginative gambits directly connected to the moral and economic climate in which Twain wrote from the Gilded Age to the emergence of full-blown American imperialism of the 1890s. The vehicle for this analysis will be Col. Sellers and his abiding speculative dreams of wealth which range from prospecting to financing democratic insurrections in the gulags of Czarist Russia. As Twain conceived of astronomical sums that circulate within modern economies (as I explored in my work on “The £1,000,000 Bank-Note”), he contemplates the individual desire for massive accumulation of capital in terms of ideological projects. As Sellers explains in *The American Claimant*, “If you wanted ten millions, I could understand that—it’s inside the human limits. But billions! That’s clear outside the limits. There must be a definite project back of that somewhere” (Ch. 18). That project is buying Siberia in the name of democracy.

Stephen Rachman is Associate Professor in the department of English, former Director of the American Studies Program and former head of Digital Humanities at Michigan State and former Co-Director of the Digital Humanities Literary Cognition Laboratory at Michigan State University. He is the co-editor and translator of *Chinese Women Writers and the Environment* (McFarland). He is the editor of *The Hasheesh Eater* by Fitz-Hugh Ludlow (Rutgers University Press). He is a co-author of the award-winning *Cholera, Chloroform, and the Science of Medicine: A Life of John Snow* (Oxford University Press) and the co-editor of *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe* (Johns Hopkins University Press). He has written numerous articles on 19th-century American literature, the history of medicine, cities, popular culture, and an award-winning Web site on Sunday school books for the Library of Congress American Memory Project. He was a 2023 Quarry Farm Fellow and his most recent work on Mark Twain is “The £1,000,000 Bank-Note’: Mark Twain and the 19th-Century Monetary Imagination” *Mark Twain Journal* 59:2 (Fall 2021).

Ann M. Ryan
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 Le Moyne College

“Gilding Jim and Nat: Mark Twain and the specter of the Angry Black Man”

In an 1885 letter often cited as evidence of his progressive sympathies, Twain writes to Francis Wayland, dean of the Yale Law school, promising to pay the tuition of Warner T. McGuinn, a Black law student, “I do not believe I would very cheerfully help a white student who would ask a benevolence of a stranger, but I do not feel so about the other color. We have ground the manhood out of them, & the shame is ours, not theirs; & we should pay for it.” (SLC to FW 12.24.1885). Warner McGuinn would go on to have an important career as an attorney, including his mentorship of a young Thurgood Marshall, which makes Twain’s support not only admirable, but also consequential. What’s often overlooked in the letter, however, is both his acknowledgment that Black manhood has been the systematic target of American culture, and that “we” will someday have to pay for crimes against it—a debt owed that may come in more ominous forms than a tuition bill. Hidden within the philanthropic agenda is a gothic reading of history, in which Twain positions white culture as both victim and villain. Twain suspects what Malcolm X predicts: chickens come home to roost. In his celebrated novel, *James*, Percival Everett’s protagonist wonders, “What would they do to a slave who knew what a hypotenuse was, what *irony* meant, how *retribution* was spelled?” (49). Despite



“Seward’s Folly.” Cartoon from *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Magazine* (April 20, 1867).



“He wants a change too.” Cartoon by Thomas Nast from *Harper’s Weekly* (October 28, 1876)

his autobiographical reveries about the enslaved people he knew and loved, Twain also reads history using an “us/them” paradigm. Long before Everett imagines the voice of James, Twain—like so many white Americans in the post-Civil War era—fears the prospect of Black retaliation, particularly when expressed and enacted by empowered Black men. In his autobiography, Twain makes a point of describing the enslaved Daniel Quarles, as a “faithful and affectionate good friend, ally and advisor” (MTOA 115). Framed as a childhood memory, this sentimental reflection is also wishful thinking, a kind of political palliative, that emerges out of Twain’s reaction to his present cultural landscape. Twain writes about his warm feelings for “Uncle Dan’l” during a period of unprecedented violence against Black people. From the election of 1876—where Black citizens are strategically assaulted at the polls—until long after he pigeonholes “The United States of Lyncherdom” in 1901, Twain wonders and worries about the kind of Black man who would not dream of being either his friend or his ally. In fragments of narrative and textual emendations, in unpublished works, and even in the liminal spaces of his famed Mississippi trilogy—*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *Pudd’nhead Wilson*—Twain imagines the voice, form, and political agenda of a Black man who knows how to spell retribution.

Ann M. Ryan is Professor of American Literature at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, New York. She is the past president of the Mark Twain Circle, the former editor of *The Mark Twain Annual*, and co-editor of *Cosmopolitan Twain*. Her research focuses primarily on issues of race and racism in Mark Twain’s life, his writings, and the society that produced him. She also writes on the intersections of the gothic and humor in American culture. Her current project, *The Ghosts of Mark Twain: A Study of Memory, Masculinity, and Race*, will be available in spring 2025.

Matt Seybold

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Elmira College

“Colonel Sellers, Doc Rockefeller, & The Technofeudal Enclosure of Everything”

In his recent manifesto, *Technofeudalism* (2023), the Greek heterodox economist, Yanis Varoufakis, declares capitalism dead, its longue durée ended not by proletarian revolution, as Marx predicted, but by the enclosure and subjectification of the means of production and circulation by an oligopoly of data-warehouseers, which he calls cloudalists. In this paper, I introduce and interrogate Varoufakis’s thesis using Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner’s *The Gilded Age* (1873), as well as some of the events it lightly fictionalizes, from an era which is frequently compared to our own, during which an emergent plutocracy seemed to some, including Twain, poised to overturn the existing political-economic order. By Varoufakis’s own admission, it is to this era in U.S. history that the cloudalists themselves turn, not only to imitate the titans of industrial combination, but for hints at how they might avoid populist and regulatory backlash like that which defined the progressive era.

Matt Seybold is Associate Professor of American Literature and Mark Twain Studies at Elmira College and Executive Producer of *The American Vandal* podcast. He is co-editor of the *Routledge Companion to Literature & Economics* (2018). Recent articles can be found in *American Literary History*, *Mark Twain Annual*, *T.S. Eliot Studies Annual*, *American Studies*, *Reception*, *Henry James Review*, and *Los Angeles Review of Books*. He has been a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Scholar at the Center for the History of Political Economy at Duke University, a Taylor Fellow in American Literature at University of Virginia’s Harrison Institute, and a Fathman Young Scholar Award recipient

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“Rereading Jim’s Coat of Arms: The Badge of Servitude and the Device of Race in Mark Twain and Nathaniel Hawthorne”

All around there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate—as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport—there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald’s wording of which might serve for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so sombre it is, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow:—

“On a field, sable, the letter A, gules.”

—*The Scarlet Letter*

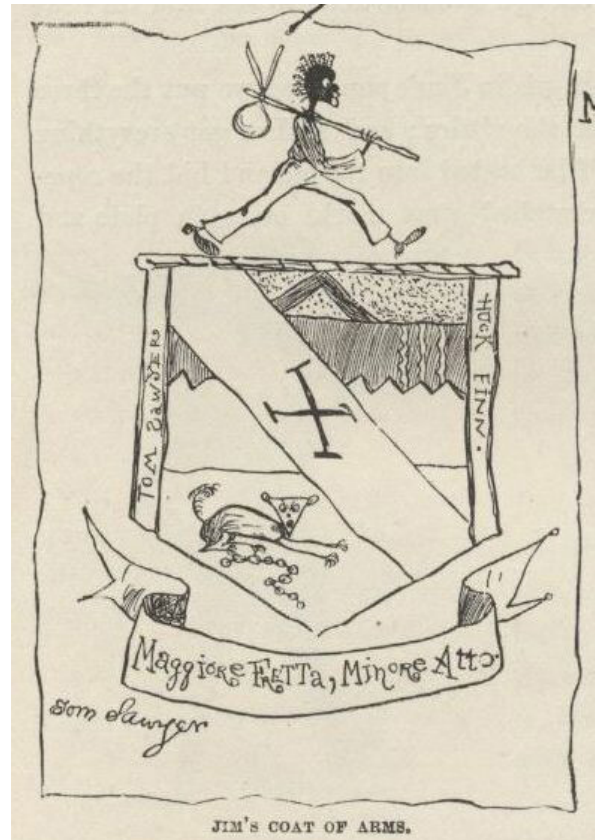
“On the scutcheon we’ll have a bend or in the dexter base, a saltire murrey in the fess, with a dog, couchant, for common charge, and under his foot a chain embattled, for slavery, with a chevron vert in a chief engrailed, and three invected lines on a field azure, with the nombril points rampant on a dancette indented; crest, a runaway nigger, sable, with his bundle over his shoulder on a bar sinister; and a couple of gules for supporters, which is you and me; motto, Maggiore fretta, minore atto. Got it out of a book—means, the more haste, the less speed.”

“Geewhillikins,” I says, “but what does the rest of it mean?”

—*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Huck Finn is as perplexed by Tom Sawyer’s insistence that Jim inscribe his coat of arms on the wall of his cell at Phelps Farm as he is unsure of that armorial device’s meaning. And he remains as dissatisfied with Tom’s evasion of his questions about the meaning of Jim’s coat of arms—“We ain’t got no time to bother over that”—as he is with Tom’s eventual admission of ignorance—“Oh, I don’t know. But he’s got to have it. All the nobility does” (322). Still, Huck decides to trust Tom and goes along with his efforts to devise a plan “romantical enough” to “set a free nigger free” (294, 358). “Tom said we’d got to,” he reports: “there warn’t no case of a state prisoner not scrabbling his inscription to leave behind, and his coat of arms” (321).

Tom Sawyer’s romantical plan, in which Jim is figured both as nobility and as state prisoner, has been the subject of much critical controversy. Building on Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s observation that critics of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* have “built an increasingly solid case that the last portion of the novel may be read as a commentary on American race relations in the post-Reconstruction era,” the more productive questions a generation later are, what kind of commentary? To what ends? And with what relevance today?



“Jim’s Coat of Arms.” Image from Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chapter XXXIII (1885)

There is no better way to answer these questions, I propose, than to reread Jim’s coat of arms. For where it is fairly clear that Tom Sawyer’s motto (“the more haste, the less speed”) could well have been a slogan for the nation’s recent repudiation of Reconstruction, the significance of Huck’s question (“What does the rest of it mean?”) is less clear. As we shall see, answering Huck’s question can help us determine what kind of commentary Mark Twain was making, not only on the racial politics of his own times, but also on the author the entire episode seems designed to confront—Nathaniel Hawthorne. It may seem that Clemens’s transformation of *The Scarlet Letter*’s heraldic motto, “On a field, *sable*, the letter A, *gules*,” into Tom Sawyer’s description of Jim’s coat of arms—“crest, a runaway nigger, *sable*, with his bundle over his shoulder on a bar sinister; and a couple of *gules* for supporters, which is you and me”—is simply a joke at Hawthorne’s expense, a parody of the romance in the name of American realism, a rejection of Hawthorne’s gloom in the name of American humor. But if it is a joke, it is an eminently practical one.

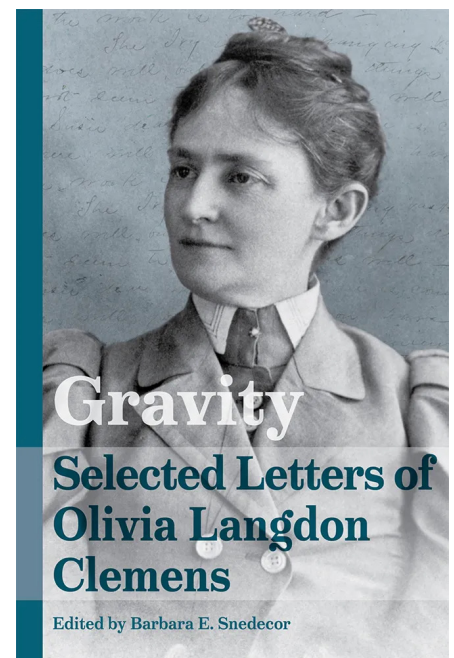
In this excerpt from my manuscript *The Race for Hawthorne*, I demonstrate that taking Twain’s practical joke seriously requires close, contextual, and intertextual reading strategies to be brought to bear on the language and iconography of heraldry in Hawthorne’s works and in the controversial evasion scene in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. When we do this, we will find new ways to understand the relations between Twain and Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the Compromises of 1850 and 1877, and antebellum and post-Reconstruction racial politics. Plus, we will gain new perspectives on our own thoroughly compromised times.

Bruce Simon is Associate Professor of English at the State University of New York at Fredonia. His research and teaching interests span the range of U.S. literatures and their intersections with American studies, Black studies, critical race/ethnicity studies, and postcolonial studies. His primary research focus is on pre-Civil War America, but he is also interested in the history, governance, and funding of higher education; the nature and value of academic and intellectual work; the structure and status of the profession; and the conditions of teaching and learning. His publications may be found in *Race Consciousness: African-American Studies for the New Century*; *The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity in the United States*; *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*; *Exploring Shared Governance in Higher Education, Vol. 1: Demands, Transitions, Transformations*; *Book XI: A journal of literary philosophy*; *Electronic Book Review*; *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*; and *Critical Matrix: The Princeton Journal of Women, Gender, and Culture*.

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“‘She is the best girl in all the world’: Gilded Age Domestic Humor and Resilience in Olivia Clemens”

Olivia Langdon Clemens, affectionately called “gravity” by her suitor, Samuel Clemens, nevertheless possessed gentle humor and a resilient mindset. Drawing on excerpts from writings by Samuel and Olivia, this paper will explore three moments of domestic humor during the couple’s Gilded Age courtship and marriage—first, during the early months of marriage, when teasing and banter were frequent; second, during their first decade of parenting, when humorous observations came easily; and finally, during the bankruptcy years, when Olivia, with bursts of optimism, eased the family’s struggle toward recovery from bankruptcy.



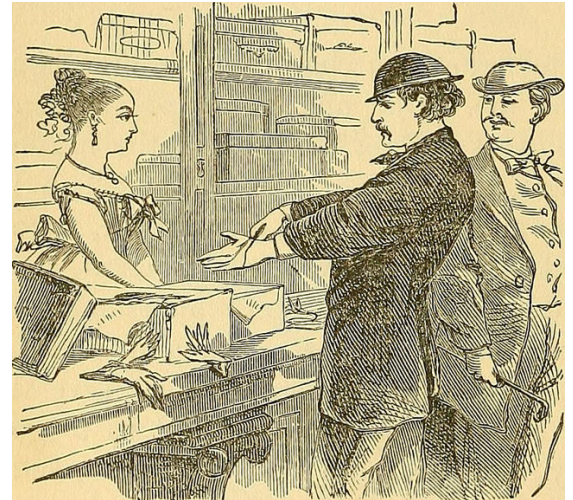
Barbara E. Snedecor served as director of the Center for Mark Twain Studies and as assistant professor of American Literature at Elmira College. In addition to editing the second edition of *Mark Twain in Elmira*, she has contributed pieces to the *Mark Twain Annual* and *American Literary Realism* and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

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“Twain, Humor, and the Fashioning of Gilded Age Consumer Society”

This paper explores the role of Mark Twain’s humor writing in training people to become “consumers” at the end of the nineteenth century. Beginning with *The Innocents Abroad* and its afterlives (especially the *Innocence Abroad* board game from Parker Brothers), it observes the pursuit in much of Twain’s work for audience participation and posits at least some of Twain’s reliance on humor as a means of securing such participation. That is, this paper posits humor as a key component in creating affective associations with the Mark Twain persona, making that persona functionally real. Simultaneously, however, the Mark Twain persona was always at least partially a consumable good, and Samuel Clemens was often explicit in discussing the salability of the Twain name and merchandise. In this way, humor functions as an engine of commodity fetishism—a fact still pervasive in modern advertising practices. Critically, though, the paper does not condemn nineteenth-century humor so much as place it within the contexts of consumer culture at the turn of the century. Much like Twain’s humor, it could at times accommodate prevailing power arrangements and inequalities, but it could also be critical and generative.



“Entertaining an Angel.” Image from Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, Chapter VII (1869)

Kyhl Stephen is a Humanities Scholars Program postdoctoral associate at Cornell University, where his dissertation *American Fiction and the Textual Basis of Corporate Personhood, 1871-1921* won the Guilford Prize for the best written dissertation in 2023-24. He is the recipient of a 2023 Quarry Farm Fellowship.

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“‘Mr. Seward’s Real Estate Transactions’: Comic Imperialism in the Reconstruction Era”

On December 26, 1867, the *Wilmington Daily Commercial* reprinted a Mark Twain piece titled “Mr. Seward’s Real Estate Transactions,” in which Twain purports to seek “any information respecting such islands, if any, as the Government is going to purchase.” Twain is asking, he says, for his uncle, who has already tried and failed to settle on the Caribbean island of St. Thomas, which Secretary of State William Seward had attempted to purchase in 1865. His uncle had also “tried Walrussia,” aka Alaska, which the US bought from Russia early in 1867; “but the bears kept after him so much and kept him so on the jump, as it were, that he had to leave the country.” Twain ends the letter

by asking about prospects in Puerto Rico, which his uncle “has heard that Government is thinking about buying.”

Twain’s letter derives humor from Seward’s postwar spending spree, during which the U.S. Secretary of State attempted to negotiate the purchase of several territories, including, unsuccessfully, the Danish West Indies (today’s U.S. Virgin Islands) and the Samaná Bay in the Dominican Republic, and, more successfully, Alaska. By 1867 the U.S. Navy also occupied the Midway Atoll, northwest of Hawai’i. My talk will consider comic and satiric treatments of Seward’s land grabs as they appeared in the popular press. I will trace how an epithet for Alaska territory, “Walrussia,” gained traction during Seward’s 1867 negotiations with Russia for that territory. In analyzing over 600 newspaper mentions of the term between 1867 and 1886, I will demonstrate the transmutation of a joke from satire to humor to tacit acceptance as serious, and then put the use of that nickname into comic conversation with other humor about US expansionism in Alaska and the Caribbean. In doing so, I will situate Seward’s imperial acquisitiveness as prefiguring on a national level the greed of individual capitalist robber barons that would soon come to define the Gilded Age in the United States.



“Russian America. Canvassing the State Ticket.”
Cartoon from *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* (May 11, 1867).

Todd Nathan Thompson is Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a Contributing Editor to *Studies in American Humor*. Todd is author of *A Laughable Empire: The US Imagines the Pacific World, 1840-1890* (Penn State University Press, 2023) and *The National Joker: Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Satire* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2015). Todd has earned research fellowships through the Center for Mark Twain Studies, the American Antiquarian Society, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Clements Library, and the Lilly Library. His work on political satire and pre-1900 American literature has also appeared in *American Periodicals*, *Scholarly Editing*, *Early American Literature*, *ESQ*, *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, *Teaching American Literature*, the *Mark Twain Annual*, and elsewhere. He is currently working on a new book project, tentatively titled “Manifest Jestiny: Comic Cartography and Humor as US Foreign Policy, 1840-1870.” Todd serves as Executive Director of the American Humor Studies Association and Contributing Editor to *Studies in American Humor*. At IUP, Todd teaches graduate and undergraduate literature and writing courses, including classes on humor and satire, literature and activism, and pre-1900 American literat



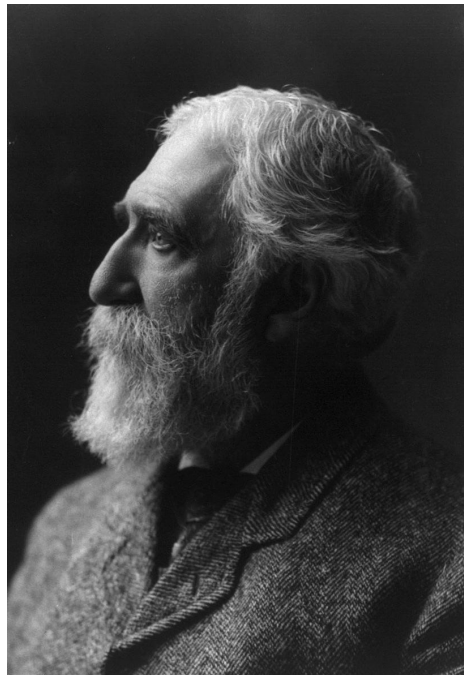
1873

W.H.W. Bicknell sc.

Frontispiece of *The Gilded Age* Volume 10 (1899) etched by William Harry Warren Bicknell. The etching was a composite based on two separate photographs of Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner. The scene appears to take place in the Study at Quarry Farm.



Mark Twain in the Study at Quarry Farm (1874)



Charles Dudley Warner in 1897



Mark Twain in a handshake with John T. Raymond, the actor who played Colonel Sellers in the stage adaptation of *The Gilded Age*. Photo taken on January 11 or 12, 1875.

GILDED AGES: Humor, Literature, and Society

October 11 & 12, 2024

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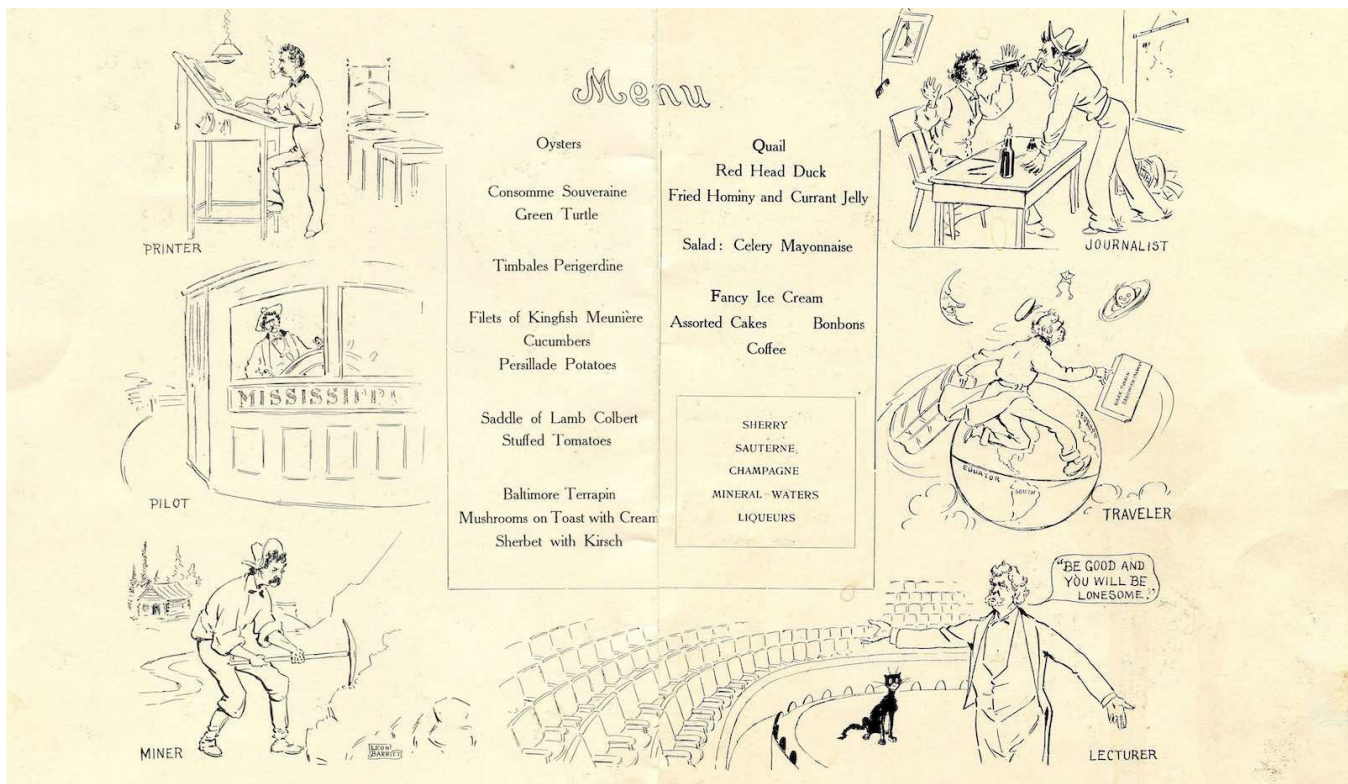
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Menu from Mark Twain's 70th Birthday Dinner at Delmonico's, New York City (December 5, 1905)

The dinners for this year's symposium have been inspired by Mark Twain's 70th Birthday dinner menu.

Friday, October 11, Tift Lounge, Elmira College

Baked Stuffed Cherry Tomatoes, Mushrooms on toast with cream
 Mixed Greens with goat cheese, oranges and sunflower seeds with red wine vinaigrette
 Saddle of Lamb Colbert, with Parsillade Potatoes and Asparagus with blistered cherry tomatoes
 Chocolate Ganache Cake with Cinnamon and fresh Cream

Saturday, October 12, Quarry Farm Barn

Meat and Cheese Board with Bread fig jam and Whole Grain Mustard
 Baltimore Terrapin-Braised Turtle
 Waldorf Salad
 Roast Quail with Currant Jelly, Fried Hominy and Shaved Brussels Sprouts
 Individual Neapolitan Cakes

Vegetarian Option are available, as requested

***As always, the Center for Mark Twain Studies would like to give a heartfelt thank you to
 Kenneth Knowles, Parkhurst Dining General Manager
 Ryan Rombach, Executive Chef
 All the gracious servers and waitstaff***



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- At least one fellowship will be reserved for creative writers.
- At least one fellowship will be reserved for creative visual artists.



Applications are due November 30, 2024
Visit: www.marktwainstudies.com for more information.



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