

2025 Fall Trouble Begins Series

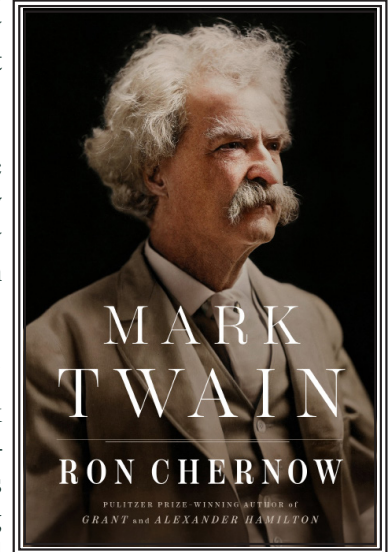


Wednesday, October 8 at Gibson Theater, Elmira College campus (7:00 p.m.) “Ron Chernow’s *Mark Twain* Book Tour” *Pulitzer-prize winning Biographer*

Mark Twain ranks as America’s most beloved humorist, the largest literary figure this country has produced. Posterity cherishes an image of a mustachioed man in a white suit, dispensing witticisms with a twinkling eye. But far from being a soft-shoe, cracker-barrel philosopher, Twain could be a waspish man of many moods and strong opinions, his wit laced with vinegar. He was funny, charming, and genial but also moody, temperamental, and sometimes explosive.

In short, he was a complex and contradictory man and though he looms large in the public imagination, most of us know very little about him. Now, in his highly anticipated and revelatory new book *Mark Twain* (Penguin Press; 2025), acclaimed biographer Ron Chernow brilliantly illuminates the full, fascinating life of the writer long celebrated as the father of American literature.

Ron Chernow is the prizewinning author of seven previous books and the recipient of the 2015 National Humanities Medal. His first book, *The House of Morgan*, won the National Book Award, *Washington: A Life* won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography, and *Alexander Hamilton*—the inspiration for the Broadway musical—won the George Washington Book Prize. He has twice been a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and is one of only three living biographers to have won the Gold Medal for Biography of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. A past president of PEN America, Chernow has been the recipient of nine honorary doctorates.



Wednesday, October 15 at the Quarry Farm Barn (7:00 p.m.) “A Delicate Balance: Work and Play in Mark Twain’s Creative Process” Kerry Driscoll, *University of California, Berkeley*

Although Mark Twain published over twenty books during his lifetime—in addition to countless short stories, sketches, and essays—he nonetheless repeatedly maintained that he was essentially a “lazy” man. Speaking to a *New York Times* reporter on the cusp of his 70th birthday in 1905, for example, Twain insisted that he “had not done a day’s work in all [his] life,” explaining, “What I have done...was play. If it had been work I shouldn’t have done it.” This talk, featuring archival photographs and manuscripts from the Mark Twain Project, examines the concepts of “work” and “play” in terms of the writer’s creative process and prolific literary output. Specifically, it explores the physical conditions and circumstances Mark Twain found most conducive to the expression of his artistic genius—from his Quarry Farm study in Elmira, NY to a rented room atop a mountain in Heidelberg, Germany, and culminating in the comfort of his elaborately carved Venetian bed.



Samuel Langhorne Clemens in bed (1909)

This talk—which features archival photographs and documents from the Mark Twain Papers at Berkeley—explores the physical environs Mark Twain found most conducive to the expression of his artistic genius—from his Quarry Farm study to a rented room atop a mountain in Heidelberg, Germany, and finally, the comfort of his own bed.

Kerry Driscoll, Professor of English Emerita at the University of Saint Joseph (West Hartford, CT) is currently Associate Editor at the Mark Twain Papers and Project at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *Mark Twain among the Indians and Other Indigenous Peoples* (University of California Press, 2018), the first book-length study of the writer’s evolving views regarding the aboriginal inhabitants of North America and Australasia, and his deeply conflicted representations of them in fiction, newspaper sketches, and speeches. She is past president of the Mark Twain Circle of America as well as a contributing editor to its journal, the *Mark Twain Annual*. In 2022, she received the Circle’s Louis J. Budd award for distinguished scholarship in recognition of her groundbreaking research.

Thursday, October 16 in the Quarry Farm Library (7:00 p.m.)

“Beyond the White Suit: Mark Twain in the 21st Century”

Kerry Driscoll, *University of California, Berkeley*

Ann M. Ryan, *Le Moyne College*

Matt Seybold, *Elmira College*

In 1910 William Dean Howells published *My Mark Twain*. In the world of Twain scholarship, the possessive pronoun—yours, mine, ours—surfaces in a number of titles, as authors struggle to interpret the meaning of Twain’s life and literature. And as we’ve seen in recent publications, the desire to understand, contain, or revise that legacy continues—generating even more complicated readings of his history and our own. Join us at Quarry Farm for a conversation about Twain in the world today.

Kerry Driscoll, author of *Mark Twain Among The Indians* (University of California, 2019), a groundbreaking study of Twain’s “deeply conflicted representations” of indigenous peoples, a topic long ignored by Twain Studies scholarship. She is Associate Editor at the Mark Twain Papers and Project at University of California, Berkeley.

Ann Ryan, author of the forthcoming *The Ghosts of Mark Twain* (University of Missouri Press, 2025), which “calls into question the ‘St. Mark’ school of criticism, and invites readers to question Twain’s easy relation to Black culture.” She is Professor of English at Le Moyne College.

Matt Seybold, editor of the annotated digital edition of *Mark Twain & The Russians* produced by CMTS in 2022, and a series of essays on “The Twain Doctrine,” the Cold War propagandization of Twain’s works and legacy by both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. He is Associate Professor of American Literature at Elmira College.



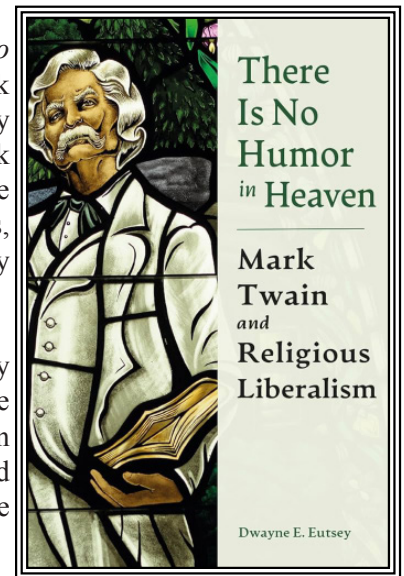
Wednesday, October 29 at the Quarry Farm Barn (7:00 p.m.)

“‘I Have Always Preached’: Mark Twain and Liberal Religion”

Dwayne Eutsey, *Independent Scholar*

“The reports of Mark Twain’s atheism have been greatly exaggerated.” So begins “*There is No Humor in Heaven*”: *Mark Twain and Religious Liberalism*, Dwayne Eutsey’s intriguing new book that significantly challenges prevailing assumptions about Twain’s hostility toward religion. Eutsey will present an overview of the book, focusing on religious liberalism’s lifelong influence on Mark Twain’s life and writing. Published by the University of Missouri Press, Eutsey’s book traces the influences of various liberal religious movements of Twain’s era on his writing and religious beliefs, ranging from Freemasonry, Universalism, and Unitarianism to the more genteel liberal Christianity of Elmira and Hartford, and ultimately Free Religion and aspects of esoteric Hinduism.

As a frustrated Gospel preacher himself, Twain’s many friendships with several liberal clergy throughout his life were instrumental in bringing these influences into his life and writing: the “radical evangelical” Franklin Rising in Nevada; Thomas Starr King and other prominent Unitarian ministers in California; Horace Bushnell, Thomas K. Beecher, and Joe Twichell in Elmira and Hartford; and the radical Emerson protege Moncure Conway, whose interest in Hinduism may have influenced Twain’s controversial final novella, *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*.



After earning a B.A. in English from the University of Maryland and a certificate in Theological Studies from Georgetown University, **Dwayne Eutsey** completed his master’s thesis on Mark Twain’s unconventional religious views at Georgetown University. He has since established himself as an independent scholar in Mark Twain Studies. The author of several scholarly articles on Twain and numerous freelance pieces on humor, religion, politics, and popular culture, Eutsey also is the co-author of *The Abide Guide: Living Like Lebowski*.

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Visit the “**Trouble Begins Archives**” at **MarkTwainStudies.com** for a downloadable recording of all these talks and other past lectures.

You can also see past “Trouble Begins” programs and CMTS quadrennial conference and symposia programs.