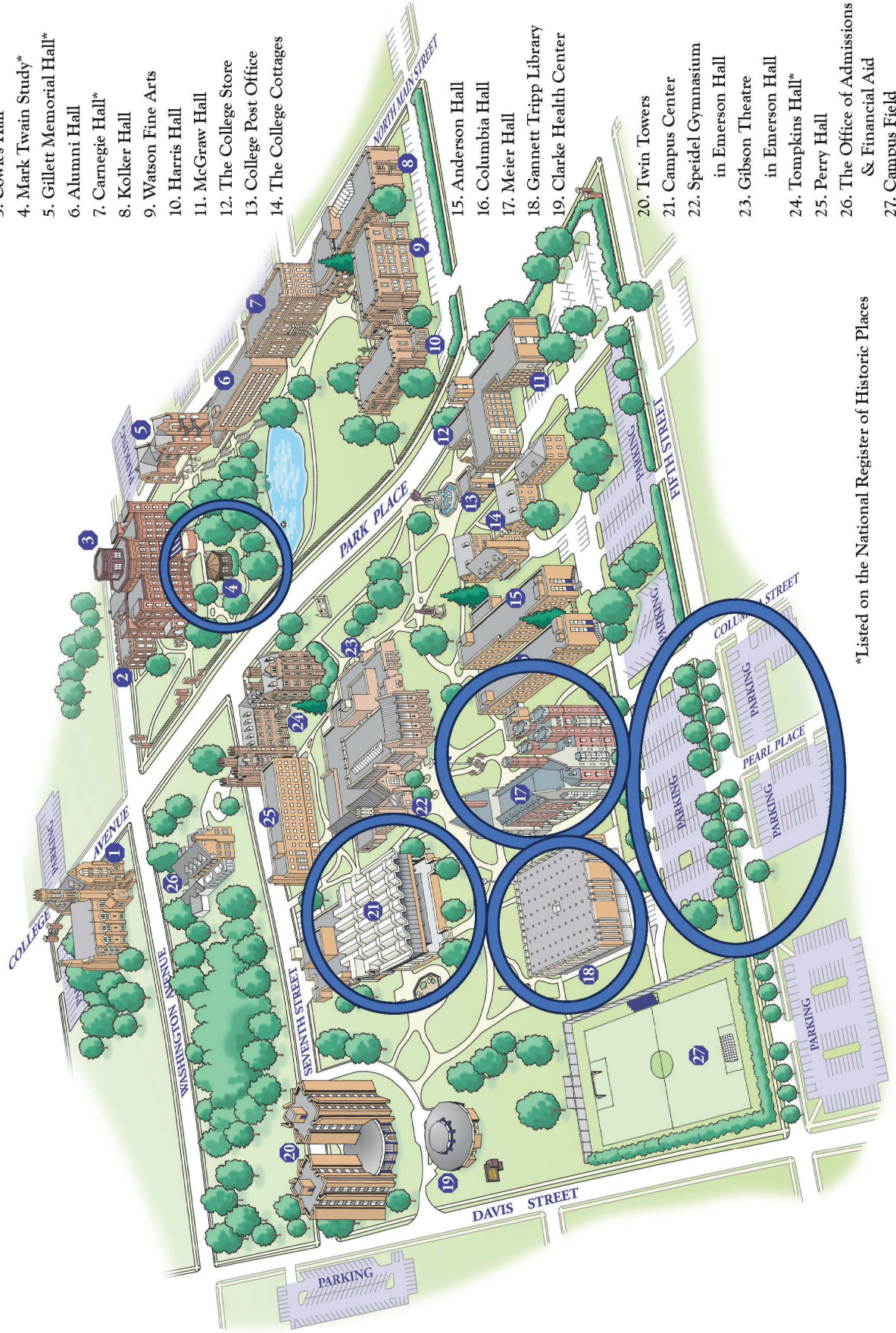




Elmira 2026: The Tenth International
Conference on the State of Mark Twain Studies

IRREVERENCE, REBELLION, & RESILIENCE
JULY 30 - AUGUST 1, 2026

The Elmira 2026 Registration Desk is located in the main lobby of the Gannett Tripp Library (#18).



1. Hamilton Hall*
2. Fassett 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



**Elmira 2026:
The Tenth International Conference
on the State of Mark Twain Studies**

“Irreverence, Rebellion, and Resilience”

Thursday, July 30 to Saturday, August 1, 2026

in collaboration with

Mark Twain Circle of America
American Humor Studies Association
Literature/Film Association
2022 Quarry Farm Symposium “Abolition Studies”
2023 Quarry Farm Symposium “Science Fiction, Invention, and Technology”
2024 Quarry Farm Symposium “Gilded Age Humor”
2025 Quarry Farm Symposium “Energy Studies”

Center for Mark Twain Studies Staff

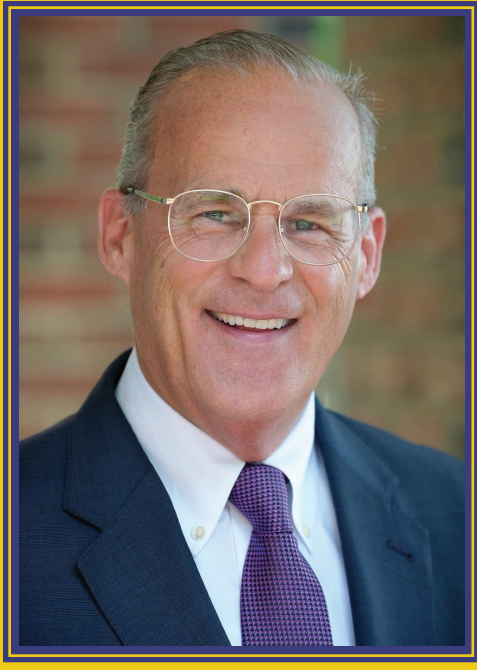
Kathleen Galvin, *Collections Manager*
Joseph Lemak, *Director*
Matt Seybold, *Scholar-in-Residence*
Steve Webb, *Quarry Farm Caretaker*

Program Editorial Assistance

Susan K. Harris, *University of Kansas*
Lawrence Howe, *Roosevelt University*
Ann Ryan, *Le Moyne College*
Barbara Snedecor, *Elmira College*

The cover artwork, program design, and exhibit design was created by
Angelina Addison '28, *CMTS Digital Design Intern*
The “Women Writers in the Time of Mark Twain” Exhibit was curated by
Jessa Barton '24, *Elmira College Collections Manager*

ELMIRA COLLEGE WELCOME



Welcome! On behalf of Elmira College, our Board of Trustees, students, faculty, and staff, I am delighted to welcome you to the Tenth International Conference on the State of Mark Twain Studies.

Elmira College's connection to Mark Twain is both unique and enduring. Members of the College faculty knew Twain personally, and that relationship was strengthened through the efforts of Dr. Ida Langdon, Professor of English and niece of Olivia Langdon Clemens.

It was Dr. Langdon who arranged for Twain's Study to be moved to the Elmira College campus in 1952.

In 1983, Jervis Langdon, Jr. further cemented this bond by gifting Quarry Farm to the College.

Since then, Elmira College has proudly served as steward of Quarry Farm and the Mark Twain Archives. The College accepts the serious responsibility in preserving

Twain's legacy while supporting scholarship that explores the continuing relevance of his work.

Recent publications, including *James* by Percival Everett and *Mark Twain* by Ron Chernow, have renewed public interest in this iconic American author. These works have highlighted the importance of the work undertaken by Twain scholars.

Under the leadership of Dr. Joseph Lemak, the Center for Mark Twain Studies continues to serve as a leading destination for dedicated scholars, writers, and artists. Through initiatives such as online access to *Mark Twain Day by Day* and efforts to secure National Historic Landmark designation for Quarry Farm, the Center is expanding its impact and preserving Twain's legacy for future generations.

On behalf of all of us at Elmira College, thank you for joining us and giving witness to the continued impact of Twain's life and legacy. I wish you a stimulating and rewarding conference and look forward to the conversations and discoveries that will emerge from your time together.

Dr. John F. Dolan
16th President of Elmira College

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Wednesday, July 29

8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Registration and Assistance

Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk

Thursday, July 30

8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Registration and Assistance

Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk

8:00 a.m. - 8:50 a.m.

Full Breakfast

Campus Center, Dining Hall

9:00 a.m. - 10:20 a.m.

Session One

See Page 6 for locations

10:30 a.m. - 11:50 a.m.

Session Two

See Page 6-7 for locations

12:00 p.m. - 12:50 p.m.

Luncheon Buffet

Campus Center, Dining Hall

1:00 p.m. - 2:20 p.m.

Session Three

See Page 7 for locations

2:30 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.

Session Four

See Page 8 for locations

4:00 p.m. - 5:20 p.m.

Session Five

Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.

Happy Hour

Campus Center, Portico

6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

CMTS Awards Dinner

Campus Center, Dining Hall

8:15 p.m. - 9:15 p.m.

American Vandal Live

Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

9:15 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.

Cash Bar

Meier Hall, Basel Lounge

Friday, July 31

8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Registration and Assistance

Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk

8:00 a.m. - 8:50 a.m.

Full Breakfast

Campus Center, Dining Hall

9:00 a.m. - 10:20 a.m.

Session Six

See Page 10 for locations

10:30 a.m. - 11:50 a.m.

Session Seven

See Page 10-11 for locations

12:00 p.m. - 12:50 p.m.

Luncheon Buffet

Campus Center, Dining Hall

1:00 p.m. - 2:20 p.m.

Session Eight

See Page 11 for locations

2:30 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.

Session Nine

See Page 11-12 for locations

4:00 p.m. - 5:20 p.m.

Session Ten

Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.

Happy Hour

Campus Center, Portico

6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Dinner

Campus Center, Dining Hall

8:15 p.m. - 9:15 p.m.

Keynote Speaker: Robert Hirst

Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

9:15 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.

Cash Bar

Meier Hall, Basel Lounge

Saturday, August 1

8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Registration and Assistance

Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk

8:00 a.m. - 8:50 a.m.

Full Breakfast

Campus Center, Dining Hall

9:00 a.m. - 10:20 a.m.

Session Eleven

See Page 13 for locations

10:30 a.m. - 11:50 a.m.

Session Twelve

See Page 13-14 for locations

12:00 p.m. - 12:50 p.m.

Luncheon Buffet

Campus Center, Dining Hall

1:00 p.m. - 2:20 p.m.

Session Thirteen

See Page 14 for locations

2:30 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.

Session Fourteen

See Page 14 for locations

4:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Quarry Farm Picnic

Quarry Farm

8:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.

Cash Bar

Meier Hall, Basel Lounge

Sunday, August 2

8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Meier Hall Checkout

Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk

FULL CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Wednesday, July 29

8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. Registration and Assistance Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk

Thursday, July 30

8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. Registration and Assistance Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk

8:00 a.m. - 8:50 a.m. Full Breakfast Campus Center, Dining Hall

9:00 a.m. - 10:20 a.m. **SESSION ONE**

Panel #1 Beyond the Page: Adaptations, Sequels, and (Re)Visions of Mark Twain's Writings

Organized by the Mark Twain Circle of America
Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall
David E.E. Sloane, *University of New Haven* (Moderator)

Jeff Abernathy, *Alma College*, "Buying Innocence: Early Commercial Adaptations of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*"

Don Pellegrino, *Independent Scholar*, "The Science Adventures of Tom & Huck"

Seema Sharma, *University of Mumbai*, "Chromatic Instability and the Ethics of Complex Seeing in *Big Jim* and *the White Boy*"

Panel #2 Writing Twain: Letters, Friendship, and Electric Connections

Campus Center, Tiff Lounge
Ann M. Ryan, *Le Moyne College* (Moderator)

Kerry Driscoll, *Mark Twain Papers and Project*, "'Not for sin but for sentiment—and stupidity': Mark Twain's Brief (and unhappy) Association with the Connecticut Prisoners' Friends' Society"

Terry Oggel, *Virginia Commonwealth University*, "Twain and Tesla: The Twain Shall Meet"

Hillary Warolin, *Cornell University*, "Transmediality and Adaptation: *Moby-Dick* and *Tom Sawyer*"

10:30 a.m. - 11:50 a.m. **SESSION TWO**

Panel #3 "Abolition Studies" 2022 Quarry Farm Symposium Reprise

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall
Nancy Quintanilla, *California State Polytechnic University Pomona* (Moderator)

Jess A. Goldberg, *New Mexico Highlands University*, "Making Dead Kidnappers:

Frederick Douglass, Mark Twain, and the Force of Abolition"

LaVelle Ridley, *Ohio State University*, "Exploring the Abolitionist Thread that Weaves

Black and Trans Women's Literary Cultures Together"

Matt Seybold, *Elmira College*, "'I am an Abolitionist - and something more': The Freelancing of James Redpath & Mark Twain"

Panel #4 "Science Fiction, Invention, and Technology" 2023 Quarry Farm Symposium Reprise

Campus Center, Tifft Lounge

James Caron, *University of Hawai'i at Manoa* (Moderator)

Edward Guimont, *Bristol Community College*, "Twain, Astronomy, and Speculative Fiction"

Anjalee Gunaratnam, *University of Cambridge*, "Latimer's Matter: The Decomposition of Self, Hegelian Dialectics, and George Eliot's Physics of Sympathy in 'The Lifted Veil'"

Patrick Prominski, *Grand Rapids Community College*, "The Microscopist and Mark Twain: Expanding Twain's Elmira Social Circle and Influence on 'The Great Dark'"

12:00 p.m. - 12:50 p.m.

Luncheon Buffet

Campus Center, Dining Hall

1:00 p.m. - 2:20 p.m.

SESSION THREE

Panel #5 Twain: Rebellion, Revision, and Empire

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall

Susan K. Harris, *Kansas University* (Moderator)

Bernard J. Dobski, *Assumption University*, "Resurrecting *Is Shakespeare Dead?*"

William Hancock, *Pennsylvania State University*, "'The Enclosed Is Not Fancy, It Is History': Mark Twain, Theodore Roosevelt, and the English Civil War in *Fin De Siècle America*"

Andrew Hebard, *Miami University of Ohio*, "Bosses and Bureaucrats: Twain's Satires of Virtue and Expertise in the Administrative State"

Panel #6 "Arrogance, Autocrats, and Corruption: Mark Twain Critiques the American Political Landscape"

Organized by the Mark Twain Circle of America

Campus Center, Tifft Lounge

Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *University of Texas at San Antonio* (Moderator)

David Carlyon, *Independent Scholar*, "Why Send Huck To a Circus? Why Bind Jim?"

Nicholas Otranto, *Southeastern Louisiana University*, "Mark Twain and American Belonging"

Ann Ryan, *LeMoyne College*, "Cowards, Critics, and the Untold True Story of 'The United States of Lyncherdom'"

2:30 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.

SESSION FOUR

Roundtable #1 "Interrogating 'American' Humor"

Organized by the American Humor Studies Association

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall

Bruce Michelson, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign* (Moderator)

James Caron, *University of Hawai'i at Manoa*, "The Obfuscation of Walter Blair's title, *Native American Humor*"

Judith Yaross Lee, *Ohio University*, "Understanding the National in American Humor"

Todd Nathan Thompson, *Indiana University of Pennsylvania*, "Hemispheric Humor Studies"

Panel #7 New Scholarship on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Campus Center, Tiffit Lounge

Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Stanford University* (Moderator)

Holger Kersten, *Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*, "Jim in a New Light: Revisiting *Huckleberry Finn* Illustrations in American and German First Editions"

Takuya Kubo, *Kanazawa University*, "Biocultural Reading of *Huckleberry Finn*: Huck's Oscillation Between Body, Thought, and American Dichotomies"

Jeff Steinbrink, *Franklin & Marshall College*, "Quantum Failure and Gunplay in *Huck Finn*"

4:00 p.m. - 5:20 p.m.

SESSION FIVE

Roundtable #2 "Man/Myth/Legend: Working Towards an Audience-Centered Mark Twain House & Museum"

Organized by the Mark Twain House & Museum, *Stephens Lounge, Meier Hall*

Erin Bartram, Associate Director for Education at The Mark Twain House & Museum

Rebecca Floyd, Director of Interpretation at The Mark Twain House & Museum

Jeffrey Nichols, Executive Director at The Mark Twain House & Museum

5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.

Happy Hour

Campus Center, Portico

6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Welcome Dinner

Campus Center, Dining Hall

Elmira College President's Welcome
Jervis Langdon, Jr. Award Presentation
Henry Nash Smith Service Award Presentation

8:15 p.m. - 9:15 p.m.

The American Vandal Live

Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

"Hot Type and Token Economies: Studying 19th-Century Print & Generative AI"

This session, which will be recorded as an episode of *The American Vandal* podcast, will feature three scholars whose research interests include and often connect the development of print technology during Mark Twain's lifetime and present technological revolutions in digital publishing and artificial intelligence. A free-flowing conversation which will also include questions from the audience, topics will give participants opportunity to think historically, comparatively, and collaboratively. Why are scholars of C19 literature and the history of journalism drawn to the study of contemporary technology? What do we learn about the cultural, social, and political repercussions of media revolutions by studying the print technologies which Twain was obsessed with? How is the emerging field of Critical AI drawing upon literary and cultural studies? How are long-time practitioners of print and digital publishing, in the academic and trade presses, adopting and/or adapting to generative AI models and applications?

Lauren M. E. Goodlad is Distinguished Professor of English at Rutgers University and the Chair of Rutgers's interdisciplinary initiative in Critical AI, co-organized by the Center for Cultural Analysis and the Center For Cognitive Science. She is also the founding editor of the Critical AI journal published by Duke University Press. Her long record of scholarship in Victorian literature and culture includes *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Oxford UP, 2015) and *Victorian Literature & The Victorian State* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2003).

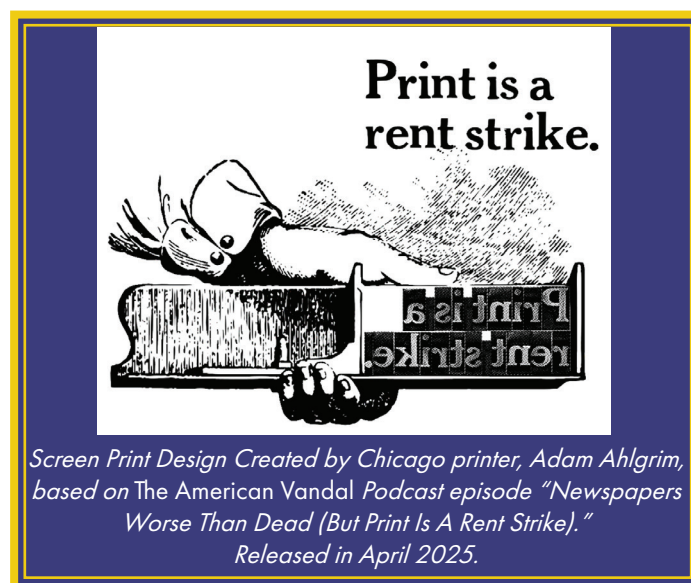
Jeff Jarvis is Visiting Professor in the School of Communication & Journalism at Stony Brook University and Distinguished Fellow in Montclair State's Center for Cooperative Media. His long career in journalism includes founding *Entertainment Weekly*, being a TV critic for *People* and *TV Guide*, and blogging at *Buzzmachine*. His two recent books, *The Gutenberg Parenthesis* (Bloomsbury, 2023) and *Hot Type* (Bloomsbury, 2026), both treat Mark Twain as a major thinker about, as well as practitioner in, the age of print.

Matt Seybold is Associate Professor of American Literature & Mark Twain Studies at Elmira College, resident scholar at the Center For Mark Twain Studies, Founding Director of Media Studies at Elmira, and host of *The American Vandal*, one of the top 3% most-downloaded podcasts in the world. He is also the co-editor of *The Routledge Companion To Literature & Economics* (2018) and is currently working on a book triangulating asset management, education technology, and university administration, tentatively titled "Deliberate Deliteracy."

9:30 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.

Cash Bar

Meier Hall, Basel Lounge



Friday, July 31

8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. Registration and Assistance *Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk*

8:00 a.m. - 8:50 a.m. Full Breakfast *Campus Center, Dining Hall*

9:00 a.m. - 10:20 a.m. **SESSION SIX**

Panel #8 Twain World/Twain's World

Organized by the Literature/Film Association
Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall
David Bianculli, *Rowan University* (Moderator)

Kristopher Mecholsky, *Savannah College of Art and Design*, "If It Is Possible to
Burlesque That Business: Twain, Detection, and Popular Inheritance"
Kyle Meikle, *University of Baltimore*, "Poeland, Twainworld, Kingverse"
Jack Ryan, *Gettysburg College*, "The Campaign that Failed: Adapting Mark Twain and
War"

Panel #9 (Ir)Reverent Twain

Campus Center, Tifft Lounge
John Bird, *Winthrop University* (Moderator)

Zsanna Mária Bodor, *Baylor University*, "'Extinction in the Smoke-Clouds of the State':
Evolution and the Ecogothic in Mark Twain's *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*"
Dwayne Eutsey, *Independent Scholar*, "'I Don't Take No Stock in Dead People': Mark
Twain's Holy Irreverence"
Kaine Ezell, *Oklahoma Baptist University*, "'Showing Off' for Who?: Twain's Analysis
of Spiritual Motivation in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*"

10:30 a.m. - 11:50 a.m. **SESSION SEVEN**

Panel #10 "Energy Studies" 2025 Quarry Farm Symposium Reprise

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall
Matt Seybold, *Elmira College* (Moderator)

Stephanie Foote, *University of Vermont*, "The Work of Leisure: Energy, Extraction, and
Nineteenth-Century Literature"
Jeff Insko, *Oakland University*, "Refinery Realism"
Alexis Schmidt, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*, "Out of This World and
Time": Energy Dreams and *A Connecticut Yankee*"

Panel #11 "Gilded Age Humor" 2024 Quarry Farm Symposium Reprise

Campus Center, Tifft Lounge
Teresa Prados-Torreira, *Columbia College Chicago* (Moderator)

James Caron, *University of Hawai'i at Manoa*, "Marietta Holley and the Gilded Age Women's Movement"

Stephen Rachman, *Michigan State University*, "Thinking Fast and Slow: Daniel Kahneman and Mark Twain's 'How to Tell a Story'"

Todd Thompson, *Indiana University of Pennsylvania*, "'Siberia,' Rechristened 'Future': Imaginative Mapping Meets Imperial Anxiety in Gilded Age Humor"

12:00 p.m. - 12:50 p.m.

Luncheon Buffet

Campus Center, Dining Hall

1:00 p.m. - 2:20 p.m.

SESSION EIGHT

Panel #12 Twain Explores the Natural World

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall

Lawrence Howe, *Roosevelt University* (Moderator)

Avery Blankenship, *Texas A&M University*, "Twain's Fantasy Menu and Visions of American Cuisine"

Thomas Bryant, *Pennsylvania State University*, "Attack of the Laughing Jackass: Mark Twain, Alexis Wright, and Interspecies Violence"

Christopher Gilbert, *Assumption University*, "Darwin Be Damned"

Panel #13 The Clemens Household

Campus Center, Tifft Lounge

Barbara Snedecor, *Elmira College* (Moderator)

Kumi Ikoma, *Tokyo Metropolitan University*, "The Defiant Daughter and the Silent Father: 'Wapping Alice' and Susy Clemens"

Kevin Mac Donnell, *Independent Scholar*, "Mark Twain's Black Muse: The Life and Legacy of His Butler, George Griffin"

Alan Rankin, *Independent Scholar*, "In Their Right Minds: Livy, Clara, Nina, and 'Americanitis'"

2:30 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.

SESSION NINE

Roundtable #3 "Women Writers in the Time of Mark Twain"

Organized by the Mark Twain Circle of America

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall

Judith Yaross Lee, *Ohio University* (Moderator)

James Caron, *University of Hawai'i at Manoa* – **Sara Willis Parton** (Fanny Fern)

Susan K. Harris, *Kansas University* - **Kate Wiggin**

Linda A. Morris, *University of California, Davis* - **Frances Whitcher** (The Widow Bedott)

Miki Pfeffer, *Independent Scholar* - **Grace King**

Barbara Snedecor, *Elmira College* - Women writers identified by **Olivia Langdon Clemens**

Panel #14 Love and Death

Campus Center, Tifft Lounge

Avery Blankenship, *Texas A&M University* (Moderator)

John Bird, *Winthrop University*, "Irreverent Humor on Death and Dying: Mark Twain's 'The Undertaker's Tale'"

Kotaro Nakagaki, *Senshu University*, "Dictating Grief: Writing as Mourning in Mark Twain's *Autobiography*"

Susan Poulson, *University of Scranton*, "Love, Marriage, and Murder: Samuel Clemens and the Perils of Passion"

4:00 p.m. - 5:20 p.m.

SESSION TEN

Roundtable #4 "Mark Twain Day by Day: A Digital Scholarly Resource for the Next Generation"

Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

Gillian MacDonald, Director of the Lab for the Education and Advancement of Digital Research, Michigan State University

Stephen Rachman, Associate Professor of English, Michigan State University

Dean Rehberger, Public Projects Coordinator of MATRIX, Michigan State University

Alicia Sheil, Head of Operations of MATRIX, Michigan State University

5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m. Happy Hour

Campus Center, Portico

6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Mark Twain Circle Awards Dinner

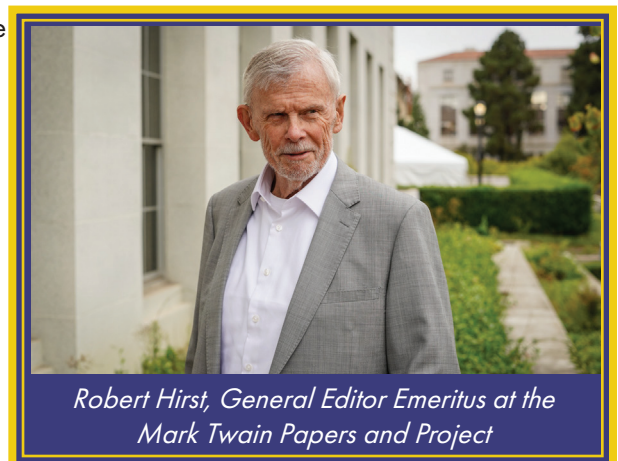
Campus Center, Dining Hall

8:15 p.m. - 9:15 p.m. Keynote Address

Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

A candid, wide-ranging conversation with emeritus General Editor of the Mark Twain Papers and Project, Robert Hirst. Bob—who Twain biographer Ron Powers has described as "the best friend Mark Twain ever had"—will discuss the Project's evolution during his forty-five years at the helm, reflecting on both the challenges he faced and the landmark editorial achievements that are his scholarly legacy.

Born in New York City, Robert Hirst received his baccalaureate degree from Harvard in 1963. He then relocated to the Bay Area, entering the Ph.D. program in English at UC Berkeley. Bob began working in the Mark Twain Papers as a graduate student and completed his doctoral dissertation on "The Making of *The Innocents Abroad: 1867–1876*" under the supervision of Henry Nash Smith in 1976. In 1980, Bob was appointed General Editor of the Mark Twain Papers and Project, a position he held for forty-five years until his retirement in September 2025. During his distinguished decades-long tenure as General Editor, he shepherded over thirty authoritative critical editions of Mark Twain's works into print, including three magisterial volumes of the writer's *Autobiography*.



Robert Hirst, General Editor Emeritus at the Mark Twain Papers and Project

9:30 p.m. - 12:00 a.m. Cash Bar

Meier Hall, Basel Lounge

Saturday, August 1

8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Registration and Assistance *Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk*

8:00 a.m. - 8:50 a.m. Full Breakfast *Campus Center, Dining Hall*

9:00 a.m. - 10:20 a.m. **SESSION ELEVEN**

Panel #15 Comic Laughter as Dissent

Organized by American Humor Studies Association

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall

Todd Nathan Thompson, *Indiana University of Pennsylvania* (Moderator)

Edward Charnley, *Lehman College*, "David R. Locke and Petroleum V. Nasby: Satire, Politics, and Race, 1862-1867."

Teresa Prados-Torreira, *Columbia College Chicago*, "Good Morning: A Humorous Magazine Fights Back after World War I."

Emily VanDette, *State University of New York at Fredonia*, "Feminist as F***: Satirical Responses to Misogyny in the Public Sphere"

Panel #16 Transnational Twain

Campus Center, Tiff Lounge

Holger Kersten, *Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg* (Moderator)

Ryuzo Hamamoto, *Konan University*, "An Unrealized Connection between Japan and Twain: Hannah Riddell's Letter and Its Transnational Context"

Harold Hellwig, *Idaho State University*, "Connecticut Yankee and *Innocents Abroad*: Catholicism and Antithesis; Pilgrimage, Conversion, Reverence, and Betrayal"

Jeanne Reesman, *University of Texas at San Antonio*, "The 'Australasian Spartans' of Tasmania: Classical Allusion as Satire in *Following the Equator*"

10:30 a.m. - 11:50 a.m. **SESSION TWELVE**

Panel #17 Performing Twain

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall

Mark Dawidziak, *Independent Scholar* (Moderator)

David Bianculli, *Rowan University*, "A Liverpool Beatle in Mark Twain's Court"

Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Stanford University*, "The Transgressive Power of 'Mark Twain Tonight!'"

Harry Wonham, *University of Oregon*, "'The insanest of all recreations': Mark Twain as an After-Dinner Speaker"

Panel #18 Mark Twain Confronts the West(ern)

Campus Center, Tifft Lounge

Kerry Driscoll, *Mark Twain Papers and Project* (Moderator)

Steven Bretherick, *Independent Scholar*, "War, Twain, and General Tom Sawyer"

Kaori Hosono, *Keio University*, "Sensationalist Roots and Radical Rebellions:

Newspaper Clippings as Moral Catalysts in Mark Twain's *Autobiography*"

James W. Leonard, "Enumerating Myth: *Roughing It* and the Disorder of Things"

12:00 p.m. - 12:50 p.m.

Luncheon Buffet

Campus Center, Dining Hall

1:00 p.m. - 2:20 p.m.

SESSION THIRTEEN

Panel #19 Mark Twain: Reluctant Romantic

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall

Linda A. Morris, *University of California, Davis* (Moderator)

Mark Dawidziak, *Independent Scholar*, "Mark Twain and Edgar Allan Poe: 'Those Two Scarecrow Figures'"

Sarah Ingle, *Howard University*, "Medieval Race Studies and Chivalric Whiteness in Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*"

Tsuyoshi Ishihara, *University of Tokyo*, "From *The Black Avenger* to *Tom Sawyer*: Romantic Adventure Fiction and Mark Twain"

Roundtable #5 Updates from the Major Mark Twain Sites

Campus Center, Tifft Lounge

Kerry Driscoll, Associate Editor at the Mark Twain Papers and Project (Berkeley, CA)

Joseph Lemak, Director of the Center for Mark Twain Studies (Elmira, NY)

Jeffrey Nichols, Executive Director of the Mark Twain House and Museum
(Hartford, CT)

Megan Rapp, Executive Director of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum
(Hannibal, MO)

2:30 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.

SESSION FOURTEEN

CMTS John S. Tuckey Award Presentation

Panel #20 Exaggerating Reports of his Death: Reading Mark Twain in the 21st Century

Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

Matt Seybold, *Elmira College* (Moderator)

Gregg Camfield, *University of California, Merced*, "Is He Dead?"

Bruce Michelson, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*, "Mark Twain and the Legacies of Satire"

Laura Rice, *Oregon State University*, "From Twain to Trump: A Genealogy of Incivility"

4:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

QUARRY FARM PICNIC

Enjoy conversation with friends old and new. Visit the original site of the Study and walk through the first floor of Quarry Farm.

Not only is the preservation of Quarry Farm paramount, but parking is limited. Please use the shuttle bus service located in the Meier Hall parking lot. Pick-up will start leaving the campus at 4:15 p.m. and will run until 9:15 p.m. See the campus map on the inside front cover for the location of the shuttle service.

8:00 p.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Cash Bar

Meier Hall, Basel Lounge

Sunday, August 2

8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Meier Hall Checkout

Gannett-Tripp Library, Main Desk

Conference attendees lodging in Meier Hall must depart by 12:00 p.m. Participants in the Graduate Student Workshop will remain in the same rooms.



Mark Twain on the Quarry Farm Porch (July 1903)

ABSTRACTS

INDIVIDUAL PAPERS

Jeff Abernathy, *Alma College*
marcjabernathy@gmail.com

"Buying Innocence: Early Commercial Adaptations of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn*"
(Session One)

In this paper, I examine the role of advertising in promoting commercial adaptations of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that helped shape the afterlives of Twain's best-known characters and the cultural memory of Mark Twain himself. An insistent theme in many of the hundreds of sequels and adaptations of the books asserts a myth of white innocence associated with *Tom Sawyer*, countered by the reckoning with race and national self-identity at the center of *Huckleberry Finn*. Here, I argue that early commercial adaptations repurposed Twain's characters, actively producing selective cultural memories while distilling both Tom and Huck into reassuring symbols of American innocence.

Through early retellings in print, advertising, and film—the first of them by Twain himself in his published and unpublished sequels and in his notes—Tom Sawyer has most frequently been condensed into a memory figure we associate with an innocent American past, free of race, slavery, and violent conquest. Portable monuments to Twain and his characters, these texts crystallize a nostalgic understanding of the American past untroubled by American history, empowering readers, viewers, and consumers to shape the present through this lens, and extract the darker themes of both in order to construct a version of American identity grounded in selective recall.

I draw on Jan Assmann's distinction between canon and archive to argue that Tom enters active memory because he stabilizes a reassuring sense of national identity, for consumers and readers alike. Conversely, Huck Finn takes a lesser part in these commercial contexts, as he carries with him a moral burden that resists easy distillation into nostalgic memory.

Three case studies illustrate this pattern: Twain's own paid endorsements, including the Conklin fountain pen, which work to merge literary author and commercial figure as Twain himself participates in celebrity culture; a 1913 Cream of Wheat advertisement in which Tom and Huck hide from Aunt Polly behind a billboard for the product, which is represented by a minstrel-like figure who figures in each ad in the series; and images of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn in the Tom Sawyer Washwear clothing line—licensed by the Elder Manufacturing Company in 1918 and continuing today in the company's Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher lines—which represents one of the most extensive commercial appropriations of a literary character in American culture. Tom and Huck are detached from narrative context and reconstituted as symbols of a wholesome, mischievous boyhood, untroubled by race or poverty. Pitched to high-end, white consumers, these advertisements offer a purchasable myth of the American past for "real boys," as their tag line reads. The cultural presence of Twain and his characters that continues today was shaped in substantial ways through commercial reinterpretation as brand came to supplant Twain's text.

"A Liverpool Beatle in Mark Twain's Court"
(Session Twelve)

In an era when more books are banned than ever before and when bookstores and public and school libraries make more and more room for CDs and DVDs, how are new generations likely to be introduced to writers and writings from the distant past? One answer is the number and quality of literary adaptations by television and the movies. Unearthing and examining any piece of 20th and 21st century pop culture, and how it chooses to adapt or reflect the stories and messages of its author, is in itself a valuable component of research. This, of course, is applicable to Mark Twain Studies. With a little digging, a scholar can glean some surprising rarities – such as a largely forgotten and little-seen late-1970s TV special, loosely adapting Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* premise, that united, among others, a star of *Three's Company*, a former co-star of *The Honeymooners*, stars from *Star Wars* and *The Pit and the Pendulum*... and, most famously of all, a former Beatle. The result is a Twain TV show that's truly terrible, but important to rediscover, watch, and evaluate in terms of its place in pop culture, and how it relates to the ongoing history of Twain adaptations.

The Prince and the Pauper is one of the most dramatized of all Mark Twain novels. Its first professional stage adaptation occurred in Philadelphia in 1889, just eight years after the story's publication. The first feature-length film version was a silent movie, filmed in 1915, and the first major sound version was released in 1937. In the 1950s, television presented an adaptation of *The Prince and the Pauper* on NBC's *Shirley Temple Theatre*, and in 1962, the same network presented a three-part live-action dramatization on *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color*. The show's host, Walt Disney, identified Twain as his favorite author, and said in his introduction that "you have to marvel at the research he must have done." This beloved, durable tale also was the basis for yet another NBC presentation – this one broadcast sixteen years later, in 1977, and presenting what arguably, almost certainly, is the worst adaptation of *The Prince and the Pauper* ever made. One of its co-writers was Pat Proft, who later the very same year would help write an even more infamous TV debacle, *The Star Wars Holiday Special*. In fact, the co-stars of this new *Prince and the Pauper* adaptation included two actors who would appear in that very *Star Wars* special: Art Carney and Carrie Fisher. Other co-stars of the Twain adaptation included talk-show host Mike Douglas, Angie Dickinson, Vincent Price, John Ritter, and former Beatle George Harrison. The name of this NBC special, and its star, also are Beatle-related. The name of the show, and its Starr, is *Ringo*. And its approach, and content, is nothing if not... irreverent.

Just how bad is *Ringo*, as an adaptation of *The Prince and the Pauper*? Brief clips will count the ways, and make the case. Start with *Ringo*, who plays himself – an exaggerated, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*-type version of himself, as a pampered, groupie-surrounded pop star – but also plays his look-alike, a Hollywood nobody selling maps to the homes of celebrities. That character's name is – wait for it – Ognir Rrats. Ognir has a cruel father (played by Art Carney) and a sweet girlfriend (Carrie Fisher), while *Ringo* has a hustling manager (John Ritter). When *Ringo* and Ognir meet and swap places, one or both of them ends up interviewed by Mike Douglas, hypnotized by Vincent Price, and arrested by "Police Woman" star Angie Dickinson – all while George Harrison provides exposition as an on-camera TV reporter. If that sounds cringe-worthy, I've saved the best, or worst, for last: *Ringo* is a musical. Clips from *Ringo* will demonstrate to one and all how much *Ringo* has veered from the original Twain source material, as well as the few – very few – occasions on which it is relatively faithful.

"Irreverent Humor on Death and Dying: Mark Twain's 'The Undertaker's Tale'"
(Session Nine)

At Quarry Farm in the summer of 1877, Mark Twain wrote a humorous piece so irreverent in its humor that he dared not publish it. "The Undertaker's Tale" concerns the story of a young homeless boy who is taken into the warmth of a happy home, a family named Cadaver. Mr. and Mrs. Cadaver become like a father and mother to him, and their children Jimmy and Mary and Grace become like brother and sisters. The boy happily thrives in the family business, learning the trade of decorating coffins, arranging them in the shop window, and driving the hearse. All is well until the family business falters because, unfortunately, no one in the village is sick and dying. But the story ends happily when people begin to suffer with sickness and when a virulent cholera epidemic comes and decimates the town. Twain narrates as if this were a Horatio Alger rags to riches story, straight-faced and deadpan as he recounts the unfortunate health and fortunate suffering and death of most of the town.

Mark Twain climbed down the hill from his octagonal study with his day's work, the manuscript of "The Undertaker's Tale" tucked under his arm, as Albert Bigelow Paine writes, "fairly bubbling with the joy of it." But when he shared it with the family members gathered on the front porch, "No one spoke during the reading, nobody laughed. The air was thick with disapproval." Paine continues: "When he finished there was heavy silence. Mrs. Clemens was the only one who could speak. 'Youth, let's walk a little,' she said." But Twain did not give up in the face of this disapproval. In October, he wrote to William Dean Howells, "When you come up, remind me to show you my 'Undertaker's Tale'—and tell me what is the trouble with it." No reply from Howells exists, but he too clearly found the story equally repulsive and irreverent, and Twain never published the story. It remained unpublished and largely unknown (as it still is) until Robert Hirst published it in his 2009 collection, *Who Is Mark Twain?*

In my analysis of the story, I argue that "The Undertaker's Tale" deserves a wider audience, an audience who can now appreciate the story's wicked and irreverent humor, its blasé and deadpan treatment of death and dying and its breaking of taboos. "The Undertaker's Tale" should take its place among Mark Twain's other transgressive, irreverent works.

"Twain's Fantasy Menu and Visions of American Cuisine"
(Session Eight)

While traveling Europe in 1880, Mark Twain wrote about his desire to eat all of the American dishes which were not found in Europe by creating a fantasy menu of his favorite food. Although he refers to the menu as "modest," the hefty seventy-two items found on the menu could never be understood as such. He expresses desire for regional seafood, American staples like Thanksgiving turkey and hoe-cake. In crafting his ideal, fantastical menu, Twain is not only sketching an image of the many regions of the United States as reflected in these local dishes, but he also defines what it means to be American in the late nineteenth century: excess, plenty, and devotion to the hyper-regional. In this paper, I analyze the ingredients, dishes, and locations Twain offers in his fantasy menu in terms of late nineteenth century ideas of the nation and identity, arguing that Twain's menu is not merely a silly, imaginative menu but rather a lens through which to understand this moment of American culture.

Zsanna Mária Bodor, *Baylor University*

Zsanna_Bodor1@baylor.edu

“‘Extinction in the Smoke-Clouds of the Stake’: Evolution and the Ecogothic in Mark Twain’s *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*”

(Session Six)

“The only gospel in any monarchy should be Rebellion against the Church and State.” This quotation from Mark Twain’s notebook—which serves as the epigraph for the Elmira 2026 Conference on the State of Mark Twain Studies—was penned in 1891, just five years before Twain published *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896). In a later note, Twain confesses that Joan of Arc required “twelve years of preparation, and two years of writing.” This means that, even as he urged a “gospel of rebellion,” Twain was actively working on a book about a figure who died for her “Church and State.”

In a gesture that has received little scholarly attention, Mark Twain cites the 1848 Hungarian revolutionary, Lajos (Louis) Kossuth, in the epigraph to *Joan of Arc*: “Consider,” writes Kossuth, “this unique and imposing distinction. Since the writing of human history began, Joan of Arc is the only person, of either sex, who has ever held supreme command of a military force of a nation *at the age of seventeen*.” Mark Twain clearly has revolution on his mind; the epigraph suggests it is a lens through which we ought to read *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*.

In this paper, I will trace the arc of nineteenth-century America’s fascination with the “Maid of Orléans,” and why she captured the imagination of American authors like Margaret Fuller and Louisa May Alcott—well before the publication of Twain’s 1896 novel. Recent critical work on *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* highlights the ways in which the novel serves as a political investigation of “the divine right of kings” (Dobski 2024). I contend that *Joan of Arc* is just as much a religious investigation as a political one. This paper will interrogate the question of whether Twain is advocating for “Rebellion against the Church and State” as part of his project in *Joan of Arc*. Surveying how American representations of Joan of Arc evolved in the years leading up to Twain’s novel can yield fresh perspectives on our understanding of nineteenth-century American religious culture.

Steven Bretherick, *Independent Scholar*

steven.bretherick@gmail.com

“War, Twain, and General Tom Sawyer”

(Session Twelve)

“The War Prayer” and Hal Holbrook’s Vietnam-era performances suggest a fiercely anti-war Twain, but the writer who married Livy Langdon and created Tom Sawyer also modulates toward a geniality the 1960s lacked. This paper argues that Tom Sawyer’s career—from his face-offs with General Joe Harper in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to his many afterlives—offers a lens for Twain’s complex attitudes toward war and heroism. Representations of Tom ridicule the venal impulses that motivate war, expressing predictable doubts about imperialist adventures and surprising reservations about the Civil War. Yet Twain also relates vignettes that justify combat. Style matters, for Tom and for Twain: the quirky humanity animating all incarnations of Tom Sawyer outweighs the shifting valence of Twain’s stance on war. Tom’s combativeness is sometimes ridiculous, sometimes admirable, but Twain’s affection for him rarely flags.

“Tom Sawyer’s Conspiracy,” an unfinished manuscript from 1897–1902, reads as a self-reflective rewrite of Tom’s “evasion” in *Huckleberry Finn*. Both works feature Tom fantasizing proto-military adventures. Often read as a parody of Scott, Cooper, and Dumas, Tom can also be seen as a parody of Radical Republicans—the anti-slavery, Reconstructionist wing of the Republican Party—exuberantly spinning well-intentioned plans that fall short in practice.

In both *Huck Finn* and “Conspiracy,” reality intrudes. But in *Huck Finn*, Tom escapes consequences: Jim is freed, and Tom never confronts the possibility of, say, Jim being shot instead of him. “Conspiracy” offers no such off-ramp. Jim faces real peril, and Tom is crushed with remorse (for a while, at least).

But Twain is never simple. Two late-career writings depict combat as noble. “Schoolhouse’ Hill” shows Tom coaching “44,” a supposed underdog, before an unavoidable fight with a bully. “Jane Lampton Clemens,” portraying Twain’s mother and the model for Aunt Polly, centers on her “boundless capacity for grace and forgiveness” but includes an episode in which the diminutive Jane confronts a large man bullying his daughter—protecting an innocent party, an embodiment of just-war principles.

Twain also strikes a surprisingly tolerant tone when lampooning the Civil War hubris of General Dan Sickles in the *Autobiography*, despite writing in the immediate aftermath of the Spanish-American War, which he vehemently opposed. Sickles lost a leg at Gettysburg. He values this missing leg “more than the one he has,” just as Tom wears his bullet on a watch-chain and continually checks the time. Twain ridicules both Tom and Sickles—overconfident generals who overvalue heroism—but also acknowledges their good intentions and bravery. The satire is genial, even amid his deep opposition to American imperialism, reflecting Jane Clemens’s ethic of grace, and the moderating influence of Twichell and Livy.

Our contemporary political discourse prepares readers to overemphasize the scathing force of “The War Prayer,” but it too ends with an appeal to decency. Twain offers ammunition for 1960s polemic, but also for the tolerance Aunt Polly extends to Tom.

Gregg Camfield, *University of California, Merced*
gcamfield@ucmerced.edu

“Is He Dead?”
(Session Fourteen)

I take my title from Twain’s works in two different, but complementary dimensions. First, as the catch-phrase of *Innocents Abroad*, it signaled a brash American voice that suggested that the old world’s culture was dead and that America was forging a new culture worthy of the world’s attention. As those of us who have studied Twain know well, Twain’s oeuvre became a profound symbol of that need for attention. At the beginning of my career, Jonathan Arac suggested that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* had become inappropriately hypercanonized. Would anybody suggest such a thing now? Which brings me to my second appropriation of the title, from Twain’s recently published play. The plot of “Is He Dead?” revolves around an artist suffering from a lack of appreciation in his life, only to pretend death in order to make his works precious.

I wonder if today Twain IS dead, or, perhaps, the cosmos is faking his death in order to restore his luster at a later date. I speculate about this possible death by looking at four cultural institutions that keep any author—or indeed any literature—alive: K-12 education, higher education, the nexus of publishing and readers loosely registering in book clubs, and libraries. In all four areas, as I will briefly show in my full paper, Twain’s presence has diminished substantially.

I will then speculate on Twain’s probable resilience by looking at our cultural moment through the lens provided by John W. O’Malley in *Four Cultures of the West*. I believe O’Malley’s framework explains much of why the entire practice of reading has become a political football and how a revived humanism—to be explained in the paper—will have a role to play in recovering literature. If I am right, Twain’s particular kind of ironic engagement, not unlike that of Erasmus, will be perfect material with which to help build a more robustly humane cultural practice.

David Carlyon, *Independent Scholar*
carlyon123@me.com

"Why Send Huck to a Circus? Why Bind Jim?"
(Session Three)

Mark Twain launched a sentimental rebellion in the deceptively simple circus episode in *Huckleberry Finn*. Despite the book's antebellum setting, he framed Huck's visit with the *postbellum* notion of circus as unsophisticated stuff for unsophisticated people. Twain had known the rowdy adult pleasure of circus before the Civil War. As America's most democratically shared experience, it drew women and men, Black and white, the learned and laborers to huge urban theaters and country tents by offering sex, violence, and politics. So why did Twain insert a sentimentalized postbellum circus into his antebellum story? And why tie Jim up while Huck attended the circus?

The answer to the first question lies in the Gilded Age Twain named. That era invented the notion, still common, of circus as family fare, matching emerging middle-class ideas of youth as a time of innocence. Soon adult accounts and children's books emphasized circus as sweet children's fun. So Twain gave Gilded Age readers what they expected—and modern readers recognize—circus dazzling an innocent child.

Yet anomalies surface. Twain wove antebellum elements into adjacent episodes. The scene's abrupt beginning and ending suggests arbitrary insertion. Huck is more childish at the circus than elsewhere. The circus episode interrupted Twain's thematic dichotomy: throughout the novel he contrasted human activity and nature, the former shabby, the latter described rapturously, but he described the human activity of circus as rapturously as his descriptions of nature.

Twain's history writing *Huckleberry Finn* suggests a reason for the anomalies. He originally aimed at a best-selling sequel to *Tom Sawyer* but felt unsatisfied and stopped, until he returned to it with a new aim: satirizing American life. I suggest Twain, before turning fully to satire, used the circus episode as a nostalgic pivot, a farewell to the Hannibal innocence of fond memory. The circus in the book's exact center also indicates a pivot, structuring the apparent picaresque, especially as chapter beginnings differ before and after.

And with Huck at the circus, why bind Jim rather than hiding him or painting him blue? I believe writing *Huckleberry Finn* changed Twain's view of race. Black people attended circus in great numbers; Frederick Douglass applauded it as a rare institution welcoming them. However, when white accounts noted their presence, it was in bastardized blackface versions, childishly eager for circus. Gilded Age readers then encountering a Black person and a circus in a story assumed he'd show up. Jim starts in the book as a minstrelsy caricature but picturing him that way at the circus would have violated Twain's growing awareness of fully human Black people. So binding Jim reassured readers they needn't wait for him to sneak into the circus, perhaps comically bumping into Huck.

Huckleberry Finn starts with a denial of motive, moral, and plot. But antebellum circus gave it a motive, merging Gilded Age expectations and antebellum details. Circus provided a plot, in structure and theme. And the moral of the story? The imperfect but powerful realization of Jim's humanity by Huck Finn—and by Mark Twain.

James Caron, *University of Hawai'i at Manoa*
caron@hawaii.edu

"Marietta Holley and the Gilded Age Women's Movement"
(Session Seven)

After the Civil War, the energy for political reform that had been absorbed by anti-slavery efforts returned to secure the rights of women. The women's movement demonstrated a renewed push to achieve full citizenship status regardless of gender. In her first book, *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet's* (1873), Marietta Holley initiated her advocacy for those rights with her character Samantha Allen.

In my talk at the Gilded Age Humor symposium and in the article elaborating it, I focused on this first book to explore how Holley's fictional presentation of well-known suffragettes meshed with actual contemporary events. Forty years after *My Opinions*, Holley published a second satirical novel, *Samantha on the Woman Question* (1913), which demonstrates Holley's tireless advocacy of women's rights. In this talk I will examine this second novel in order to gauge how Holley presented women's experience in the US in the final successful push for universal suffrage.

Edward Charnley, *Lehman College*
edward.charnley@lehman.cuny.edu

"David R. Locke and Petroleum V. Nasby: Satire, Politics, and Race, 1862-1867."
(Session Eleven)

David Ross Locke's "Petroleum V. Nasby" letters were among the most widely read forms of political satire in the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. Written in the voice of a drunken, semi-literate Democratic bigot, Nasby allowed Locke to caricature and highlight the contradictions and fallacies inherent in Democratic arguments against emancipation, Black suffrage, and legislative efforts to secure Black civil rights. This article argues that Locke's satire, especially its contemporary reception and circulation in the North and Midwest and its reprinting in Black newspapers, reveals a strand of mid-nineteenth-century political culture, deeply critical of "prejudice against color," that existing scholarship has largely overlooked.

I will argue that the Nasby letters did not simply mock "Copperhead" Democrats; rather, through their "reverse logic," they exposed the contradictions of racial prejudice itself and treated race as a politically constructed device. Tracing the trajectory of Locke's work from wartime attacks on Copperheadism to the Reconstruction-era lecture "Cussid be Canaan," I will demonstrate the wider range of racial thought available within Union political culture than a purely white-supremacist interpretive frame allows. Additionally, it suggests the untapped potential of mid-nineteenth century political humor as a window into American political culture and reform values.

Mark Dawidziak, *Independent Scholar*
hlgrouch@sbcglobal.net

"Mark Twain and Edgar Allan Poe: 'Those Two Scarecrow Figures'"
(Session Thirteen)

It was eighty-five years ago that English author and literary critic V. S. Pritchett declared that "everything really American, really non-English, comes out of that pair of spiritual derelicts, those two scarecrow figures with their half-lynched minds," Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain. Despite the risk of hyperbole in such a sweeping statement, there is an element of truth in this assessment. Poe's and Twain's impact on literature and their ongoing embrace by the pop culture are as profound as they are undeniable. More than a quarter of our way through the twenty-first century, Twain and Poe remain the two most immediately recognized, most relentlessly marketed, most universally exported, and most constantly quoted (and misquoted) American writers. Yet celebrity has proven to be a double-edged sword for the two scarecrow figures, reducing them in the public consciousness to caricatures. They became a study in black and white. Poe was turned into our grandfather of goth – a gloomy, pale, sickly, haunted figure dressed in black and keeping company with talkative ravens. Twain was our folksy humorist and family author dressed in a white suit and favoring the company of jumping frogs.

Despite the great differences in their popular images and their writing styles, some keen-eyed Twain and Poe scholars have observed significant personal and professional connections between them. Dennis Eddings, both a Poe and Twain scholar, has examined how Poe's comic tales found echoes in Twain stories, suggesting the influence

of Poe's "The Devil in the Belfry" on Twain's "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg." Despite the writers' opposite reflections in the popular imagination, Eddings notes a great deal of spiritual common ground shared between them, including "a delicious sense of humor" and a love of cats. And both took art seriously while at the same time making fun of it.

But perhaps the most intriguing connection is hiding behind another misconception about Poe. In his lifetime, Poe was best known first as a powerful and insightful literary critic, then as a poet, then as the author of short stories. Our century has reversed that order. As a fierce—and feared—literary critic, Poe called for the emergence of a true American literature. He knew that the young nation would never develop its own genuine literary voice until it got off its knees and threw off the influence of Europe in general and England in particular. His own fiction only went so far in this regard, but the American writer who truly responded to his call was the one William Dean Howells would call "the Lincoln of our literature": Mark Twain. This may be the most profound link of all between Poe and Twain – a link that gives an even greater meaning to Pritchett's "scarecrow" observation. Indeed, it is a significance Pritchett, for all his insights, did not grasp: that Poe was the one calling for a true American literary voice and that Twain was the one who answered that call.

"Resurrecting Is Shakespeare Dead?"
(Session Three)

Near the end of his life, Twain published a strange little book dedicated to the debate over the authorship of the plays and poetry credited to William Shakespeare. *Is Shakespeare Dead?* is strange for a number of reasons. It is strange partly because Twain's book is as much a biography of himself as it is of Shakespeare. And it is strange partly because Twain devotes one of the last books that he would publish in his storied career to what, by initial accounts, looks like a weak attempt at literary criticism.

But, as with all things Twain, first impressions tend to deceive. And in this case deception is precisely the point. The core of the book is about the identity of the poet, or rather, a poet (or poets simply), and the ability to use one's identity, in its various masks and manifestations, to challenge and maybe even usurp the reigning authorities, be they literary, political, or even civilizational. In fact, *Is Shakespeare Dead?* opens with a discussion of "claimants" to various ruling orders and the bulk of it seems to challenge Shakespeare's claim to the immortal glory which he has enjoyed for the past 500 years. While the claimant Twain openly argues for Bacon as the real author of Shakespeare's plays, the numerous – and very obvious – problems with those arguments points back to the benefits of pseudonyms for those potential usurpers, be they poetic or political, who would lay claim to "rule" over some aspect or domain of human life. Those problems also invite the reader to consider how both scientific genius (i.e., Bacon) and poetic mastery (i.e., Shakespeare) can reside in the breast of a single artist.

For an artist who employed a world-famous "nom de guerre," *Is Shakespeare Dead?* shows how its author's poetic indirection aids his bid to become America's "poet-ruler." Moreover, it shows that the poet who would "rule" others, that is, who would shape the thought and character of his audience, must do so by first appealing outwardly to the opinions and prejudices that govern their lives before gradually refining and, in some cases, replacing them. The short novel *Pudd'n'head Wilson* provides a vivid – and particularly *American* – illustration of this point. The Twain-like ability of the novel's lead character, David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson, to combine an interest in modern science, a mastery of ironic poetry, and a commitment to democratic governance allows him to justly rule over Dawsons Landing. Thinking through *Is Shakespeare Dead?* thus offers a new way to think about Mark Twain as a poetic usurper, one whose democratic literature would govern America. More than the "Lincoln of literature," Twain aspired to be the poet-legislator of the New World.

“‘Not for sin but for sentiment—and stupidity’: Mark Twain’s Brief (and unhappy) Association with the Connecticut Prisoners’ Friends’ Society”
(Session One)

Under the cover of darkness on December 9th, 1875, two unidentified men drove up to the port cochere of the Clemens residence in Hartford to deliver a gift—a large, intricately inlaid wooden model of a three-masted barque—made by one Wesley Hart, an inmate at the nearby State Prison in Wethersfield. George Griffin accepted the parcel and delivered it to his boss, along with a rambling, almost unintelligible, letter from the ship’s creator. Two and a half years later, Clemens chronicled his reaction to the gift in a letter to industrialist Frank Woodbridge Cheney, a fellow member of the Monday Evening Club, who had recently received a similar item from the same individual:

“I couldn’t hurl the man’s present at his head, neither could I accept it from a prisoner. I wrote & said I would sell the ship for him if he would set a price; or buy it myself at \$50. He said send the \$50 to his aged father at Middletown, which I did drawing the check in said old father’s name; sent it by mail, & got the old man’s acknowledgment per next mail.” (SLC to Frank W. Cheney, 24 Feb 1878).

Remarkably, Hart’s model ship still exists today in the collection storage facility at the Mark Twain House and Museum—its central mast snapped off, its rigging torn and partially unstrung. Perhaps even more remarkably, some 3,000 miles away in the “General Letters” file at the Mark Twain Papers, Hart’s two original 1875 letters to Clemens survive, as does his father Lorenzo’s grateful acknowledgment of the writer’s check. Until now, however, no one has ever connected—or contextualized—these discrete artifacts, which together illuminate a little-known aspect of the writer’s civic engagement in his local community and, more importantly, demonstrate how that experience contributed to his growing cynicism about the fallibility of human nature.

In my paper, I will detail the recovery of this lost narrative as a connection to Clemens’s service on the advisory board of the Prisoners’ Friends’ Society, founded in Hartford in January 1875. The Articles of Association defined the organization as a group of “philanthropic, honorable and judicious councilors” who pledged to advance the mission of reforming and rehabilitating former prisoners by providing financial assistance upon their release. Although it had been previously thought that Mark Twain’s role on the Prisoners’ Friends’ advisory board was largely symbolic—lending the clout of his celebrity to a worthy social cause—archival evidence demonstrates that Clemens made financial commitments to the society’s cause.

However, in two instances, Clemens came to regret his involvement. In an 1878 letter, he recalls having written to the warden of Wethersfield having “proved to my own (probably prejudiced) satisfaction that the Prisoner’s Friend Association ought to be hanged, drawn, & quartered: (not for sin but for sentiment—and stupidity).” His disillusionment with the Association’s idealistic goals anticipates the tenor of the stranger’s infamous “test remark” in “The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg”: “*You are far from being a bad man. Go, and reform.*”



Dwayne Eutsey, *Independent Scholar*
deutsey2@gmail.com

“‘I Don’t Take No Stock in Dead People’: Mark Twain’s Holy Irreverence”
(Session Six)

Like the powerful currents coursing beneath the surface of the Mississippi River, irreverence runs deep throughout most of Mark Twain’s works. Many efforts are made to plumb the murky depths of his irreverent sensibility, hoping to discern both its origins and for what humorous purposes Twain used it. With this year’s commemoration of the American Revolution’s 250th anniversary, my paper will examine Twain’s irreverence within the context of the underlying cause of this world-altering rebellion: liberty. As Twain observed in his notebook, the two were closely entwined for him: “Irreverence is the champion of liberty and its only true defense.”

Specifically, this presentation traces Mark Twain’s irreverence to two foundational aspects of the American Revolution: religious liberty and various influences of religious liberalism on the Founders, such as: Freemasonry on Benjamin Franklin; Unitarian Christianity on Thomas Jefferson; and radical Freethought on Thomas Paine. Each of these influenced the Revolution to some extent with irreverent critiques of traditional religious and political orthodoxy, such as Thomas Paine’s exhortation in *Common Sense* “to begin the world over anew.”

In this paper, I will explore how these aspirations of the Revolution influenced Twain’s development as an irreverent humorist in the 1860s. As a cub riverboat pilot on the Mississippi, he joined a Masonic lodge and read Paine’s *Age of Reason*; as a burgeoning writer on the western frontier, he supported the religious liberties enshrined in Nevada’s new state constitution and befriended nationally prominent Unitarian Christian clergy with popular ministries in San Francisco during the Civil War.

Ultimately, I make the case that these heterodox influences—rather than Twain’s alleged skepticism or atheism—significantly sharpened the edge of the satirically irreverent swipes he took at established religious and political orthodoxies. In particular, I will examine how two of his ministerial friends—Horace Bushnell (considered the father of American religious liberalism) and Moncure Conway (an Emerson protégé, Thomas Paine biographer, and advocate of Free Religion)—informed Twain’s complex critique of Christianity in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, written during a crucial phase in American culture (i.e., the Centennial year of 1876 through 1883).

Kaine Ezell, *Oklahoma Baptist University*
Kaine.Ezell@okbu.edu

“‘Showing Off’ for Who?: Twain’s Analysis of Spiritual Motivation in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*”
(Session Six)

As a child, I recall sitting in a service for a Vacation Bible School in which the preacher offered five dollars to the child who could pay the closest attention to the lesson that night. With a determined effort to stare blankly into space for what seemed like two hours, I won the \$5. I expected my unchurched dad to be proud of my ability to sit still and pay attention, so I was taken aback when he instead unleashed a verbal assault against the preacher and his method of motivation. The incident made an indelible impression on me. Although I didn’t understand his anger at the time, I have come to understand his view better. There is a point to this story. I think my dad was making an observation about the American practice of religion similar to a point that Mark Twain makes in his irreverent description of a Sunday morning church service in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. While Twain’s parody of a Sunday morning service largely aids in setting the stage for Tom’s adventures in the novel, it also provides insight into the need for status, routine, and showmanship in American religion. In this essay, I will examine key scenes in Twain’s novel that demonstrate the limited value of extrinsic motivation to promote spiritual growth. Twain suggests that by prioritizing

extrinsic motivation and choreographed participation, the institutional church trades deep spiritual interrogation for superficial engagement, neglecting the vital role that unpredictability plays in personal faith.

In Chapter 4, for example, Twain uses Tom's fraudulent victory in the scripture memorization contest to illustrate the ways in which spiritual worship are undermined by economic interests. In the following chapter, Twain targets rote performativity in the main service. While the novel's lightly irreverent description of the church service might not be classified as an all-out satire on religion, it implicitly makes the case that church services fall prey to extrinsic motivations, theatricality, and predictability, all of which are disturbed by the congregation's fascination with a battle between a pinch bug and a dog. This battle enthralls the spectators more than the pastor's sermon because of its novelty, but there is a suggestion that the congregants are witnessing a borderline transcendental event. With this light touch, Twain signifies the most genuine moments in church are those that are unscripted and authentic, and the battle ultimately makes a painful ritual bearable for Tom and many others.

Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Stanford University*
sfishkin@stanford.edu

"The Transgressive Power of "Mark Twain Tonight!"
(Session Twelve)

This paper will explore the ways in which Hal Holbrook deployed the transgressive power of a range of texts by Mark Twain in "Mark Twain Tonight!," from the 1950s through 2017. Drawing on the book I am completing, *Mark Twain Tonight! How Hal Holbrook Made Mark Twain a Social Critic for Our Time*, I will explore how Holbrook pushed his audiences to challenge accepted pieties, break out of familiar patterns of behavior and understanding, reject accustomed habits of conformity, and think more deeply on issues of race, jingoism, and corruption. I will examine the impact of his performance on a segregated college in the 1950s, and on a recently de-segregated university in the 1960s; at West Point at the height of the Vietnam War; and on a Denver audience two months after Donald Trump took office as president 2017. I will also briefly note how actor Richard Thomas handled some of this same material in his (authorized) reprise of Holbrook's show in 2026.

The paper will be based upon my examination of Holbrook's personal archive related to the show—including script books, clipping files, and personal journals—as well as many hours of interviews I conducted with Holbrook himself and with individuals who attended his shows. It was a tremendous privilege to be given access to these materials. This paper will provide a glimpse into the remarkable history that they document.

Stephanie Foote, *University of Vermont*
stephanie.foote@uvm.edu

"The Work of Leisure: Energy, Extraction, and Nineteenth-Century Literature"
(Session Seven)

This paper looks at the material and psychic energy expended by texts that persuaded readers to follow the simple life in the late nineteenth century. From the earnest rejection of consumerism to the pursuit of self-improving leisure activities, literary genres like regional fiction seemed to narrate the spiritual and cultural value of village or rural life. But what industrial and extractive economies underwrote the narratives of such appeals? What kinds of energy were expended in the production and circulation of texts about a rural seemingly outside of industrial extractive cultures? What populations were sacrificed to the engines of leisure and tourism?

"Darwin Be Damned"
(Session Eight)

When Mark Twain revered Charles Darwin for abolishing "special creations" from what he, Twain, conceived to be the myth of human origins, he did not only celebrate what was then a novel basis for "hitch[ing] all life together." Twain also articulated a sentiment that inspired him to rebel against the repressive notion of human exceptionalism, which since time immemorial has put humanity at the center of "the History of Things and the Meanings of them." Especially in writings from Twain's later years, nonhuman animals appear all over the place, portrayed in circumstances where they delight in laughing at us, turning the tables on the human assumption of our superiority. Birds in particular occupy a privileged position for looking down on humans for their horrors and hypocrisies. Cats and dogs are similarly situated as creatures embodying something akin to creaturely rectitude.

However, one essay—titled variously "The Lowest Animal," "Man's Place in the Animal World," or "The Damned Human Race" in different printings between 1896 to 1905-- stands out as the cornerstone of Twain's irreverence toward the human superiority complex. This paper will make a case that in this essay Twain, at once, lamented the descent of human beings from *higher* animals (that is, nonhuman animals) and reaffirmed a saving grace in the capacity of humans to be redeemed through a sense of humor. My argument will deploy the concept of "comic devolution" as a heuristic for comprehending Twain's ultimate concerns not only with the myths of human origins, and not only with creation myths, but also the misguided rationalizations for human exceptionalism.

My analysis considers how symbolic and somatic expressions of laughter might enable us to reimagine nonhuman animals as foils for our failings as a species. Nonhuman animals, according to Twain, exhibit a sense of humor *without* moralizing, and—in so doing—establish a comic setup for imagining that, of all the animals, humans are the most laughable. Yes, homo sapiens is the laughable animal, and yet laughter remains a most redeeming quality. With this as the framework for understanding Twain's mock evolutionary study, I will provide an account of Twain's irreverence in an age of burgeoning animal rights rhetoric, of public awareness around the corruptions underlying outward displays of both philanthropy and conspicuous consumption, and of moral panic and moral reform. Thus, Twain's essay is a reaction against a prevailing gospel of wealth and its seeming connection to the worst of our survival instincts, upending collective imaginations about the divine rights of humankind and so-called natural laws, and a march of progress that betrays malignancy, treachery, and viciousness. Hence the folly, perhaps even the evolutionary folly, of our Moral Sense.

Jess A. Goldberg, *New Mexico Highlands University*
jagoldberg@nmhu.edu

"Making Dead Kidnappers: Frederick Douglass, Mark Twain, and the Force of Abolition"
(Session Two)

Speaking at the 1852 Free Soil Democratic Convention in Pittsburgh, Frederick Douglass posits, "The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnappers." It goes almost without saying how horrifyingly relevant Douglass's sentiment is to today's unfolding project of racist federal kidnapping carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). My presentation will attempt to think rigorously about this "relevance" through the framework of transhistorical abolitionist thought, critical carceral studies, and legal humanities scholarship.

This presentation comes out of my thinking in both my first book, *Abolition Time: Grammars of Law, Poetics of Justice*, and my current work on my second book project. The rest of this abstract will first describe the concept of *deputy*

citizenship that I am currently writing about for my second book, then discuss how I am bringing that concept to think with Douglass in the 19th century, and finish by speculating about how this thinking is enriched by being in dialogue with Twain Studies.

My new book project, *Deputy Citizenship: White Supremacy and the Privatization of State Violence*, analyzes the juridical category of the citizen as a counterinsurgent force of law. The book begins in the contemporary moment, focusing on anti-trans, anti-abortion, and anti-DEI legislation and proposed policies which call upon regular citizens to report their neighbors and coworkers to the government as an enforcement mechanism. The arc of the book will then historicize this enforcement mechanism by connecting these current policies to historical precedents including the Second Amendment as a tool of settler colonial conquest and the Fugitive Slave Law as a violent consolidation of "citizenship," "whiteness," and "police powers." This mechanism acts as a counterinsurgent force against potential coalitions against the ruling powers of settler colonial governance. Because the state cannot be everywhere at once, legislation and policy invoke the imperative to police one's neighbors as a method of capturing potential forces of resistance with the promise of the protections of citizenship. Without flattening historical change, *Deputy Citizenship* unearths a core principle of violence at the heart of the liberal regime of rights and duties: the rights of citizenship are guaranteed by the duty to police. Drawing on both my scholarship and my organizing work, I return in this second book to abolitionist thought, looking to politics of coalitional refusal as deputy citizenship's undoing. For this 20-minute paper, I will focus on how Douglass's meditations on violent resistance against kidnapping, in particular, offer an articulation of the *force* of abolition as a praxis that undoes deputy citizenship by denying the duties attendant to the racialized rights of citizens to surveil their criminalized or thingified neighbors. In the midst of 21st-century discourse's over-emphasis on the "building" side of the "we build as we tear down" abolitionist slogan, I return to Douglass's speech to highlight that while abolition is indeed all of the beautiful world-making work that we activists so often describe, it is also, equally, a movement of force in the face of urgent and immediate violence, with the scene of attempted capture being the transtemporal meeting point of abolitionist urgency in the face of the Fugitive Slave Law and ICE enforcement.

The final piece of this paper is the most speculative for me. I am a scholar of abolitionist thought equally comfortable in 19th and 21st century literary studies, but I am not a Mark Twain scholar, specifically. I want to take up the occasion of the Quarry Farm Symposium as a call to think, too, about the temporalities of "arriving at" abolitionist thought and practice. That is, on the one hand, Douglass's prescience in his quote is "ahead of the game," so to speak, while Twain, at least in most conventional readings of his biography, is a "late arrival" to abolitionism and many of his other more radical or liberatory politics. What lessons, I am asking without giving in to the temptation to answer in advance, are the to draw about 21st-century organizing from the comparison between the "early" and "late" arrivant to the urgency of abolition's demands for razing the world?

Edward Guimont, *Bristol Community College*
edward.guimont@bristocc.edu

"Twain, Astronomy, and Speculative Fiction"
(Session Two)

In July 1909, Mark Twain told his biographer, Albert Bigelow Paine, what would become one of his most famous aphorisms: "I came in with Halley's Comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it. It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's Comet." Nine months later, Twain's prediction came true, as he died one day after the comet's closest approach to the sun. This talk will explore Twain's interest in astronomy, including astronomical ideas during his lifetime and which scientific works he consulted; which astronomical ideas Twain did (and didn't) incorporate into his own writings; and his relationship with contemporary authors of speculative fiction such as Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Edward Everett Hale, and Ignatius Donnelly.

"Latimer's Matter: The Decomposition of Self, Hegelian Dialectics, and George Eliot's Physics of Sympathy in "The Lifted Veil"
(Session Two)

This paper centers on the physical and metaphysical decomposition of Latimer, the protagonist of George Eliot's proto-science fiction novella "The Lifted Veil" (1859), in order to put forward what I call a "physics of sympathy" that operates as Eliot's energy-powered ethical philosophy. Latimer, *TLV's* central figure, possesses a rich characterological make-up, hovering between the scientific and the spiritual, a Frankensteinian assemblage of Eliot's own intellectual obsessions at the time: of Hegelian dialectics, sympathy, physiology, and nineteenth-century energy science. I show how Latimer's dissolution into something non-human, where he becomes a specter of scattered passion through clairvoyant insight into the other, a "miserable ghost-seer" constructed through the distorting conventions of science-fictional artifice, allows for interesting themes on the divinities of human "ordinariness" (*TLV* 32). His fading physical opacity (withering frame and diseased state) lends to a corresponding metaphysical fading, and such dyadic dissolutions make Latimer a distinct type of Eliotian character, one that is not afforded the length of most of Eliot's realist narratives, in which the flickerings of thought, impulse, and relationality can be teased out and tested. In *TLV's* short frame, Eliot accomplishes much: she delineates an ethical philosophy that combines the logic of thermodynamics — heat dissipation and entropy — with the dialectical reasoning of Hegelian philosophy to expose truths about the interdependence of sympathy and selfhood. By doing so, she shows that it is Latimer's absence of true sympathy for another — what George Eliot calls the "analytic power" that "restrain[s] the fury with which [the passions] rush to their own destruction," a prefiguration of negentropy — that primarily contributes to the deterioration of his solidity. In other words, Eliot exposes how plain old human connection, rather than divine omniscience, is essential to the construction and maintenance of self. Sympathy *is* energy for Eliot; it is both generative and resistant; it creates wholeness. Much like life forms themselves, sympathy fights against a universal tendency for disorder, creating structural integrity from the mere dust of impulse, the particles of feeling. Borne from what Eliot calls the "energy of human fellowship" and the "determining energy of sympathy," this paper examines her "physics of sympathy" as a system that must be generated precisely from the acts of human limitation rather than transcendence.

Ryuzo Hamamoto, *Konan University*
eag1001@gmail.com

"An Unrealized Connection between Japan and Twain: Hannah Riddell's Letter and Its Transnational Context"
(Session Eleven)

This paper reports on a letter from Hannah Riddell to Mark Twain, dated December 21, 1907, preserved in the Mark Twain Papers & Project at Berkeley. By examining the historical circumstances with this document, this study investigates why the letter was written, how it reached Twain, and what resulted from this attempted contact.

Hannah Riddell (1855–1932), an English missionary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), arrived in Japan in 1890. After landing in Kobe, she was assigned to Kumamoto, where she engaged in missionary work. In the spring of 1891, Riddell was deeply moved by the condition of people with Hansen's disease who had gathered within Honmyōji Temple. Determined to provide relief for them, Riddell founded the private hospital named Kaisyun Byouin (The Kumamoto Hospital of the Resurrection of Hope) in 1895.

Although Riddell does not explicitly state it in the letter, her reason wrote to Twain was that she hoped for a donation to her hospital after donations from Britain declined. Following the enactment of the Leprosy Prevention Law in

1907, it became widely argued in Japan that Hansen's disease should be treated under governmental responsibility, leading to expectations of a decline in external donations.

In response to these challenges, Riddell traveled to North America in 1907 to cultivate new donor networks. In Canada, she delivered lectures through CMS connections. In the United States, she relied on personal and institutional ties linked to Japan. During this tour, she first delivered a lecture at the church of Joseph H. Twichell, a close friend of Twain.

In this presentation, I will report the results of as thorough an investigation as possible on the Japanese side regarding this letter. I will also report on related side stories, such as from where Riddell sent the letter to Twain, and whether she actually met Twain. Through this presentation, I will examine the unrealized connection between Japan and Mark Twain that this letter represents.

William Hancock, *The Pennsylvania State University*
wrh5167@psu.edu

"'The Enclosed Is Not Fancy, It Is *History*': Mark Twain, Theodore Roosevelt, and the English Civil War in *Fin De Siècle America*"
(Session Three)

At the turn of the century, two Americans—one a prominent man of letters, the other a rising politician—looked back on Cromwellian England. Mark Twain's "The Death-Disk," a short story set during the English Civil War, which Twain excitedly described to William Dean Howells as featuring "Cromwell in big picturesque power," was published in the December 1901 issue of *Harper's Monthly*. A year earlier, Theodore Roosevelt had been putting the finishing touches on a biography of Oliver Cromwell as he prepared to take the stage at the 1900 Republican National Convention and secure the nomination for vice president under William McKinley. Given their ideological differences and personal distaste for one another, why did Twain and Roosevelt agree that American readers at the dawn of the twentieth century would or should be interested in the seventeenth-century English past? In their mutual fascination with this history, Twain and Roosevelt reveal a shared veneration of the Parliamentary cause, which they viewed as an antecedent to the republicanism of the United States.

In "Death-Disk," Twain paradoxically valorizes Cromwell by deflating the English general and statesman's fearsome "Lord Protector" persona. The story rewrites in a hyper-sentimental mode a grim anecdote found in Thomas Carlyle's 1845 collection of Cromwell's correspondence and oratory. This mawkish revisionist narrative features a precocious little girl who melts Cromwell's pitiless façade and reveals him to be a caring and magnanimous ruler. Twain's Cromwell thus begins the tale as the stern patriarch of the nation, but he ends it as a tickled fatherly figure. In posthumously published autobiographical fragments, Twain further defends the Parliamentary legacy by half-jokingly claiming to be descended on his father's side from Geoffrey Clement, one of the judges who condemned Charles I to death.

Roosevelt, by contrast, evinces less interest in showing the softer side of Old Ironside. *Oliver Cromwell: The Story of His Life and Work* (1900) presents its subject as an imperfect trailblazer for liberal democracy whose "Puritan Revolution" presaged both the American Founding and the Union victory in the American Civil War. This Whiggish Cromwell resonates with another important actor in Roosevelt's historical writings: the cowboy. Just as the savage frontier violence of the cowboy was necessary to "win the West" for civilization, the brutal repression of the Roundhead was necessary to ensure the survival of England's fledgling experiment in republican rule. Roosevelt also draws implicit parallels between Cromwell's political career and his own by casting the Lord Protector in the role of proto-Progressive. Despite the iconic status of Twain and Roosevelt, "Death-Disk" and Oliver Cromwell have not been the recipients of recent or substantive critical attention. The last significant scholarship on "Death-Disk" occurred in the New Critical era, with formalists deriding the tale as hackneyed and maudlin. *Oliver Cromwell*, meanwhile,

has received only passing mentions in the voluminous literature detailing the 26th president's life and times. These works warrant further scrutiny, though, from a historicist perspective. The disparate uses to which Twain and Roosevelt instrumentalized historical memory of the English Civil War reveal the rhetorical malleability of that history in early-twentieth-century American discourse.

Andrew Hebard, *Miami University of Ohio*
hebarda@miamioh.edu

"Bosses and Bureaucrats: Twain's Satires of Virtue and Expertise in the Administrative State"
(Session Three)

Critiques of political corruption in the late nineteenth century often vacillated between two frameworks. On the one hand, they drew upon the tradition of republican virtue to frame political corruption as the moral failure of individual politicians and citizens, a failure that should be condemned and criminalized. On the other hand, they figured corruption as a systemic failure, as something endemic to the institutions of the state that needed to be managed and minimized. This latter account of corruption responded to the growth of the administrative state, and it figured corruption as an inefficiency to be managed rather than as a crime to be prosecuted. The spoils system, for example, was thought to be corrupt not necessarily because political appointees were immoral actors, but rather because they were incompetent, because they lacked expertise.

Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's *The Gilded Age* dramatizes the tension between these frameworks. A character like Colonel Sellers is an example of what Lawrence Lessig calls "decent souls corruption," a figure who is not immoral, but who nevertheless participates in forms of systemic corruption. He is also a figure who is persistently satirized for his lack of expertise, a lack that is juxtaposed to characters like Philip, a trained engineer who is the hero of one of the novel's major plots.

This paper will examine the relation between virtue and expertise in Twain's political satires. As a writer who often satirized morality for being overly conventional, Twain's political satires raise questions about the role of virtue for good governance. Examining *The Gilded Age* as well as *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, the purpose of this paper will be to understand how Twain's irreverent depiction of moral conventions extends to his depiction of political virtue and more particularly how Twain's fiction depicts conventions and morality operating in a state that increasingly valued expertise over virtue.

Harold Hellwig, *Idaho State University*
haroldhellwig@isu.edu

"*Connecticut Yankee* and *Innocents Abroad*: Catholicism and Antithesis; Pilgrimage, Conversion, Reverence, and Betrayal"
(Session Eleven)

Catholicism appears to play a small role in Twain's cultural appropriation of Europe; he is mostly anti-Catholic throughout his work. However, I will discuss the extent of the influence of European culture on *Connecticut Yankee* and *The Innocents Abroad* in terms of the major themes of Catholicism that are embedded in that culture and that figure prominently in his response to an existential reflection on religion. Twain responds to concepts of pilgrimage, conversion, reverence, and betrayal in both works that show the extent of his acknowledgment of Catholicism as a major force in European culture, even as it suggests anti-Catholicism as its American response. These two representative works show how he evaluates institutional authority.

In *Innocents Abroad*, Twain transforms pilgrimage into anti-pilgrimage; the American traveler encounters Catholic

Europe and the Holy Land through relics, cathedrals, sacred art, ceremony, and commercialized reverence, repeatedly resisting the religious responses such sites are supposed to produce. In *Connecticut Yankee*, the problem of pilgrimage becomes a problem of conversion, as Hank Morgan attempts to remake medieval Catholic Britain according to American technological, republican, and Protestant-inflected ideals. Both works reveal a critique of authority: religious, political, and cultural.

Twain finds the act of rebellion central to a *Connecticut Yankee* (a disavowal of European influence) and to his American vandal's appreciation of the aesthetics of Catholic cathedrals (a lack of appreciation, perhaps) in *Innocents Abroad*. The Church is the enemy in *Connecticut Yankee*; Catholicism represents an anti-democratic faith in *Innocents Abroad*. Both works suggest the range of responses from most American writers who encountered general concepts of pilgrimage, conversion, reverence, and betrayal, concepts vital within Catholicism and its antithesis in American culture (more generally known as anti-Catholicism). With Twain's works (not just these two), that range speaks not of acceptance but of resistance to the cultural values that somehow entice at the same time American writers refuse to accept. Catholicism matters in these texts because of the critique of authority (religious, political, cultural) embedded in what the American traveler and the Yankee describe, sharply shown by Hank's counter-conversion because his own project reproduces the authoritarian structures he claims to oppose.

Kaori Hosono, *Keio University*
kaorihosono@keio.jp

"Sensationalist Roots and Radical Rebellions: Newspaper Clippings as Moral Catalysts in Mark Twain's *Autobiography*"
(Session Twelve)

One of the elements that makes Mark Twain's *Autobiography* (The Complete and Authoritative Edition) entirely distinct from other autobiographies is its rejection of chronological order in favor of a "free-association" dictation method. Central to this practice was Twain's reliance on the daily press; he frequently incorporated contemporary newspaper clippings into his dictation, using them as prompts to navigate his past and comment on his present. At times, he inserted articles detailing events he attended as if to save himself the trouble of re-dictating the specifics; thus, these articles served as a supplementary tool for the author in his later years to reflect on daily occurrences. While scholars such as Bernard DeVoto have often viewed these insertions as mere filler or even signs of a waning creative energy, this paper argues that Twain's use of the press constitutes a sophisticated literary strategy, reconnecting his late-life radicalism to his origins as a Western sensationalist, fueling his final rebellion against the moral and political failures of the turn-of-the-century United States.

Drawing on Jarrod D. Roark's *Mark Twain at the Gallows* (2019), this presentation explores how the sensationalist tactics in "sensation hoaxes" of Twain's Nevada and California years informed the methodological approach and use of current events in his *Autobiography*. These "sensation hoaxes" drew from the tradition that flourished in antebellum print culture. I argue that Twain never abandoned this tradition; rather, he evolved it, maintaining his style as a sensationalist writer even after 1873, the end of Roark's scope.

In the *Autobiography*—most notably Twain's treatment of newspaper articles on sensational violence and scandal—I show that these clippings serve as "moral catalysts" that he uses the sensational, "bloody" aesthetics of the press to bridge the gap between daily news and profound meditations on human nature, imperialist ethics, and social justice. Thus, the *Autobiography* can be read as a final, monumental engagement with the American sensationalist tradition. By repurposing the violent news of his day into a tool for social critique, Twain proves that his identity as a "sensation reporter" was not a youthful phase to be outgrown, but a lifelong framework for his role as a social thinker and anti-imperialist provocateur. Maintaining his connection to mid-19th-century sensationalist reformers reveals that his late-life radicalism was not a departure from his Western origins, but a resilient application of the "sensation hoax" to the global stage.

Kumi Ikoma, *Tokyo Metropolitan University*
kumiikoma09@gmail.com

"The Defiant Daughter and the Silent Father: "Wapping Alice" and Susy Clemens"
(Session Eight)

Mark Twain adored his eldest daughter, Susy Clemens (1872–1896). In *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, he praised her literary talent, noting that she authored his biography at the age of thirteen. During the composition of *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), he sought counsel from his daughters, particularly from Susy. He openly declared her the model for the protagonists in *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896) and *A Horse's Tale* (1906/1907). Indeed, while composing *Joan of Arc*, he valued Susy's opinions above all others. Consequently, Twain drew significant literary inspiration from Susy throughout his life.

While Justin Kaplan acknowledges this influence in *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*, Peter Stoneley and Susan K. Harris analyze Twain as a repressive father bound by Victorian sexual norms. Recent scholarship, notably by Linda Morris, shifts the focus to Susy as an adult and addresses her sexuality. Several scholars point to Susy's relationship with Louise Brownells as sources for Twain's tales of same-sex attraction such as "How Nancy Jackson Married Kate Wilson" (1902c) and "Hellfire Hotchkiss" (1897c).

In this paper, I will discuss "Wapping Alice" (1898)—a narrative focusing on latent male homosexuality and cross-dressing—and its connection to Susy's influence on her father. In adapting the real 1877 domestic incident involving premarital relations between servants Lizzie Wills and Willie Taylor, Twain altered names and details to distance the incident from his family. However, when read contrapuntally alongside his elegy for Susy, "Broken Idols" (1898), connections emerge between Alice and Susy, particularly in clothing descriptions, gender performativity, and themes of hidden desire. First tracing Susy's life and her romantic same-sex intimacy, I introduce the elegy "Broken Idols," which expresses the profound grief experienced in the wake of losing a cherished daughter. Subsequently, I analyze the controversial short story "Wapping Alice" from the perspectives of gender and sexuality. The two works were both created in 1898, yet the former conveys a sense of parental mourning, while the latter places homosexuality as a central theme. Although the relationship between these texts is not immediately apparent, by highlighting the depictions of clothing in a contrapuntal reading, I explore the trajectory of Twain's internal struggle regarding Susy's sexuality.

As Ron Chernow suggests, Clemens, steeped in Victorian norms, found it "extremely difficult to accept," let alone "comprehend," his daughter's intimate female friendship. Thus, I argue that, through subversive fiction, Twain subtly defied the sexual norms he had internalized, suspending the heteronormative expectations and idealized Victorian familial roles.

Sarah Ingle, *Howard University*
sarah.ingle@howard.edu

"Medieval Race Studies and Chivalric Whiteness in Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*"
(Session Thirteen)

The field of medieval studies has been revolutionized in the past decade by Geraldine Heng's *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018) and other scholarship by medievalists who have begun to analyze premodern literature through the lens of critical race studies. Despite receiving criticism for being "anachronistic," scholars such as Geraldine Heng, Nahir I. Otaño Gracia, and Amrita Dhar have challenged both traditional medieval scholarship and "canonical race theory" by arguing that "race" was not solely an invention of the modern era.

Mark Twain, though best known for his writing about American slavery and 19th-century conceptions of race, also

displayed a fascination with medieval Europe in works such as *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and his little-known novel *Joan of Arc*. In this paper, I aim to bring Twain's literary depictions of the medieval world into conversation with the recent scholarship on medieval race studies, and especially with Gracia's notion of chivalric whiteness in the Arthurian tradition. Although Twain's depictions of race have been studied extensively in his writing about 19th-century American slavery and the rise of Jim Crow segregation, I argue that his representations of medieval Europe provide even more fertile ground for further understanding Twain's irreverent critiques of racialized whiteness.

Jeff Insko, *Oakland University*
insko@oakland.edu

"Refinery Realism"
(Session Seven)

This paper considers the coincidence of the rise of literary realism and the development of petrochemical refining. Although fossil fuels, both coal and petroleum, were distilled into illuminants like kerosene in the early nineteenth-century, the development and construction of major modern oil refineries only began in the last three decades of the century, following the discovery of major oil reserves in Pennsylvania and Ohio. Refining operations produced the products that would fuel the modern world. They also transformed local landscapes and blackened the atmosphere. Turning to works by Theophile Maher, Theodore Dreiser, and Willa Cather, I examine some of the ways realist writers identified the emergence of fossil modernity and grappled with what today we call "energy transition."

Tsuyoshi Ishihara, *University of Tokyo*
ishihara@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp

"From *The Black Avenger* to *Tom Sawyer*: Romantic Adventure Fiction and Mark Twain"
(Session Thirteen)

This paper reexamines Mark Twain's relationship to Romanticism by focusing on *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and the popular adventure fiction that shaped its imaginative world. Twain is famously known for his vehement attacks on canonical Romantic literature, particularly his ridicule of Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper. These attacks have often encouraged a simplified understanding of Twain as an anti-Romantic realist. However, this paper argues that such a view overlooks Twain's deep and complex engagement with Romantic *adventure* fiction, especially in its popular and sensational forms.

Rather than concentrating on Twain's own reading habits, this study shifts attention to his character—Tom's—reading. Twain's preface explicitly states that Tom is a composite of boys the author knew in his youth, suggesting that Tom's reading reflects the literary environment of Hannibal, Missouri, in the 1840s. In this context, the most significant text is Ned Buntline's *The Black Avenger of the Spanish Main* (1847). Notably, this sensational pirate romance is the only book explicitly named in *Tom Sawyer*, and it appears repeatedly at crucial moments when Tom imagines his future as a heroic outlaw. I will focus on these textual moments in order to demonstrate that Tom's fantasies are structured by the conventions of Romantic adventure fiction rather than by the canonical Romantic works Twain later mocked.

The paper then examines *The Black Avenger* itself, situating it within the broader tradition of nineteenth-century American sensational literature. Although often dismissed as crude popular fiction, *The Black Avenger* reveals a strong dependence on canonical British Romanticism. Its chapter epigraphs draw heavily on the poetry of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, and its narrative centers on familiar Romantic motifs: forbidden love, revenge, disguise, and ultimate reconciliation. This analysis shows that American popular adventure fiction functioned as a crucial intermediary through which British Romanticism continued to shape American literary culture well into the mid-nineteenth century. Building on this comparison, the paper argues that the influence of *The Black Avenger* extends

beyond Tom's playful fantasies and casts a darker shadow over Tom Sawyer through the figure of Injun Joe. Particular attention is given to Joe's repeated disguise as a "Spaniard," which resonates with the Black Avenger's persistent cry of "Death to the Spaniards!" By situating both works within the historical context of the Mexican–American War and the intensification of anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic sentiment in the US during the 1840s, the paper suggests that Injun Joe embodies the racialized and imperial anxieties embedded in Romantic adventure fiction. Although Tom does not directly kill Joe, Joe's death—brought about by Tom's cave adventure—can be read as an indirect enactment of the violent logic that underpins such romances.

Finally, the paper briefly turns to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to suggest that Twain's critique of Romantic adventure fiction becomes even more explicit in his later work. Tom Sawyer's obsessive adherence to romance conventions in the novel's final chapters reveals the disturbing consequences of confusing imaginative play with real human suffering. Read in this light, *Tom Sawyer* emerges not merely as a nostalgic tale of boyhood but as a critical exploration of how Romantic adventure fiction shaped American imagination—and how that imagination was inseparable from the histories of violence and war that marked nineteenth-century America.

Holger Kersten, *Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*
holger.kersten@amerikanistik.uni-halle.de

"Jim in a New Light: Revisiting *Huckleberry Finn* Illustrations in American and German First Editions"
(Session Four)

Despite the wealth of scholarship on Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), studies of the novel's first-edition illustrations have often been selective, focusing on a few striking images rather than offering a systematic analysis.

A survey of major reference works reveals that the study of illustrations has historically occupied a relatively minor place in Mark Twain studies. Most of the encyclopedic texts omit any reference to the illustrations. Only Greg Camfield's *Oxford Companion to Mark Twain* (2003) includes an entry six pages long. Even in Shelley Fisher Fishkin's recent *Jim* (2025), which examines the character's representation and worldwide reception, the illustrations in *Huckleberry Finn* receive only passing mention. Scholarly discussion of illustration in Twain's books has largely focused on the representation of African American characters, most notably the visualization of Jim. In this context, Earl F. Briden's frequently reprinted and cited essay on E. W. Kemble's stereotypical caricatures of African American figures has exerted considerable influence on assessments of the illustrator's work and, by extension, on interpretations of Twain's novel. A closer reading of Briden's article and the commentary it has inspired raises questions about the methodological assumptions underlying these interpretations of what images mean and how they shape the reading of the text.

This paper proposes a more self-reflexive methodological approach to the study of the illustrations for Twain's novel and supplements it with a comparative look at the illustrations in the first German illustrated edition. First translated into German in 1890, *Huckleberry Finn* was incorporated in 1892 into a six-volume selection of Mark Twain's works; in 1898 this edition appeared in an illustrated version featuring 51 images by the German artist Hans Schrödter (1872-1957).

By examining these two sets of illustrations in relation to one another, this paper attempts to illuminate both the cultural framework established by the American first edition and its subsequent transnational transformation, as well as the broader range of representational possibilities inherent in the narrative.

Beyond this specific case study, this paper seeks to advance a methodologically transparent framework for the study of illustration in American literature and to show that systematic, context-sensitive approaches can yield more nuanced and balanced insights into character representation and visual storytelling.

"Biocultural Reading of *Huckleberry Finn*: Huck's Oscillation Between Body, Thought, and American Dichotomies"
(Session Four)

America is a nation premised on diversity, as its motto "E Pluribus Unum" suggests. Yet beneath that ideal lies a history in which sharp "dichotomies"—good and evil, civilization and savagery, freedom and slavery, etc.—have repeatedly structured society.

This presentation reinterprets *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) by incorporating the concept of "biocultures" as proposed by Nancy Easterlin and Lennard J. Davis as its starting point. This "biocultural" framework treats the biological body and cultural norms as inseparable, aiming toward an understanding that transcends the division between science and the humanities that has long been considered rigid. Within this framework, I analyze how Twain narrativized the contradictions and oscillations of American society and the individuals who live within it through the interplay of body and thought in the novel.

Twain seems to have understood that "the separation of thought and body is impossible" in America, a nation that might well be called a land of dichotomies. Having grown up in the era of slavery, experienced a failed participation in the Civil War, and then become a writer during the subsequent period of transition while continuously witnessing the transformations of American society, this author is believed to have physically experienced the numerous dichotomies of America, oscillating between them as he thought. The boy Huck is understood not as a figure possessing a single unified identity but as one who embodies contradictory duality. Building on this understanding, the presentation focuses on particular scenes in which Huck thinks.

We frequently observe Huck retreating into physical isolation and becoming absorbed in thought. At times, the places of thought are the depths of a forest, the cabin in which Pap confines him, and a raft drifting on the Mississippi River. I focus on the process of Huck's thinking, rather than its consequences. In some instances he thinks as a boy who has been told he is ignorant; at other times, as a young man who is striving to achieve the ideal of masculinity that the America of his era demands; and again, as a prisoner who is blamed for his failures and seeks to vow obedience. Through the analysis of these thought processes, this presentation situates Huck's oscillation as a product of the "biocultural process" and offers a perspective from which we can reconsider the relationship between body and thought in Mark Twain's works.

James W. Leonard, The Citadel
jleonar2@citadel.edu

"Enumerating Myth: *Roughing It* and the Disorder of Things"
(Session Twelve)

My paper will focus on one key formal element of *Roughing It* that paradoxically reinforces and refutes conventions familiar to travel narratives: the chapter argument, or descriptive list, assigned to each chapter of the narrative. As I outline below, my contention is that Twain carefully structures the arguments introducing *Roughing It's* chapters to evoke an unsettling sense of incoherence which aligns with his project as a whole.

I begin with an analysis from Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, in which he interrogates the modern principles of order we largely take for granted. Examining a list of animals that Jorge Luis Borges supposedly scraped from an ancient Chinese encyclopedia called the *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*, Foucault experiences a sort of psychic revulsion when confronting the suspicion that "there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*."

Roughing It doesn't quite reach these levels of eldritch horror, but it is certainly full of disorder. By applying Foucault's

methodology to *Roughing It's* arguments, my paper will attempt to parse out what exactly Twain accomplishes by including, within list-descriptions which are largely legible and genre-standard, such items as "Another Delusion Dispelled," "A Spoiled Watermelon," and "Overcoats as an Article of Diet."

After all, while the West in America often figures disorder, wildness, and individualism, isn't the purpose of the traditional travel narrative to conceptually "civilize and pacify" in the name of coherence and stability? Twain's use of unreadable arguments would, therefore, inflict a particularly acute irony on the reader. Our desire for the West as a space of adventure hinges on tales of extra-civilizational disorder, but the format through which we present those journeys uses the stability of its framework—the recognizable narrative, the application of familiar politics, the relatable desires of the inhabitants—to tame the spaces and experiences traversed in the writing.

The truer desire etched in the process would then necessarily be our longing for a place of *fragile* misrule which can thrill temporarily, but which inevitably resolves into the familiar solaces of recognizable social, logical, and linguistic orders. In *Roughing It*, then, disrupting the site of mythmaking's supposed coherence, Twain produces the incoherence of those conflicting desires and offers in their place a, again ironically, more representative account of the granular chaos of the individual experience of expansion.

Kevin Mac Donnell, *Independent Scholar*
info@macdonnellrarebooks.com

"Mark Twain's Black Muse: The Life and Legacy of His Butler, George Griffin"
(Session Eight)

The better we get to know Mark Twain's butler, George Griffin, the better we can understand Huck's Jim. The 20,000-word biography of George Griffin that appeared in the Spring 2024 *Mark Twain Journal* has grown fivefold into a full-length account of his life, which will be published by Lyons Press in February 2027. This talk will preview some of the newly discovered details of Griffin's remarkable life that have since come to light.

The roster of important historical figures that Griffin met has grown substantially. How, when, and where he met them will be revealed. Solid evidence has surfaced that Griffin met Abraham Lincoln and his son Tad two weeks before the assassination, and may even have served Lincoln a glass of water—while the others present drank whiskey. Evidence has also emerged that he met all or most of the following people: Red Cross founder Clara Barton, General Ulysses S. Grant, President Theodore Roosevelt, President William McKinley, authors George W. Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, Edward Bellamy, and Bret Harte, explorer Henry M. Stanley, Twain's Nevada colleagues Dan de Quille and Joe Goodman, cartoonist Thomas Nast, painters Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Remington, statesman Hamilton Fish, diplomat and US Secretary of State John Hay, landscape architect and designer of New York's Central Park Frederick Law Olmsted, New York Senator Chauncey Depew, and business titans J. P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller. Leonard Zelig and Forrest Gump would have been jealous—had they not been fictional characters. It turns out that Griffin had three children, not two, and their tragic stories will be told. The two racetracks where Griffin made large sums of money as a professional gambler have been tentatively identified, and two new documents by Griffin have come to light, one of which sheds light on his religious beliefs.

Twain called Griffin "as remarkable a character as I know"; this talk will add detail to that outline.

Kristopher Mecholsky, *Savannah College of Art and Design*
kmechols@scad.edu

"If It Is Possible to Burlesque That Business: Twain, Detection, and Its Popular Inheritance"
(Session Six)

Mark Twain's engagement with detective fiction is well mapped in scholarship, from his burlesques of the Pinkerton agency and the Simon Wheeler sequences he tinkered with across decades to the parodic demolition of Holmesian ratiocination in "A Double-Barreled Detective Story" (1902). What has received less sustained attention is both the cultural context informing Twain's ambivalence about the detective form and how he contributed to it, as well as what became of the imaginary he cultivated in relation to detection once it escaped his critical control.

Twain wrote during an era when detective fiction and adventure fiction were not yet cleanly separable genres. The Nick Carter dime novels, enormously popular across the same period and beyond, blended sensation, adventure, and detection into serialized entertainment whose appeal rested on the hero's infallibility and the world's fundamental legibility. Twain's response—in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), in *Tom Sawyer, Detective* (1896), and in the unpublished fragments of "Tom Sawyer's Conspiracy"—worked both with and against this cultural current.

This presentation's argument, however, is less about Twain's own texts than about the afterlife of a cultural imaginary. Twain was not simply an author of books. Like Sherlock Holmes, he was a cultural institution—his name and his creation of a shared imaginative property that audiences understood as simultaneously literary, biographical, and national. It is this imaginary, rather than any specific text, that has persisted most durably in popular culture. And it has persisted quite visibly in a genre Twain interrogated ferociously: the cozy mystery. Contemporary fiction has found the Twain imaginary irresistible as cozy material. Peter Heck, Bill Peschel, and Daniel D. Victor depict Twain himself as a detective in multi-part series, with the latter two bringing him into Sherlock Holmes's Baker Street orbit directly. What these works share is not just their use of Twain's persona but their reliance on the "Auden formula" that Twain ridiculed and skewered: the detective as exceptional individual who restores a bewildered community to a state of grace, expelling guilt and returning innocence.

The cozy afterlife of the Twain imaginary is not simply a case of popular culture pillaging a canonical author for brand recognition. Rather, it reveals a complex system at play in adaptation: the elements that survive, from a deeply ambivalent body of work, are those most compatible with a genre's demands. What the cozy keeps from Twain is not his critique of detection but his performance of it—the Tom who triumphs in the courtroom, the white-suited raconteur whose charm papers over the cracks in the social order, the St. Petersburg that can be restored. At stake are three competing systems: the internal logic and critical history of the Twainverse; the market dominance of the cozy mystery and its reliance on reassurance over subversion; and the cultural notion of high literary art as something that resists, complicates, or transcends the popular formulas it most powerfully inhabits. What the cozy tradition keeps from Twain is, finally, the version of him he was most ambivalent about producing.

Kyle Meikle, *University of Baltimore*
kmeikle@ubalt.edu

"Poeland, Twainworld, Kingverse"
(Session Six)

Early on in his *History of American Literature on Film*, Thomas Leitch registers a dearth of Stateside "tentpoles," figures whose works might inspire entire "cinematic and televisual franchises" (25). "Compared to the torrent of Dickens and Austen adaptations that have been produced on both sides of the Atlantic," he writes, "remarkably few films have been based on the work of ... the nineteenth-century American classics" (6). This paper turns to two remarkable exceptions to that rule, Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain, as well as their twentieth-century compatriot, Stephen King. Viewed from

above or afar, Poe, Twain, and King look very much like the tent-poles of American adaptation and franchising. Such a bird's-eye survey suggests not only some kinship between these American Gothics, but a similar approach to the adaptation and franchising of their work. Leitch notes, for instance, filmmakers' tendency to forsake Poe's specific texts in favor of taking their audiences to a more general "Poeland," "a place that is conceived theatrically, imagistically, and spatially" (22). This paper tours Poeland's most recent expansion—Mike Flanagan's Netflix mash-up *The Fall of the House of Usher*—while returning to sites where King (in Hulu's *Castle Rock*) and Twain (in 1985's *The Adventures of Mark Twain* and in Disney World itself) have similarly landed. Along the way, it asks how much Poeland, Twainworld, and the Kingverse not only look like each other but like the American landscape from which they draw their inspiration.

Bruce Michelson, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*
brucem@illinois.edu

"Mark Twain and the Legacies of Satire"
(Session Fourteen)

Satire can be -- and at a basic level, perhaps always is -- a kind of self-care, and also of in-group signification in and beyond the moment of its outbreak. Whatever else it might intend, a satiric text can provide reassurance, both to its creator and to whatever audience it might eventually reach, that incisive thinking, moral clarity, and common sense are still possible, even in times of epidemic confusion. To engage honestly with works of Aristophanes, Juvenal, Rabelais, or Swift, we normally concede that with regard to altering injustices and stupidities in the public sphere, these texts and performances really changed nothing. What they could accomplish, and often still can, includes a measure of reassurance to small communities of readers and watchers that not everyone in a given moment accepts a general depravity. Satiric texts can show us that there were, and are, scattered fellowships of bewilderment, exasperation, scorn, dismay, distress, and that as narrative histories flatten the past into eras of ostensible conformity, at least a few people in those times recognized big-scale problems in their world and tried to express and challenge them.

If these perceptions seem valid, how might they refresh our engagement with Mark Twain as a satirist now, even as "close reading" declines as a cultural practice, and as many of Mark Twain's own texts risk obsolescence as social and political critique? It's well known that in his later years, as his engagements with imperialism, racism, religious hypocrisy, and conventional delusions about human nature and worth grew hotter, they often morphed into private discourse, only reaching a public decades after his death -- sometimes according to his wishes, and sometimes not. Though we can attribute this reticence to in-house censorship or to failures of nerve, health, and so on, we can also understand it in light of his longstanding suspicions about discourse itself, about the trouble that published texts and spoken words can promulgate, and his recognition that satiric response, published or otherwise, is in fundamental ways a dialogue with the self, and, at best, also with a few others. In his published writings, Mark Twain's targets often include nonsense circulating in mass-produced newspapers and books, and spoken from pulpits and rostrums, as well as affectations, misunderstandings, and destructive behavior incited or sustained by popular texts and dubious authorities. When Mark Twain turned to writing longer narratives, his satiric quarrels with injustice often led him into thematic confusion; and one source of these troubles is his chronic uncertainty about the consequences of utterance, the semantic and moral instability of discourse, satiric or otherwise, as it disperses into the world. To appreciate Mark Twain as a satirist now requires heightened awareness of what he himself understood about the challenges of the mode, the limits of its reach and comprehension, and the inherent privacy of its satisfactions.

"Dictating Grief: Writing as Mourning in Mark Twain's *Autobiography*"
(Session Nine)

Mark Twain's *Autobiography* stands as one of the most formally audacious yet critically under-examined works in American literary history. This presentation argues that *The Autobiography* is simultaneously an act of radical formal innovation and an act of grief—a text in which the structure of life writing and the dynamics of psychological resilience are inseparable. By recovering this dimension, we gain a fuller understanding of Twain's significance within Twain studies and within the broader tradition of American autobiography and the emerging canon of trauma and resilience literature.

Following Olivia's death in 1904, Twain proclaimed that he had finally discovered "the right way to do an autobiography," abandoning chronological sequence for free association. Scholars have long recognized the formal boldness of this departure; what remains insufficiently explored is its psychological urgency. Twain's associative method was not merely aesthetic experimentation but grief work—resilient adaptation to cumulative, devastating personal loss. The *Autobiography* registers the deaths of his brother Henry (1858), his infant son Langdon (1872), his daughter Susy (1896), and Olivia (1904), with Jean's death in 1909 casting a final shadow. These accumulated losses transformed Twain's dictation sessions into what I term a "therapeutic arena for grieving," a space in which formal freedom served profound psychological necessity.

The theoretical framework of my analysis draws on grief studies and resilience research, applying Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model—which conceptualizes healthy grieving as oscillation between loss-oriented coping (confronting death) and restoration-oriented coping (rebuilding life around loss)—to demonstrate that Twain's associative structure enacts this resilient alternation at the level of form. Rather than reading his late-career pessimism as abstract philosophical determinism, as much Twain scholarship has done, I reframe it as psychological adaptation: a resilient, if incomplete, defense mechanism enabling sustained creative production amid bereavement.

These dynamics emerge through close readings of key passages that deal with loss. Alongside these loss-oriented passages, humor, satirical digression, and philosophical reframing signal resilient attempts to reconstitute a livable self. Yet the oscillation remains incomplete: the deepening nihilism of *The Mysterious Stranger* and *What Is Man?* reveals that even remarkable formal resilience could not fully resolve what grief scholarship would now classify as complicated grief—a finding with significant implications for understanding the relationship between creative production and psychological survival.

Terry Oggel, *Virginia Commonwealth University*
toggel@vcu.edu

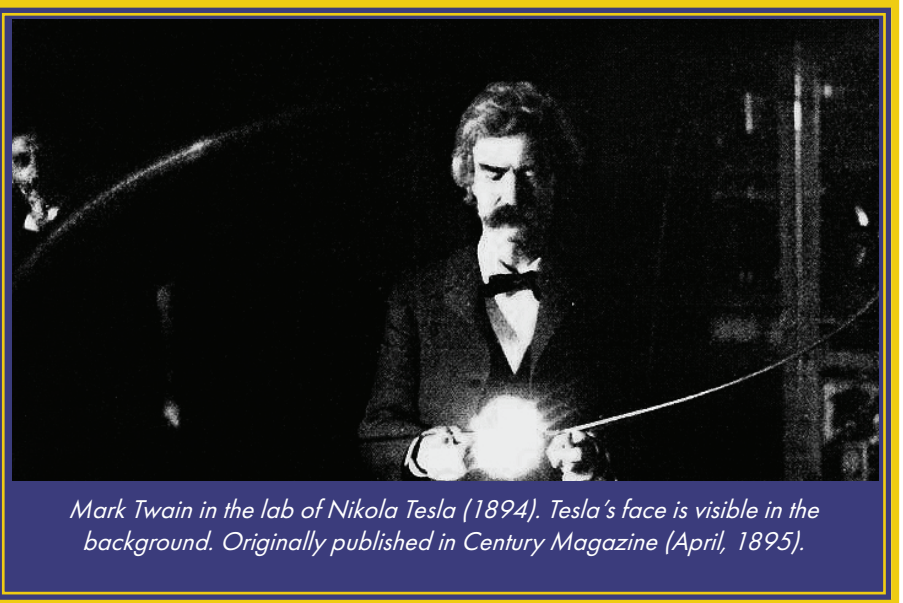
"Twain and Tesla: The Twain Shall Meet"
(Session One)

My presentation will include many images of Twain and Tesla as well as passages from their letters, their writings and more.

The Twain-Tesla relationship began "informally," to use Tesla's own term. They "met" long-distance (4300 miles) in 1870. 14-year-old Nicola Tesla, a Serbian living in Croatia, was struck with a deadly illness. Bed-ridden, he read constantly and, as he wrote in his autobiography, he read some early stories by Mark Twain, so "captivating," so "unlike anything" he had ever read before that he "utterly forgot" his "hopeless state" and began a "miraculous recovery." Tesla worked in Europe pursuing his dream to invent machinery—oscillators, generators, the famous Tesla coil—that would transmit electricity long distances wirelessly. In 1884 he immigrated to America to further

his work alongside Thomas Edison, a pioneer in the practical use of electricity. In time Tesla broke with Edison, who adamantly stayed with DC. Tesla, more far-sighted and with greater imagination, saw that the future of wireless was with AC. High Voltage.

A few years later, in 1891, Tesla became a U.S. citizen. That was also the year of Tesla's actual first meeting with Twain. It was a deeply-held memory for Tesla, captured poignantly by his recollection of it many years later: "... when I met Mr. Clemens and we formed a friendship between us, I told him of the experience [when I was a teenager] and was amazed to see that great man of laughter burst into tears."



Mark Twain in the lab of Nikola Tesla (1894). Tesla's face is visible in the background. Originally published in Century Magazine (April, 1895).

Their first meeting in 1870 occurred because Tesla read wonderful stories by the already internationally known Twain; their actual meeting in 1891 occurred because Twain had learned through international media coverage of Tesla's magical powers with wireless electricity. Twain even called him "The Wireless Man." A high point in their friendship occurred in 1894 when Twain visited Tesla's laboratory.

The more the friendship between the writer Twain and the inventor Tesla is considered, the less surprising it is. The fiction-writer held that "An inventor is a poet—a true poet—and nothing less than a high order of poet," a tribute made in 1870, the very year when young Tesla was "captivated" by Twain's exciting writing. Twain was enthralled by science--geology, archeology, evolution, forensic science (finger-printing), and more.

Likewise for Tesla. His scientific procedure differed from the usual method. "When I get an idea," he explained, "I start at once building it up in my imagination. I change the construction, make improvements and operate the device in my mind." When he made the device, without exception it "worked as I conceived it." For Tesla, "reality" was created by the imagination. One extraordinary instance occurred in 1882 in Budapest when he was deeply perplexed. While walking in a park, he recited passages from Goethe's Faust, which he had memorized. As he uttered the lines, the answer "came like a flash of lightning and in an instant the truth was revealed."

Nicholas Otranto, *Southeastern Louisiana University*
nicholas.otranto@southeastern.edu

"Mark Twain and American Belonging"
(Session Three)

Over the past five years I have been considering Mark Twain in relation to the phenomenon of belonging. I've been interested in what, if anything, Twain's life and works reveal to us about American belonging. On one hand, this focus derives from practical concerns: broader issues with contemporary American discourse and socio-cultural relationships, and more narrow anxieties about the need for academia to adapt, reorient or reimagine itself in a society that increasingly sees the academy as no more than a box office. On the other hand, it's a product of the undeniable and frustratingly understudied reality of Mark Twain's incredibly resilient standing within the public imagination. Given our recent and justifiable tendencies to disassemble the myths surrounding our historical forebears, and in light of current political polarization, there are few figures who remain idols of the American polity. And those who do are typically individuals who inspired major transformations in societal dynamics. So why is it that

despite many obvious flaws that would otherwise disqualify a historical figure from esteem, and despite the current hyperawareness of differences that divide Americans, Twain continues to be invoked for any cause for which an American can find one of his quotes (or misquotes) and maintains his position among revered cultural artists who captured what it means to be American?

Perhaps, as his daughter Clara said when she agreed to have her father's long withheld *Letters from the Earth* collection published in 1962, "Mark Twain belonged to the world." But that would also naturally mean that Twain belongs to America. Yet the insufficient answers to questions of "how?" and "in what ways exactly?" still leave this phenomenon shrouded in mystery. That is, Twain, through all his political, religious, and philosophical comments, as well as the various readings and misreadings of those comments, continues to receive popular consent as an authority to speak on behalf of the American experience, and no satisfactory explanation of how or why so many Americans can view him as belonging to "me and mine" exists to date. But that shortcoming is not for a lack of trying. For instance, in the Mark Twain Archive at Elmira College, we can find Michael J. Kiskis's repeated attempts to frame and describe Twain's own lifelong search for belonging, a paradox that makes this phenomenon especially rich. Between his *Drifting toward Home* and "Mark Twain's Bleeding Heart" manuscripts, Kiskis tries to work out how Twain's life and fiction "recount the struggle of the human heart to find a place in this world, to find peace... to find a home." So it seems that for a man who rarely felt at home (or was at home), who wrote about outsiders and strangers, and who crossed practically every threshold of American society, only to depart before remaining too long, these questions surrounding how someone like Twain could belong to America while never having found belonging for himself, open seriously abundant and timely opportunities to explore how his legacy can continue its influence in our own time.

Don Pellegrino, *Independent Scholar*
Donpellegrinopgh@gmail.com

"The Science Adventures of Tom & Huck"
(Session One)

This paper will focus on reviewing the multimedia use of Tom & Huck in a new series targeted at middle school students to teach STEM.

The series includes a movie, *The Science Adventures of Tom & Huck*, (launched in September 2025) available on streaming services such as Netflix, soundtrack of the movie (available on series such as Spotify), and approximately 30 books (available from Amazon and others in printed, e-book and audio versions) which support the movie, including stories based on Twain's characters in new adventures, plus exercises and work books designed to teach science.

The paper will show that this series is a great way to not only keep Twain's characters current in the 21st century but is a wonderful introduction to bring new readers into Twain's original works. Additionally, the same creators of this series (Super Science Showcase/ Wonder Mill Cosmos) have issued two other books of interest to Twain readers; a sequel to *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, and a reprint of a comic strip *Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn* by Clare "Dwig" Dwiggins from the 1920's.

"Love, Marriage, and Murder: Samuel Clemens and the Perils of Passion"
(Session Nine)

This paper examines Samuel Clemens's engagement with nineteenth-century debates over marriage, divorce reform, and criminal responsibility, arguing that his response to the sensational murder trial of Daniel McFarland in 1870 reveals a moral position shaped by both sympathy for marital injustice and deep suspicion of emotional exculpation in the courtroom. While Clemens enjoyed a devoted and intellectually companionate marriage to Olivia Langdon Clemens, he lived during a period in which the institution itself was increasingly perceived as unstable. Divorce rates were rising, women's rights advocates pressed for liberalized divorce laws, and conservatives warned that weakening marital bonds would undermine social order. Clemens entered these debates not as a reflexive defender of indissoluble marriage but as a morally serious observer of its failures.

The paper begins by situating Clemens within contemporary controversies over divorce reform. In response to a New York murder trial that exposed severe abuse within a marriage, Clemens expressed qualified support for liberalizing divorce laws. Where cruelty and sustained harm were evident, he recognized that the law might justly release spouses from destructive unions. Marriage, though socially foundational, was not sacred when it perpetuated injustice. Clemens's stance here reflects a pragmatic moralism: institutions must serve human welfare, not entrench suffering. Yet Clemens drew a decisive line when emotional suffering entered the courtroom as a defense of homicide. His reaction to the McFarland trial is especially revealing. McFarland murdered Albert Richardson amid accusations of marital infidelity and claimed that jealousy and domestic humiliation had rendered him temporarily insane. The jury ultimately accepted this narrative, effectively endorsing the idea that a husband's wounded honor and possessive rage could overwhelm reason and suspend responsibility. Clemens sharply criticized the verdict. He rejected the cultural script that equated jealousy with mental disease and objected to the willingness of lawyers and jurors to transform intense emotion into legal absolution.

For Clemens, the McFarland acquittal represented more than a troubling verdict; it signaled a broader shift in moral reasoning. He condemned attorneys for theatrical manipulation and derided what he saw as the gullibility of juries swayed by sentimental appeals. The courtroom, in his view, risked becoming a stage on which passion was medicalized and accountability diluted. While he acknowledged the power of emotional suffering, he resisted its elevation into a general excuse for violence. In a culture renegotiating both marital norms and the boundaries of criminal responsibility, Clemens insisted that compassion for suffering must not erode the law's moral clarity.

Teresa Prados-Torreira, *Columbia College Chicago*
tprados-torreira@colum.edu

"*Good Morning*: A Humorous magazine fights back after World War I."

Six months after World War I ended, a group of cartoonists and journalists founded *Good Morning*, a humorous magazine that addressed the complex political landscape the conflict had left behind. At a time when the U.S. government continued to use flawed arguments to justify American participation in a conflagration with millions of human casualties, *Good Morning* used humor to remind the nation what World War I had been about—profits. As the U.S. turned inward, *Good Morning* criticized the Palmer Raids and the nativist sentiment that guided harsh immigration restrictions. When the First Amendment was undermined, *Good Morning* questioned the Wilson Administration's policy of shutting down left-leaning publications, and sending union leaders, such as Eugene Debs, to jail.

Defining a political identity was at the core of *Good Morning's* agenda. The publication was on the side of the working class. But how critical should progressive Americans be of the Russian Revolution? Of fringe groups such as the Anarchists? What should the right balance between electoral politics and direct action be? The magazine did not have a long life: By 1924 it had run out of funding and support, but while it lasted, *Good Morning* captured with wit and humor the contradictions, hopes and dilemmas the American Left faced as it entered the 1920s—dilemmas that are surprisingly relevant more than 100 years later.

Patrick Prominski, *Grand Rapids Community College*
patrickprominski1@grcc.edu

The Microscopist and Mark Twain: Expanding Twain's Elmira Social Circle and Influence on "The Great Dark" (Session Two)

In Mark Twain's unfinished story "The Great Dark," Twain's narrator is plunged into a microscopic dream world after examining slides under a microscope. In this world, he encounters microscopic creatures magnified thousands of times, becoming monsters that chase the ship he travels on. In some ways, this story resembles Twain's later "Three Thousand Years Among the Microbes." However, where the later work focuses more on the social organization of the microbial world, "The Great Dark," among other things, considers the physical characteristics of the microscopic. Examining the scientific influences of Twain's descriptions, as well as his understanding of science provides insight into how and why he described the microscopic world as he does.

During his twenty summers in Elmira, NY, Twain encountered local microscopist Thaddeus Up de Graff. Largely overlooked in Twain studies, Up de Graff was a well-known author, scientist, and publisher. The two frequented the same locations and ran in the same social circles. Twain likely drew his early descriptions and knowledge of the microscopic world from interactions the two had. Uncovering and examining this relationship deepens scholarly understanding of Twain's knowledge of the emerging science of microscopes and the role it plays in his work.

Stephen Rachman, *Michigan State University*
rachman@msu.edu

"Thinking Fast and Slow: Daniel Kahneman and Mark Twain's 'How to Tell a Story'" (Session Seven)

Building off of my presentation "Buying Siberia" at the Gilded Age Humor symposium, in this presentation I discuss an aspect of my work on Mark Twain's economic thinking, which I relate to the cognitive/psychological economic theories of Daniel Kahneman, as summarized in his study *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Here, I argue that the relationship between Kahneman's fast and slow thinking is operative in Twain's exploration of the art of humorous storytelling in "How to Tell a Story." In particular, I connect Twain's taxonomy of the American humorous story to Kahneman's discussions of "priming effects," in which test subjects are subliminally affected by suggestions and body positions. I apply this to the elements of misdirection that Twain claims distinguished the American humorous story from other national modes of story/joke-telling. My aim is to demonstrate how economic thinking impacted Twain's aesthetics of humor.

"In Their Right Minds: Livy, Clara, Nina, and 'Americanitis'"
(Session Eight)

Mark Twain's wife Livy spent much of her life subject to debilitating episodes, sometimes diagnosed as the mystery ailment "nervous prostration." Although it was often overshadowed by her siblings' tragic medical histories, Clara Clemens also suffered periodically from "nervous prostration" and spent time in sanitariums. Nina Gabrilowitsch's struggles with mental illness are so well-documented, the general public knows little else about her. Were the maladies of her mother and grandmother connected to Nina's mental state? What is "nervous prostration" anyway? *"In Their Right Minds: Livy, Clara, Nina and 'Americanitis'"* examines the scholarship surrounding these questions. The late Patrick Ober's *Mark Twain and Medicine* provides a springboard into the topic, with its thorough documentation of the Clemens family's medical history during Twain's life. Livy's medical condition in particular is illuminated by Ober's plain-spoken explanation of "nervous prostration." The poorly understood malady was nicknamed "Americanitis" in the 19th century.

Clara's adult life included incidents of "nervous prostration" similar to Livy's. The most well-known occasion was after her mother's death, when Clara had an emotional breakdown and spent several months bedridden, attempting a "rest cure." Her daughter Nina's teenage diary provides further records of Clara's condition in the post-Twain era.

In Nina's adult life, her well-known alcoholism was just one aspect (or perhaps symptom) of underlying, and untreated, mental illness. Its effects on her life were far more destructive than the spells of "nervous prostration" that her mother and grandmother suffered. A common genetic cause, however, cannot be ruled out.

Environmental factors may have contributed to the severity of Nina's condition as well. Diaries and other records of Nina's behavior suggest that her mental deterioration began to accelerate after her father's death in 1936. Nina's relationship with her mother became antagonistic, to put it mildly, complicated by Clara's own erratic behavior and marriage to the troublesome Jacques Samoussoud. Livy and Clara, by contrast, both had emotional support from their families during their health crises.

The main goal of this presentation is to provide an overview and history of the family's mental health that includes and foregrounds Nina. Despite its nebulous nature, "nervous prostration" was a significant part of the Clemens family's medical history. The breadth of documented evidence suggests that this topic would benefit from further study.

Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *University of Texas at San Antonio*
jeanne.reesman@me.com

"'The 'Australasian Spartans' of Tasmania: Classical Allusion as Satire in Following the Equator'"
(Session Eleven)

When most Americans hear "Tasmania" they probably don't know anything about it, but the first thing that often comes to mind is the Looney Tunes character the "Tasmanian Devil." What will not spring into mind is the source of the character's name: it is the name given to the savage white British convicts by the indigenous people, the Palawa. They called their island "Lutruwita." They arrived from the mainland 35,000 years before and lived there 6,000 years after the isthmus was cut off. Like the cartoon character and the actual animal, convicts sent from Australia to build infrastructure in Tasmania, or Van Dieman's Land, as 17th-century Dutch explorer who "discovered" it named it after himself, gobbled up the whole island.

Convicts began the supervised and unsupervised genocide of the indigenous people. The islanders knew their island; they were a lot better at guerilla war than the convicts. But the Palawa were often deemed too hard to catch for the £5 bounty for capture and simply killed. These convicts were the refuse of London's overcrowded prisons, many guilty of heinous crimes. Imagine a prison full of some of the most dangerous criminals alive suddenly released into Eden with pay and lots of booze.

Afterwards the government was embarrassed by the slaughter. Things went to another bad extreme by supposedly well-meaning "religious" man George Augustus Robinson, whose enlightened ideas included banishing the few survivors to remote rocky islands where they died, as Twain emphasizes, gazing across the sorrowfully across the water at their lost home," and "wondered what could be the matter with them" (267). Twain states, "As far as Tasmania is concerned, the extermination was complete: not a native left" (256). But he was wrong. Though the "Black War" of the 1820s-30s decimated them, they did not all die: their descendants are building their tribal numbers, now 30,000 people (possibly from a few as 47 survivors) and are quite activist about being stewards of the land, which owns them, and healing.

Of course, I am sailing in the wake of fine work on Tasmania and Twain, especially Susan K. Harris and Kerry Driscoll, but I want to take a different tack to Tasmania. I examine Twain's decision to equate the Palawas to heroes of western civilization from the Greek 300, to Napoleon at Waterloo, and to Black Douglas, a fearsome Scottish knight of the 13-14th centuries who led the Wars of Scottish Independence with Robert the Bruce. Twain's literary allusions that critically interpret the colonial enterprise.

Throughout my teaching and scholarly focus on Oceania, I have learned a lot about post-colonialism in Oceania. I am eager to share it concerning Tasmania in *Following the Equator*.

Laura Rice, *Oregon State University*
ricel@oregonstate.edu

"From Twain to Trump: A Genealogy of Incivility"
(Session Fourteen)

The Gilded Age was our nation's best political novel (Garry Wills, *New York Times*, 1976). "No matter what new craziness pops up in America," Wills claimed, "I find it described beforehand by [Twain]." Twain's observations about how incivility undermines representative democracy provide a roadmap of the workings of political corruption from his time to our own. The morally bankrupt politicians, hapless citizens, marginal swindlers, and mainstream scoundrels Twain described with humor and condemnation continue to populate our evolving socio-political landscapes giving the lie to our national, patriotic myths of one person, one vote. "It is not worthwhile to try to keep history from repeating itself, [given] man's character," Twain surmised ("Purchasing Civic Virtue"). Man's character may not change, but a citizen's *circumstance* and *condition* do. Twain saw that *circumstance* which "moves by laws of its own" (railways, steamships, or the telegraph; computers, satellites, or artificial intelligence) can create *conditions* (inequalities generated by "vast power and wealth") that, we discover "to our grief and dismay," have eroded civil rights and encouraged autocracy ("The Plutocracy, I").

LaVelle Ridley, *Ohio State University (Abolition Studies)*

ridley.25@osu.edu

"Exploring the Abolitionist Thread that Weaves Black and Trans Women's Literary Cultures Together"

(Session Two)

A famously circulated nineteenth-century lithograph with the headline "The Man-Monster" depicts Mary Jones, a black gender non-conforming sex worker who was charged with grand larceny for stealing clients' wallets and sentenced to hard labor on June 18, 1836. Fifteen years later, in 1851, abolitionist Sojourner Truth delivered her famous "Ain't I A Woman" speech at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, urging the mixed crowd to reflect on who counts within the category of "woman." Following up on the contemporary history traced in my previous paper on CeCe McDonald's political life writing, I explore the ways in which abolitionist politics structure black, feminist and trans* literary circles. Specifically, I discuss the autobiographical elements of early abolitionist discourse—particularly within the fugitive slave narrative—resonate with the self-representational origins of contemporary trans studies. I then discuss several trans literary circles and collectives that weave the thread of abolition from the nineteenth century through to the contemporary period through articulations of racialized gendered capture, embodied modes of memory, and the importance of geography and time.

Ann Ryan, *Le Moyne College*

ryanam@lemoyne.edu

"Cowards, Critics, and the Untold True Story of 'The United States of Lyncherdom'"

(Session Three)

After the brutal responses to Friedrich Nietzsche's most heretical arguments, Mark Twain reflected upon the price paid by artists who tell the truth. He writes in his *Autobiography*, "The human race is a race of cowards; and I am not only marching in that procession but carrying a banner." At the end of his life, Twain returns to the moral outrage of lynching—a subject that occupies his imagination throughout his career--and while he yearns to tell these American stories; ultimately, he leaves them unpublished and untold. This compositional context is written into these literary orphans as well. In *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, for example, or *Which Was It?* Twain creates White, male characters who quiver and crawl before a dominating specter of Black manhood; in order to protect their privileges, they choose a humiliating retreat from the truth. Although praised by Twain critics as an expression of his political and moral courage, "The United States of Lyncherdom" tells a similar story. Despite his abhorrence for the violent, inhumanity of lynching and the "half men" who practice it, Twain defers and postpones publication of his "acid article." This paper considers not only Twain's decision not to speak out against lynching, but also the critical pattern of ignoring this failure, of trying to imagine that Twain was not—as he himself declares--carrying the banner of cowardice.

Jack Ryan, *Gettysburg College*

jryan@gettysburg.edu

"The Campaign that Failed: Adapting Mark Twain and War"

(Session Six)

Mark Twain wrote "The Private History of a Campaign that Failed," published in 1885, from the distance of a reconstructed Southerner. Twain deliberately presents his military service with Tom Sawyer-like exuberance, recalling "a very jolly time ... full of horse-play and school-boy hilarity." In 1981, Peter Hunt released an adaptation of "The Private History" as part of a public television series based on stories or novels by Twain. Hunt's version pays fidelity

to the source material, except when Colonel Ralls (Pat Hingle), a Southern sympathizer full of zest for the lost cause, tries to aid the renegade Marion Rangers. Additionally, the innocent traveler wounded in Twain's story is killed in the television version. By expanding the source material in these ways, Hunt and screenwriter Philip Reisman complicate Twain's narrative and come closer to how Twain honestly felt about war and its aftermath. This paper will examine these complications.

Alexis Schmidt, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*
alexiss7@illinois.edu

"Out of This World and Time": Energy Dreams and *A Connecticut Yankee*"
(Session Seven)

My paper takes up the electric, transportive story of time travel in *A Connecticut Yankee* to examine the relationship between the influence of the period's emerging ideas about energy, industry, technology, science, and modernity and the literature that explored them. In particular, my paper situates the novel within the turn-of-the-century popular literary tradition of socialist utopias like Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1887) and *Equality* (1897), Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), Howells's *A Traveler from Alturia* (1892-1893), and Gilman's *Moving the Mountain* (1911), *Herland* (1915), and *With Her in Ourland* (1916), and more broadly, alongside the period's proto-dystopian and science fiction texts with overlapping genre conventions, like Wells's "The Chronic Argonauts" (1888) and *The Time Machine* (1895), London's *The Iron Heel* (1908) and *The Star Rover* (1915).

I take up these texts as my "archive of energy dreams of the past," following Elizabeth Carolyn Miller's example in *Extraction Ecologies* (2021). Miller reads British speculative fiction from *The Time Machine* to *The Hobbit* and considers how energy dreams can "orient readers toward a new future, one untethered to past cycles and drained by an extraction-based present" (80). The primary goal of energy dreams, then, is reorientation to the future and its structures and principles that could go beyond those of fossil capitalism. Energy dreams inspire the following questions for scholars who study U.S. literature of the turn of the century: What did writers influenced by the Second Industrial Revolution imagine the future to be? To what extent are visions of the future tethered to the past? How do visions imagine alternatives to the problems of fossil capitalism then and now? What did writers imagine as real and possible, versus dreamlike or utopian? Are these visions of the future better described as nightmares rather than dreams?

In response, my paper asks these questions of *A Connecticut Yankee*, as a case study of the energy dreams method. Novel-specific questions are: What is the significance of sending back in time a modern figure like Hank Morgan who is explicitly tethered to fossil capital cycles in the present? What do Hank's attempts to bring modern technology and industry and ways of life to King Arthur's ancient England reveal about fossil capitalism? What impact do the novel's humor and medievalisms have on what we conceive "energy dreams" to be?

Ultimately, my paper aims to provide energy studies better understanding of a useful analytical tool, energy dreams, and initial insights into how utopia and utopian thinking can function as energy dreams or energy dreaming. Finally, my paper also builds on past readings of the novel by Twain scholars, to see what Twain and Twain studies have to offer the texts and ideas at the heart of energy studies. In return, I hope my reading will defamiliarize a familiar novel for Twain scholars, and if successful, my talk might just be as electrifying and transportive as Hank Morgan's!

Matt Seybold, *Elmira College*
mseybold@elmira.edu

"'I am an Abolitionist - and something more': The Freelancing of James Redpath & Mark Twain"
(Session Two)

Mark Twain's original booking agent, James Redpath, was, as Twain himself described him, John Brown's "right hand man." Both Twain and Redpath came to understand, during the period from Bleeding Kansas to their collaboration on the "American Vandal" lecture tour, that the violence implied in being a "freelance" journalist was not metaphorical. The work of a "wildcat" or "roving" editor was dangerous. And freelance journalists were not merely victims of reactionary attacks and forceful suppression of First Amendment rights, they were often involved in the incitement of political violence for the express purpose of its mediation. In this paper, I will focus particularly on what Twain might have learned from Redpath's freelance work with the Pottawatomie Rifles, during his surveillance tour of Southern newspapers, as part of Sherman's March, and during the occupation of Charleston.

Seema Sharma, *University of Mumbai*
seema.sharma@jaihindcollege.edu.in

"Chromatic Instability and the Ethics of Complex Seeing in *Big Jim and the White Boy*"

David F. Walker and Marcus Kwame Anderson's recently published graphic novel *Big Jim and the White Boy* (2024), is an important addition to the ever-expanding list of adaptations of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This paper focuses on how this graphic adaptation situates illustrations and colors - ranging from black and white, to saturated palettes of red, blue and green, and to shades of Sepia - to map past and present versions of history that are at odds with one another. Unexpectedly shifting colors create non-linear accounts from the era of slavery to 1930s, 1980s, and 2020s, that force the reader into an active interpretive role. By bringing in references from historical records, journalistic writings, academia, and popular culture, the novel further destabilizes any "authorized discourse" of race and race relations in America. This discourse is further challenged by Jim who wrests narrative authority to deconstruct not only the stereotypical, but also the "sympathetic" portrayals of African-Americans in history and fiction.

I argue that this novel uses these multiple strategies to enable 'complex seeing' as opposed to earlier illustrated adaptations of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* not only in the U.S., but also in locations outside the U.S. (including India), that reduced the text to a tale of boyhood adventure.

Jeff Steinbrink, *Franklin & Marshall College*
jeff.steinbrink@fandm.edu

"Quantum Failure and Gunplay in *Huck Finn*"
(Session Four)

Four years ago in Elmira I talked about *Roughing It* and quantum mechanics, in particular quantum superposition, and before it was over I proposed to come back next time to preach quantum entanglement, a concept so odd that Einstein himself called it "spooky action at a distance."

Well, here we are, four years later, and don't think I haven't tried. But the truth is, there's not much about quantum entanglement that seems to me to apply plausibly to Mark Twain. In a nutshell, entanglement involves two quantum particles being connected so profoundly that a change in one is immediately mirrored by a change in the other—and this is somehow true whether the particles are separated by a centimeter or a solar system.

That's a remarkable phenomenon, no doubt, and one of the unsettling surprises brought to us by the development of twentieth-century quantum mechanics, but it hasn't opened a correspondingly surprising window for me as a reader. What it has done, in its insistence on immediacy, is to get me thinking about the quickest things that happen in, for instance, *Huck Finn*, and, consequently, to pay attention to the gunplay that transpires there and the bullets that fly.

So in this talk I propose to carry on about four particular bullets, from all those fired off in the book. And while they might not behave instantaneously or span galaxies, they do profoundly affect the direction of the narrative, as I suppose bullets often will. Beyond that, they demonstrate an aim on Mark Twain's part every bit as sharp and deliberate as that of Cooper's Leatherstocking.

Three of these bullets are lethal. They kill Huck's almost-friend Buck Grangerford, Colonel Sherburn's tormentor Boggs and, although we're not there to bear witness, Pap Finn. The fourth catches Tom Sawyer toward the end of *The Evasion* and hardly dampens his spirits, much as many readers wish it would. Only in the case of Boggs do we know who pulls the trigger, although of course it's Mark Twain who's ultimately responsible for all the shooting. I would argue that he carefully primes and loads at least three of these bullets and that all four deepen and complicate the story in their own way.

Quantum entanglement, meanwhile, is by its nature relentlessly random. It cannot be directed or caused or influenced. This is one of the reasons it can't be used as a means of instantaneous communication across vast distances. To try to affect or even observe one of the paired particles—to give it purpose—is, as physicists say, to collapse the entanglement and break the pairing. Bullets, on the other hand, and often ironically, can establish or intensify a bond. They tether the Grangerfords to the Shepherdsons, and they will forever join Sherburn to Boggs in the minds of the community he despises.

So this talk is likely to deliver when it comes to entanglements, even spooky ones, just not entanglements on a quantum scale.

Todd Nathan Thompson, *Indiana University of Pennsylvania*
thompson@iup.edu

“‘Siberia,’ Rechristened ‘Future’: Imaginative Mapping Meets Imperial Anxiety in Gilded Age Humor”
(Session Seven)

In the article that grew out of my talk for the 2024 symposium on the Gilded Age of Humor, I briefly mentioned that eternal optimist and opportunist, Colonel Sellers, as depicted in Mark Twain's *The American Claimant* (1892). In the article I made a passing claim about Sellers's dreams of purchasing Siberia and starting a new, more enlightened republic there as being a potential burlesque of U.S. Secretary of State William Seward's imperial yen during the early Reconstruction period (which Twain had earlier mocked in several newspaper articles in 1866-67).

Since then, I have developed research and teaching interests in what Martin Brückner has labeled the “cartographic turn” in American literary studies. This interest has led me to reconsider Sellers' rejiggered map of Siberia, on which he had written “FUTURE” over the label “SIBERIA” and added “in red ink” made-up cities such as “Libertyorloffskoizalinski,” and “Freedomolovnaivanovich.” Sellers' imaginative palimpsest atop his Siberia map prefigures differences between “charting” and “mapping” outlined by Denis Cosgrove and further developed by Edward Watts and Keri Holt in their 2015 collection *Mapping Region in Early American Writing*. For Cosgrove, and Watts and Holt, mapping is an imaginative and internal process of creating new spatial possibilities, whereas charting is “a process of defining space based on borders and closure” (Watts and Holt 1). Sellers is wholeheartedly a mapper.

Using Sellers' speculative map as a starting point, my talk will consider the deployment of maps and globes as a persistent trope in Gilded Age humor and satire, especially as it addressed American imperialism. Maps referenced in written humor and especially political cartoons vacillated between Sellers-esque optimism and Twainian cynicism about the possibilities and pitfalls of U.S. imperialism. Whether for or against imperialism, such humor does not merely figure maps as metonyms for the spaces and places they represented. Gilded Age humor also engages in "mapping" through a shared assumptions about the ease with which maps (and thus the territories and borders that they depict) can be redrawn, written over, ignored, or otherwise imaginatively reconceived for imperial ends.

Emily E. VanDette, *State University of New York, Fredonia*
vandette@fredonia.edu

"Feminist as F***: Satirical Responses to Misogyny in the Public Sphere"

The title of my talk uses an expression of radicalism that is featured in, among other places, a cross-stitch pattern that circulated online in the immediate aftermath of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. Participating in a conventionally feminine activity, cross-stitchers turned the expectations for female silence and passivity on its head, stitching powerful, angry, and often hilarious messages in response to a cultural backlash against feminist progress and women's rights. In doing so, they continued a longstanding relationship between humor, rage, and feminism, a tradition which was explored in the October 2024 special issue of *Studies in American Humor* on "Feminist Humor and the Future of Fumerism."

Modern day "fumerists" in the public sphere continue the legacy of famous feminist satirists Fanny Fern (1811-1872) and Alice Duer Miller (1874-1942), who used their newspaper columns as platforms to turn the tables on gender roles and expose the absurdity and injustice of patriarchal double standards. In addition to examples of feminists stitching Juvenalian messaging into textiles, I will share other prominent, web-based sites of feminist satire, including the TikTok series "Roe v. Bros," which adopts an investigative reporting style to test voting men's knowledge about women's bodies and health issues and the blog Reductress, which parodies the resurgence of retrograde gender roles and ideals, including the performative femininity and submissiveness popularized by the "trad wife" movement.

Hillary Warolin, *Cornell University*
hmw53@cornell.edu

"Transmediality and Adaptation: *Moby-Dick* and *Tom Sawyer*"
(Session One)

Part of a larger project exploring the relationship between the nineteenth-century American novels and their creative afterlives, this paper offers a comparative analysis of both the role of illustration and its incorporation into the respective storyworlds of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*. What emerges as stories migrate across media and mutate through adaptation? Turning to the transmedial aspects of narrative representation, this paper argues that illustration does not merely supplement these novels' storyworlds but actively reshapes them, installing, foregrounding, and destabilizing particular readings that later adaptations inherit and extend. Reading illustrated editions of *Moby-Dick* and *Tom Sawyer* in view of their subsequent adaptations (film, comics, etc) I trace how visual paratexts condition the interpretive horizons through which these novels are transmitted and transformed. To begin, this paper draws on and defines key concepts — transmediality, storyworlds, and remediation — as they apply to each text, using *Moby-Dick* and *Tom Sawyer* to work through what these terms mean in practice rather than treating them as fixed theoretical shorthand. Pairing *Moby-Dick* and *Tom Sawyer* is not incidental: both novels share roots in the boy's adventure story, a genre already primed for the kind of serialized, illustrated, and cross-media proliferation that would define their respective afterlives. Yet the two texts anticipate and accommodate adaptation in strikingly different ways, and it is in this contrast, between a novel that resists visual and narrative containment and one that seems to invite it, that the comparative value of this pairing lies.

“‘The insanest of all recreations’: Mark Twain as an After-Dinner Speaker”
(Session Twelve)

I have spent the last year of sabbatical reading, writing, and thinking about Mark Twain’s after-dinner speeches, and I would like to share some of the results of this effort at the 2026 State of Mark Twain Studies Conference in Elmira. Eminent Twain scholars, including Paul Fatout, Gary Scharnhorst, and Barbara Schmidt, have over many years curated a significant archive of Twain’s after-dinner speeches, some of which are extremely well known. His celebration of General Grant in “The Babies,” the infamous Whittier birthday dinner speech of 1877, and “The Weather in New England” are all anthology standards, as they should be, and yet the other 200 or so extant speeches are not so well known, even to serious Twain scholars. Lou Budd’s *Mark Twain: The Making of His Public Personality* is the only extended work of scholarship that considers the after-dinner archive in detail, and even Budd’s treatment—effective as it is for his purposes—is highly selective. The larger project I am working on, and from which this paper is drawn, offers a cultural history of after-dinner oratory in late nineteenth-century America, with Mark Twain’s accomplishments as a banquet speaker as its focus.

The question I propose to address in Elmira is: why did Twain devote so much effort over more than 50 years to banquet oratory, which he called “the insanest of all recreations”? Of all American authors, he was perhaps the most famously adamant that writers should be paid for their work, as he demonstrated by lobbying for international copyright legislation and in his contentious interactions with a long list of publishers throughout his literary career. Why would a writer so fixated on the transactional nature of literary work devote so much time, energy, and artistry to a performance medium whose only compensation lay in social advancement and publicity? It is possible that Twain so relished the spotlight and the company of distinguished statesmen, foreign dignitaries, generals, ex-presidents, plutocrats, and celebrities that he felt adequately compensated in the era’s new currency of media prestige for his always-newsworthy participation on the banquet circuit. While there must be an element of truth to this explanation, I will suggest that it does not go far enough to explain the persistence of his obsession. Something about after-dinner performance spoke to his imagination in ways we have yet to fully comprehend. I will venture an explanation.

ROUNDTABLES

Roundtable #1: "Interrogating 'American Humor'"

(Session Four)

Organized by the American Humor Studies Association

Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall

Bruce Michelson, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Moderator

James Caron, "The Obfuscation of Walter Blair's title, *Native American Humor*"

Walter Blair's 1937 book is rightly considered to be one of the founding documents of the field of American humor studies. Blair's title draws a magic circle around his selection of a certain kind of comic writing to celebrate them as a genuine index to something called *an American Identity*. He also creates a genealogy of comic writers that culminate in one writer that everyone in 1937 would agree is the epitome of that identity, Sam Clemens, aka Mark Twain. Blair's book obscures the fact that the historical reality for the literary marketplace of the antebellum United States showcased much more, including a transnational aspect.

Judith Yaross Lee, "Understanding the National in American Humor"

Walter Blair's exclusion of indigenous, African American, and ethnic contributions to *Native American Humor* (1960) deserves contemporary scorn, even considering its origins in 1937, before American literature and popular culture had stature as fields. After all, Constance Rourke ranked the African American Minstrel with the Yankee in 1931. But an 1838 British book review inspiring Blair's book remains relevant today: "Humour is national when it is impregnated with the convictions, customs, and associations of a nation. . . . The humour of a people is their institutions, laws, customs, manners, habits, characters, convictions,— their scenery, whether of the sea, the city, or the hills, — expressed in the language of the ludicrous." [i] I would go further, and reverse the standpoint. Ignore the national in humor studies, and you miss how the economic and legal frameworks of any locale—from the comedy club's two- drink minimum to the First Amendment—shape the production and circulation of American comic performances and artifacts in all media, from speech and writing to music and art. Ignore the national in the study of humor, and you miss how that content likewise reflects the social, political, linguistic, artistic, and intellectual history behind those legal frameworks. That history begat regional and demographic diversity from European imperialism, African enslavement, and other migrations that further inflect what people find funny—variety that calls for attention to the singular, ethnic, and local as well as the dominant and national. My work on American humor and "matters of empire" treats these factors as foundational and replaces Blair's categories with broad sets of unequal transnational political relationships (imperialist, post-colonial, and neo- imperialist/colonial) that have shaped the formal components (plot, character, incident), rhetorical conventions, and comic techniques—the constituent matters of empire—underlying comic traditions in the United States across time, place, demographics, and media.

[i] H. W., pseud for John Robertson, "Yankeeana: Slick, Crockett, Downing, Etc," *The London and Westminster Review* 32, no. 1 (December 1838): 138–39.

Todd Nathan Thompson, "Hemispheric Humor Studies"

More succinctly than any academic thesis that I could articulate, the end of Bad Bunny's 2026 Super Bowl halftime performance encapsulates my sense of what "American" in "American humor studies" should mean. Holding a football inscribed with the words "Together, we are America" (see fig. 1), Bad Bunny shouted out a list of countries and regions in North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. In short, he urged a huge, mainstream TV audience to reconsider "America" as a hemispheric concept rather than a synonym for the U.S.

As a humor scholar whose day job is early American literature, I share this conception. My scholarly sense of “America” has been profoundly shaped by the hemispheric turn in literary and cultural studies, which eschews a teleological narrative of US nation-building and focuses on boundaries and borders, transnational interstices that show “America” to be a rhetorical creation, a hemispheric constellation of overlapping and competing cultural relations. This view of nation as a shifting historical construction rather than an incarnation of some fictional “essence” shifts critical focus from national difference or US exceptionalism to “*hubs and borders*” that “link distant parts of the Americas to one another and other parts of the world” (Fox 643).

As a humor scholar, this means moving away from the foundational, nation-building myths that originally animated the field of humor studies in favor of transnational, sometimes comparativist approaches. If we only engage with texts written in English, we are retelling a false version of history that elides and excludes Latinidad. In my own work this means working hard to give voice to comic counternarratives—including and Spanish-language satire periodicals—from the peoples impacted by US imperialism in order to foster productive, comic conversations of hemispheric scope, even if that means taking time to do translation.

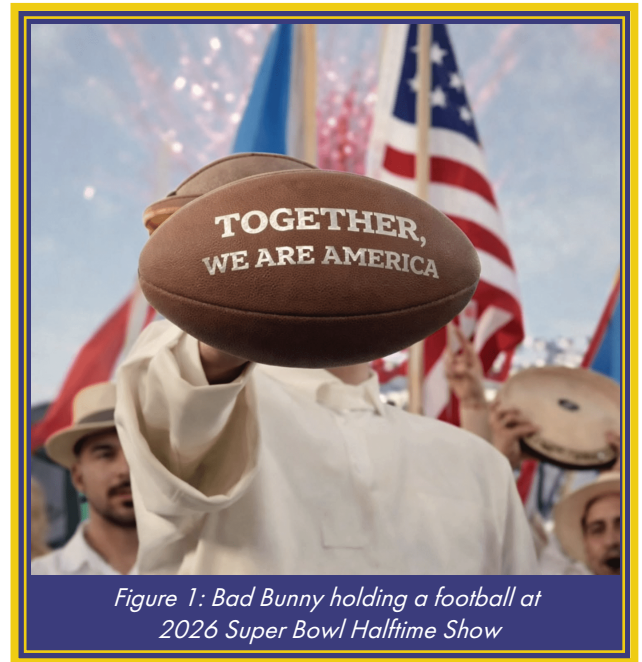


Figure 1: Bad Bunny holding a football at 2026 Super Bowl Halftime Show

Roundtable #2: “Man/Myth/Legend: Working Towards an Audience-Centered Mark Twain House & Museum”

(Session Five)

Organized by the Mark Twain House & Museum (Hartford, CT)
Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

Rebecca Floyd, Director of Interpretation at The Mark Twain House & Museum
 Erin Bartram, Associate Director for Education at The Mark Twain House & Museum
 Jeffrey Nichols, Executive Director at The Mark Twain House & Museum

The Mark Twain House & Museum is in the middle of a three-year Museums Empowered grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Our goal has not been to determine “how to talk about Mark Twain better,” but instead to develop the skills to ensure we can help our audiences find connection and inspiration in his life and work wherever they’re coming from. From our own surveys and interactions, we know that most of our visitation is not currently driven by pre-existing interests in Twain and his writing—but it also never has been. From our perspective as a historic house museum, there never was a “golden age of Twain” when most visitors came to the museum with a pre-existing appreciation for Mark Twain and his writing, let alone Sam Clemens and his family, the people who lived in the house we interpret. As a result, we’ve long known that cultivating interest and engagement in his life and legacy cannot be accomplished by simply deciding, as an institution, what is interesting and engaging and then communicating that to the public. This grant has allowed us to conduct focus groups and intercept surveys to develop a more granular understanding of the people who come—and don’t come—to our museum, and to learn new skills for historical interpretation, engaging in difficult conversations, creating new mechanisms for ongoing evaluation, and prototyping new tours and exhibits.

In this roundtable, we’ll talk a bit about what we’ve learned about our audiences, including the ways their perceptions of Mark Twain—the man, the myth, the legend—shape the work we are doing and the work we want to do in the future. We’ll also talk about what audience-centered work actually means in the museum world, how we’ve

built capacity and developed new skills across the museum's staff during this process, and how it's transforming the way we work with the public. Finally, we'll discuss what this might mean for the future of The Mark Twain House & Museum and consider how it might also be useful for the broader world of Twain Studies.

Roundtable #3: "Women Writers in the Time of Mark Twain"

(Session Nine)

Organized by the Mark Twain Circle of America
Gannett-Tripp Library, Tripp Lecture Hall
Judith Yaross Lee, Ohio University, Moderator

Within the context of "under-studied, overlooked, and persistent critical and biographical questions in Mark Twain scholarship," this roundtable discussion will concentrate on American women writers in Twain's time. We seek to broaden our understanding and appreciation for the larger context within which Twain wrote and published.

James Caron, *University of Hawai'i at Manoa*
Susan K. Harris, *University of Kansas*
Linda A. Morris, *University of California, Davis*
Miki Pfeffer, *Independent Scholar*
Barbara Snedecor, *Elmira College*

Sara Willis Parton (Fanny Fern)
Kate Wiggin
Frances Whitcher (The Widow Bedott)
Grace King
Women Writers identified by Olivia Clemens

Roundtable #4: "Mark Twain Day by Day: A Digital Scholarly Resource for the Next Generation"

(Session Ten)

Meier Hall, Stephans Lounge

Gillian MacDonald, Director of the Lab for the Education and Advancement of Digital Research,
Michigan State University
Stephen Rachman, Associate Professor of English, *Michigan State University*
Dean Rehberger, Public Projects Coordinator of MATRIX, *Michigan State University*
Alicia Sheill, Head of Operations of MATRIX, *Michigan State University*

This presentation explores the evolving digital future of the *Mark Twain Day by Day* project, a scholarly chronology by David Fears that documents the life, work, and world of Mark Twain. The presenters detail the intellectual history and scholarly significance of *Day by Day*, emphasizing its function as an infrastructure for research in biography, textual studies, and reception history, rather than merely a reference tool. The session describes the transition to a redesigned web platform that offers enhanced navigation, cross-referenced entities, integration with archival and digital resources, and improved accessibility and editorial workflows. Demonstrations of visualizations and network graphs illustrate how digital methods can uncover patterns and relationships within Twain's social, literary, and historical contexts. The concluding discussion addresses community collaboration, future development priorities, and the need to sustain *Day by Day* as a dynamic, participatory resource for Twain scholars and researchers.

Roundtable #5: Updates from the Four Major Mark Twain Sites

(Session Thirteen)

Campus Center, Tiff Lounge

While they may have different primary audiences and missions, Berkeley, Elmira, Hannibal, and Hartford comprise the four major organizations dedicated to presenting and promoting Mark Twain and his literature. This roundtable gives conference attendees the opportunity to hear updates from each the directors of each location, detailing past challenges and successes, current assessments, and future goals and aspirations.

Kerry Driscoll, Associate Editor at the Mark Twain Papers and Project (Berkeley, CA)

Joseph Lemak, Director of the Center for Mark Twain Studies (Elmira, NY)

Jeffrey Nichols, Executive Director of the Mark Twain House and Museum (Hartford, CT)

Megan Rapp, Executive Director of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum (Hannibal, MO)

The Many Women of Mark Twain's Life and Work

Roundtable Introduction by Judith Yaross Lee

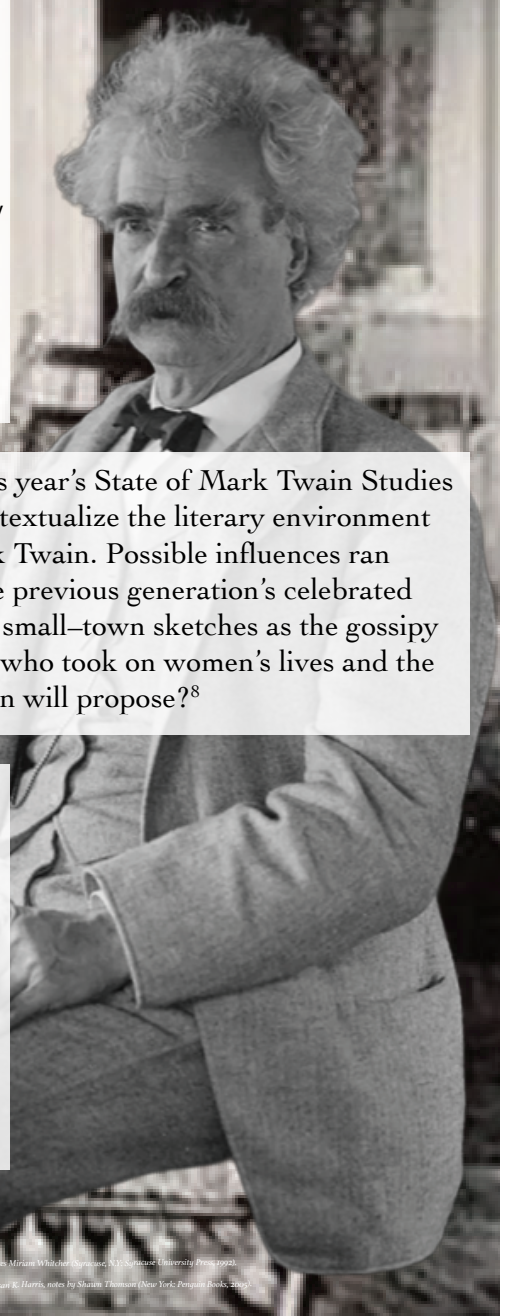
Across his life, **Samuel Clemens** read as widely and deeply as he socialized, and women occupied important roles in both activities. His California friends in the 1860s included the poet and journalist **Ina Coolbrith (1841–1928)**, whose poetry appeared in the same first four numbers of the *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* (1868), launched by their mutual friend Bret Harte, that also contained Mark Twain's sketches from the forthcoming *Innocents Abroad* (1869)¹.

The 1867 international trip to Europe and the Holy Land detailed in that book introduced him to **Mary Mason Fairbanks (1828–1898)**, herself an occasional travel writer, who remained his lifelong friend and correspondent.² In the early '70s he keenly felt the competition of writer **Kate Fields (1838–1896)** on lecture circuit, both in the US and England, and as a fellow correspondent from Britain to New York newspapers—rivalry leading to mutual antipathy beneath a public veneer of collegiality, according to Gary Scharnhorst, despite her brief portrayal of Laura Hawkins in a stage adaptation of *The Gilded Age* and efforts to capture his regard.³ From 1874–91, when living in Hartford's Nook Farm community, Clemens lived next door to **Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896)**; his family so valued her books that Clara and Clemens retained the volumes, some inscribed by the author and others to one another, all their lives.⁴

Across those Hartford years, as Kerry Driscoll has detailed in unpublished talks (2017), Clemens regularly presented lectures to the young women members of the local Saturday Morning Club, perhaps most notably “On the Decay of the Art of Lying” (1880).⁵ He kept his critiques of these and other women literary figures largely to himself and intimates. But one became infamous: Mark Twain ridiculed the poetry of **Julia A. Moore (1847–1920)**, whose *Sentimental Song Book* echoes in Emmeline Grangerford's doggerel, in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).⁶ Many other women also figure in a full account of Mark Twain's possible debts and contemporary literary contexts, as Laura Skandera-Trombly has shown,⁷ and Alan Gribben's account of Clemens's reading in volume 2 of *Mark Twain's Literary Resources* (2022) notes many of his responses to the women's writing on his shelves.

The roundtable discussion and accompanying exhibit at this year's State of Mark Twain Studies conference highlights writing by contemporary women to contextualize the literary environment of Clemens's day and suggest its relations to his work as Mark Twain. Possible influences ran in both directions. How much might he have gleaned from the previous generation's celebrated humorists **Frances Whitcher (1811–1852)**, who wrote satiric small-town sketches as the gossiping Widow “Silly” Bedott, and **Sara Willis Parton (1811–1872)**, who took on women's lives and the urban scene as Fanny Fern, as Linda Morris and James Caron will propose?⁸

And what lessons might his work have imparted to the younger novelists **Kate Douglas Wiggin (1856–1923)**, the witty author of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* who collaborated with Clemens on copyright reform,⁹ and **Grace King (1852–1932)**, the novelist and historian who became Olivia Clemens's intimate correspondent from the late 1880s, as Susan Harris and Miki Pfeffer will offer?¹⁰ And how did Livy, who documented her own extensive reading in letters to Sam and others, introduce other books for him to read and absorb, as Barbara Snedecor will observe? The Mark Twain Circle invites discussion of these and related topics at the roundtable session.



¹ See, for example, Ina Coolbrith, “Clemens,” and Sam L. Clemens (Mark Twain), “By Rail through France,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, 1, no. 1 (July 1868): 27–30–21.

² Mark Twain, *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, ed. Diana Weller, Huntington Library Publications (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1949).

³ Gary Scharnhorst, “He is a Literary Bull and Johnson is a Gentleman,” *The Visual Relations of Kate Fields and Samuel Clemens*, *Esq.* 18, no. 2 (November 2002): 193–202. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jes.1001.0014>.

⁴ Alan Gribben, *Mark Twain's Literary Resources: A Biographical List of His Library and Reading* (Morgantown, MD: New South Books, 2019): 202–2, 210–18.

⁵ Kerry Driscoll, “My Love and Parton's Bedott,” *Mark Twain and the Saturday Morning Club of Hartford*, lecture, Mark Twain House and Museum, Hartford, CT, 25 October 2017.

⁶ Julia A. Moore, *The Sentimental Song Book* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: C.M. Loomis, 1870).

⁷ Laura E. Skandera-Trombly, *Mark Twain in the Company of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁸ James E. Caron, *The Modern Innocent: The Victorian Satire of Fanny Fern*, *Pennsylvania Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Linda Morris, *Women's Humor in the Age of Gilded: The Life and Works of Frances Miriam Whitcher* (Saratoga, NY: Scarecrow University Press, 1992).

⁹ Gribben, *MTL: A New Edition*, ed. Barbara Snedecor, *Revised and Revisited: Mark Twain's View of Women's Writing*, *Mark Twain Journal* 45 (Spring 2007): 17–21.

¹⁰ Miki Pfeffer, *A New Edition: Susan Harris's Court Letters from Olivia King's New England* (Saratoga, CA: Scarecrow University Press, 2019); Kate Douglas Wiggin, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, edited with an introduction by Stuart K. Harris, notes by Sharon Thomson (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

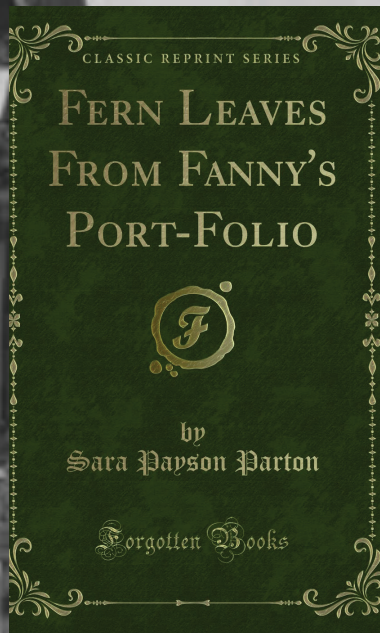
Sara Willis Parton (Fanny Fern)

Presented by Jim Caron

Sara Willis Parton (1811-1872) and her literary alter ego, Fanny Fern, occupy a significant role in the antebellum literary marketplace dominated by women authors of sentimental fiction.

She achieved her fame in the early 1850s, writing columns for Boston and New York periodicals before collecting them into two best-selling anthologies, *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio* (1853), and *Fern Leaves, Second Series* (1854). When the editor of the *New York Ledger* hired her to write weekly columns at \$100 each, Parton as Fanny Fern became the highest-paid US columnist. She also wrote two novels, *Ruth Hall* (1855) and *Rose Clark* (1856).

Though one might speculate that Sam Clemens read some of Parton's well-known Fanny Fern columns, there are no obvious biographical links between Mark Twain and Fanny Fern. There are, however, stylistic similarities in their writing: a use of personal history to create comic scenarios, a willingness to be aggressive in their satiric efforts that exploited comic violence, and a fearlessness about ridiculing social norms concerning respectability, gender expectations, and hypocrisy in all its forms.



"I am naturally a happy, bright, energetic, warm-hearted, chain-lightning, impulsive woman— born after stages were exploded, and in the days of railroads and steam-engines. I've the most capacious heart that ever thumped against a silken boddice; can, hate like Lucifer, and love in proportion, and be eternally grateful to any one who is kind to me."

—*Boston Olive Branch*, November 22, 1851, p3.

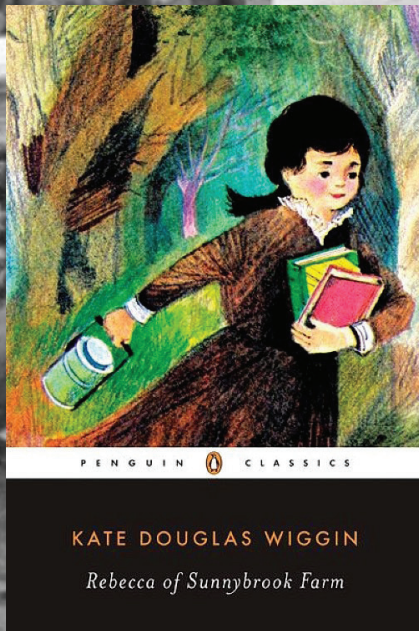
Kate Wiggin

Presented by Susan Harris

Kate Douglas Wiggin (1856-1923), born Kate Douglas Smith, turned to writing to support her family after the death of her stepfather. She also became involved in the kindergarten movement, an American offshoot of progressive German educational experiments. Wiggin established the first free kindergarten west of the Rockies. She wrote her first novels, *The Story of Patsy* (1883) and *The Birds' Christmas Carol* (1887), to raise money for the school.

In 1881, Wiggin married Samuel Bradley Wiggin. Although this constituted the end of her active teaching, she remained committed to educational issues her entire life as a lecturer, writer, and editor. Samuel Wiggin died suddenly in 1889. In 1895, she married George Riggs, with whom she regularly traveled to Europe. These sojourns inspired subsequent works, the most famous being the *Penelope* series.

Wiggin established firm friendships with literary notables, including Mark Twain. She wrote prolifically, producing educational manuals, children's fiction, and poetry, novels, and short stories for adults. The work for which she is best known, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, was published in 1903. She died in England in 1923 shortly after completing her autobiography, *My Garden of Memories*.



"There is no substitute for a genuine, free, serene, healthy, bread-and-butter childhood. A fine manhood or womanhood can be built on no other foundation; and yet our American homes are so often filled with hurry and worry, our manner of living is so keyed to concert pitch, our plan of existence so complicated, that we drag the babies along in our wake, and force them to our artificial standards, forgetting that "sweet flowers are slow, and weeds make haste."

-*Children's Rights, A Book of Nursery Logic*, 1892, p 11

Frances Whitcher (The Widow Bedott)

Presented by Linda Morris

Frances Miriam Berry Whitcher (1811-1852) was born in Whitesboro, New York. Using a pseudonym, she began publishing satirical sketches in *Neal's Saturday Gazette*, where she honed the vernacular voice of the social-climbing and husband-hunting "Widow Bedott". In 1847, she married William Whitcher and moved to Elmira when he was appointed minister of the Trinity Episcopal Church. She continued to anonymously publish sketches lampooning the social tendencies of the townspeople.

In late 1848, her anonymity was shattered when residents of Elmira recognized themselves and their neighbors in her most popular sketch. She moved back to Whitesboro shortly after to escape the scandal, while her husband took jobs around the state. In 1852, she died of tuberculosis.

Her fame only increased after her death. Thirty of her stories were published posthumously under the title *The Widow Bedott Papers* (1855), which sold over 100,000 copies. Later, more stories were published as *Widow Spriggins, Mary Elmer, and Other Sketches* (1867). A stage adaptation of *The Widow Bedott*, in which the titular role was played by a male actor, was also immensely successful. Mark Twain was a fan of Whitcher's writings and considered her to be the first American woman humorist.



"She sot up for a lady. She was always a coarse, boisterous, high-tempered critter, and when her husband grow'd rich, she grow'd pompous and overbearin'. She made up her mind she'd rule the roast, no matter what it cost—she'd be the first in Scrabble Hill. She know'd she wa'n't a lady by natur nor by eddication, but she thought mabby other folks would be fools enough to think she was if she made a great parade. So she begun by dressin' more, and givin' bigger parties than any body else...If ther's any body that won't knuckle tew her, I tell ye thy have to take it about east. She abuses 'em to their faces and slanders 'em to their backs."

—"Aunt Magwire's Account of the Sewing Society Continued", in *Godley's Lady's Book*, Vol 38 Issue 1, 1849, p 25

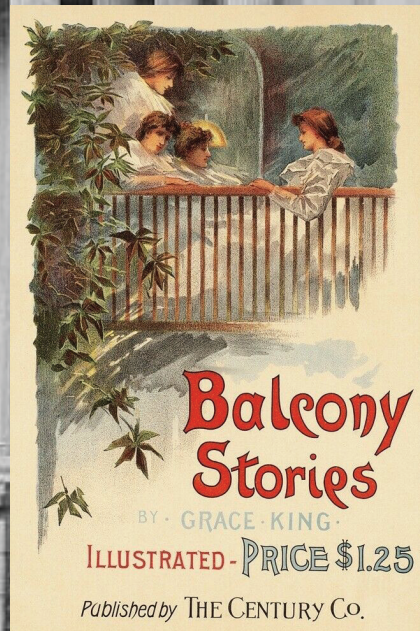
Grace King

Presented by Miki Pfeffer

Fledgling writer **Grace King (1852-1932)** had no reason to expect to become intimate with Sam and Olivia Clemens and their daughters, but in June of 1887, she did. Her host that summer was Twain's neighbor, Charles Dudley Warner. He met her in her hometown of New Orleans during the World's Fair of 1884, encouraged her, and placed her first stories.

In Hartford, she had daily contact with the Clemens family, who invited her back for a month with them in 1888. The friends kept regular correspondence, and when Grace traveled through Europe in 1892, she spent another month with them at Villa Viviani near Florence.

She was always mindful of Twain's fame, but was more captivated by Sam Clemens, the husband, father, and friend. She wrote first as a local colorist, then as historian, biographer, and genealogist. Her best-known works are *Balcony Stories* (1892) and *New Orleans: the Place and the People* (1895).



“Experiences, reminiscences, episodes, picked up as only women know how to pick them up from other women's lives,—or other women's destinies, as they prefer to call them,—and told as only women know how to relate them; what God has done or is doing with some other woman whom they have known— [...] that is what interests the women who sit of summer nights on balconies.”

—*Balcony Stories*, 1892, p 1

A Sampling of Books by Women Authors Read by Olivia Louise Langdon Clemens

Presented by Barbara Snedecor

In her letters to friends and family, **Olivia Langdon Clemens** mentions books she is reading written by the women authors of her day.

Olivia's reading habits were timely. She was aware of contemporary women authors and enjoyed keeping current on their publications. Her readings were representative of what female authors were producing in the mid-to-late nineteenth century—historical fiction and the beginnings of feminist fiction, and also a memoir and letter collection by the daughter of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Olivia was, like her husband, a lifelong reader, and her letters affirm her interest in contemporary women authors.

"My darling Alice

Allie and Clara Spaulding have gone to Waverly, they went on Wednesday last and expect to return next Thursday. We have finished "Frederick the Great and his Court" it is extremely interesting—have you commenced it yet? We became very much excited over some portions of it—" —Letter to Alice B. Hooker about Luise Mühlbach's writing, 26 May 1867



"Tell me Grace dear what you are writing and what you are reading. I hated to have the Balcony Stories end. What a haunting picture of a self seeking charming old lady you gave us in a Delicate Affair" —Letter to Grace E. King, 5 November 1893

"Mother darling

I do so much want to see you here, the house looks prettier and prettier all the time I think—I do wish I could go in and read to you—I am reading some short stories now of Miss Phelps they are sensational as all her stories are but I think more interesting than any thing else of hers that I have read" —Letter to Olivia Lewis Langdon about Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward's writing, 30 November 1879

ODDS AND ENDS

If you have any questions or are experiencing an unexpected situation and need help, contact the Elmira 2026 Registration Table, located at the Gannett-Tripp Library Main Desk. The Registration Table will be staffed during the following dates and times:

Wednesday, July 29	8:00am - 8:00pm
Thursday, July 30	8:00am - 8:00pm
Friday, July 31	8:00am - 8:00pm
Saturday, August 1	8:00am - 4:00pm
Sunday, August 2	8:00am - 12:00pm

Archives - The Elmira College Mark Twain Archives will be open during the conference by appointment only. Attendees should have a legitimate research inquiry and have accessed the finding aids prior to arriving to Elmira. If you need to schedule an appointment, contact Katy Galvin, Collections Manager, at kgalvin@elmira.edu.

Books for Purchase - A wide variety of new and gently used books focusing on Mark Twain Studies are available for purchase in the Gannett-Tripp Library. Mark Twain Studies reference sets are also available at a special discounted price. See the Registration Table for more information.

Campus Safety - The Office of Campus Safety is available throughout your entire stay on campus. Campus Safety is located in Cory House (710 Park Place, Elmira, NY). Campus Safety can be reached at (607) 735-1777, or at security@elmira.edu.

Food, Special Requests - If you have any special food requirements, contact Director Joseph Lemak (jlemak@elmira.edu) as soon as possible. Every effort will be made to accommodate your request.

Food on Wednesday, July 29 - The conference will be serving breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks starting Thursday morning and ending Saturday night. For conference attendees arriving Wednesday, here is a list of recommended eating spots:

Easy Walking Distance:

Chiltepin Mexican Restaurant (456 W. Washington Ave., Elmira)
Pietro and Sons Italian Restaurant (400 W. Washington Ave., Elmira)
7-11 Convenience Store (865 Davis St., Elmira) **Open 24 Hours**

Easy Driving Distance:

Centertown Social (8 Clemens Square, Elmira)
Ill Eagle Tapouse (200 East Church St., Elmira)
Rye Bar and Restaurant (365 Davis St., Elmira)
Siam Elephants Thai Restaurant (200 West Water St., Elmira) **Good vegan options**
Patrick's Bar (303 College Ave., Elmira)
Wegmans Grocery Store (1100 Clemens Center Parkway, Elmira)

Information Technology - If you have any tech problems, feel free to stop by the IT Help Desk, located in the basement of the Gannett-Tripp Library, next to the Tripp Lecture Hall. Hours of operation are Thursday (9:00am - 4:00pm) and Friday (9:00am - 12:30pm).

Linens and Towels - Fresh linens, towels, and pillows will be included in all Meier Hall campus lodging.

Mark Twain Exhibit - The Exhibit on the second floor of the Gannett-Tripp Library focuses on Mark Twain's legacy in Elmira, as well as the author's and the Langdon family's special relationship with Elmira College. A current temporary exhibit highlights caricatures of Mark Twain from Louis J. Budd's expansive collection.

Mark Twain Study - The iconic Study, once located at Quarry Farm, now on the Elmira College campus, will be open and staffed by a Mark Twain Ambassador on Thursday and Friday from 9:30am to 3:30pm.

Parking - Conference attendees should park in the Meier Hall parking lot, adjacent to Meier Hall.

PowerPoint, Google, and Keynote Slides - Each lecture space will have the capability of supporting PowerPoint and Google Slide presentations. All presenters wishing to show images should email their presentations to Director Joseph Lemak (jlemak@elmira.edu) before they arrive to Elmira. It is also recommended that presenters bring a backup of their presentation in case of an emergency. Please note that Keynote presentations will not be accessible. Make sure to convert all Keynote presentations to PowerPoint before you arrive to Elmira.

Quarry Farm Shuttle - Conference attendees wishing to attend the Saturday evening picnic are strongly encouraged to take the shuttle located in the Meier Hall parking lot. Not only is the preservation of Quarry Farm paramount, but parking is limited. Pick-up will start promptly at 4:15pm and run until 9:15pm.

Registration Check-In - Registration check-in will be Wednesday, July 29 (8:00am to 8:00pm), Thursday, July 30 (8:00am to 8:00pm), and Friday, July 31 (8:00am to 12:30pm). The Check-in Table is located at the Gannett-Tripp Library Main Desk. Attendees lodging in Meier Hall will receive a key to their room at this time.

Registration Check-In (Outside of Designated Hours) - Conference attendees lodging in Meier Hall and arriving outside the designated registration hours can pick up their room keys at the Office of Campus Safety, located in the Cory House (710 Park Place, Elmira, NY). It is strongly recommended that you notify Director Joseph Lemak (jlemak@elmira.edu) if you plan to arrive outside of designated registration hours.

Registration Check-Out - For those attendees lodging in Meier Hall, please return your room key at the Gannett-Tripp Library Main Desk by 12:00pm on Sunday, August 2.

Walking/Running Map - The Clemens/Langdon funerary plot is located 1.2 miles (25-minute walk) away from the Elmira College campus in Woodlawn Cemetery. A map can be found on the next page.

Wi-Fi Access - Log on to "EC_Guest." Follow all directed prompts. If problems continue to persist, consult the IT Help Desk. Please see the "Information Technology" section above.

NOTES

NOTES

NOTES

NOTES

13th Quarry Farm Symposium

October 2026



Black Childhood and Children's Literature in the 19th Century





Quarry Farm Fellowships are open to any scholar working in any field related to Mark Twain Studies at any career stage. This is a unique opportunity to work on academic or creative projects at Quarry Farm, Mark Twain's summer retreat where he penned *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and other iconic works.

Eleven Quarry Farm Fellowships will be offered in 2027:

- Each fellowship comes with a two-week residency at the historic Quarry Farm and a \$1000 honorarium.
- At least three fellowships will be reserved for graduate students, contingent faculty, independent scholars, and faculty three or fewer years removed from completion of their Ph.D.
- At least one fellowship will be reserved for creative writers.
- At least one fellowship will be reserved for creative visual artists and musicians.



Applications are due November 30, 2026
Visit: www.marktwainstudies.com for more information.



(607) 735-1785
twaincenter@elmira.edu
www.marktwainstudies.com