

## NEW RESOURCES FOR AMERICAN STUDIES II

### THE MARK TWAIN MEMORIAL IN HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

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A house is a document, and Mark Twain's Hartford home is richly instructive. Now restored by a group of local citizens as The Mark Twain Library & Memorial Commission, the many-turreted and multi-patterned brick mansion has become a publicly available symbol. Hartford was at the green end of a road from Hannibal. The sentimentalist may be content to stay in Missouri for the reflection of one of America's greatest writers; the student will also visit Connecticut.

The house stands as more than Mark Twain's residence from 1874 for two decades, the period of his principal literary achievements. Van Wyck Brooks in The Ordeal of Mark Twain wrote of these Hartford years in terms of what he called "capitulation." Mark Twain, as everybody's neighbor, was not, Brooks said, "simply living the bourgeois life now; he had adopted all the values and ideals of the bourgeoisie. Success, prestige, wealth had become his gods and the tribal customs of a nation of traders identical in his mind with the laws of the universe." On this basis his nineteen-room Hartford home, whose cost was \$131,000, can be regarded as a graphic expression of the "tribal customs of a nation," and then more than that, more even than the "laws of the universe." "But listen, it's not finished,"--as they say at Grover's Corner, in a different tone from Brooks' but with the same sense of involvement--"the United States of America; . . . the Universe; the Mind of God--that's what it said on the letter." Brooks never described the Hartford house as a microcosm of his thesis; a scholar today would be able to, and ought to, if he were examining the same overall proposition.

The scholar would be looking at what tokens the details of the house offered. He would be thinking of the implications and involvements of such a message as Mark's to his wife in 1886:

It was good news I sent you, Livy, darling, I thought it would reconcile you to your costly sofa. You can order 1000 such sofas now, if you want to--the future bank account will foot the bill and never miss it. The Pope's book is ours, and we'll sell a fleet load of copies.

With this he would consider, too, Mark's eulogy of the Hartford house when he heard of Susy's death there in 1896:

To us, our house was not un sentient matter--it had a heart, and a soul, and eyes to see us with; and approvals and solitudes, and deep sympathies; it was of us, and we were in its confidence, and lived in its grace and in the peace of its benediction. We never came home from an absence that its face did not light up and speak out its eloquent welcome--and we could not enter it unmoved.

We have become so accustomed to thinking of Mark Twain in phrases of his final bitterness, and so involved in moral judgments like those of Brooks, that it is useful to be reminded by a house and its furnishings that it was fun for Mark to be rich, and exciting for him to have the symbols of success. These were part of the eloquent welcome his home gave him.

When Mark Twain moved to Hartford in 1871 he was going to a literary and publishing center not too far from Boston and not so far from New York but that visitors from either capitol could find it easy to come as his guests. When his house was finished in 1874 they did. He had someone to talk with, always. George Warner, Charles Dudley Warner, and Harriet Beecher Stowe were his neighbors at Nook Farm, in this unfenced enclave on Farmington Avenue, where children and parents and guests could wander from porch to porch as in a village. It was Susy's death in 1896 from meningitis that made the house impossible,--that and the heavy costs of maintaining it when his investments went sour. Mrs. Clemens would never cross the threshold again. In 1903 the house was finally sold; whatever furniture was not taken by the family or given away was auctioned. "That god damned house," Mark called it by then. "I would rather go to hell than own it 50 days longer."

The house became the residence of the president of a fire insurance company. Then, from 1917 until 1922, it was a boys' country-day school. Later it was used as a storage warehouse until its upper stories were subdivided and rented as individual apartments. Eventually its first floor was used as a branch public library, without structural change. In 1929 the house was at last bought from the City Coal Company by a group of citizens and chartered as a Commission. But until four years ago only the ground-floor guest room and the master's bedroom on the second floor were open to the public. In the former was a piece or two of the original furniture and framed scraps of manuscript; in the latter was the enormous Venetian carved bed, given by his daughter Clara, in which Mark Twain was so often photographed in his last years and which had been his and his wife's at Hartford. There was not much else to be shown. The branch library and the apartment-dwellers remained. Today the whole house, room by room, is being opened. A thousand guests a month appear. The renaissance has been rewarding.

Since the house is regarded as a document, the chief aim of the trustees of the Commission has been to restore its original text. Fortunately the guests who visited Mark during his own lifetime have given us the best parallel readings. The last decades of the nineteenth century were a period when it was popular to write up visits to the homes of the great, both for magazines and in memoirs. It was also a period when wood-engravings and steel-engravings were being used. Mark Twain of course was a famous man; one way of showing familiarity with him was to describe precisely what was on his mantelpiece; another way was to draw the room. Because of such illustrations he lived next door to everyone.

Writers like Howells, Moncure Conway, Mrs. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and George Parsons Lathrop contributed particulars. So did less name-worthy authors of newspaper articles. So did his daughter Clara and his servant Kate Leary, each in her book of reminiscences. So did Mark in his own letters, and Mrs. Clemens in hers. By the present-day gathering of this sort of overt intelligence, and by its synthesis, a report of the decor has been gained. Interviews with a few still-living persons who themselves had played with the Clemens children have added other, less-public information. The effort to uncover the past has been an act of intelligence. Even the colors of the walls have been identified, and the definitions confirmed by scraping. The drawing room was in salmon and rose. The library was in silver and peacock blue. The dining room was green and brown. In the gold-stencilled front hall, by the entrance to the dining room, was a brown, coffin-shaped Swiss music box of polished wood whose nine tunes (including Lohengrin's wedding march) were wound up and played endlessly during dinner. In the reception-hall closet was the first private telephone in Hartford (Mark liked being a pioneer). In the balconied billiard room at the top of the house was a small desk with a few filled bookshelves, where he did much of his writing. Many more volumes were in the first-floor library. From auction records and the catalogues of collections the titles have been learned. Contemporary editions begin again to fill the shelves.

Bit by bit the rooms have resumed their old appearance. A music box correct in color and shape, and with at least eight tunes, was found and given from a neighboring house. The original crystal chandelier has come back to the drawing room, so has the full-length rosewood-and-ebony mirror; the original heavy mahogany sideboard now dominates the dining room; in the guest-room more of the porcelain-tiled furniture is in place again. In the front-hall closet is a contemporary example of the first telephone, given by the Southern New England Telephone Company. In the billiard room, on the third floor, is not the original billiard table with its black and gold legs, but in its place the custom-built table H. H. Rogers gave him in 1904. Mark had it first in New York, and then at Redding; it had been dismantled and stored by the children of his biographer, and has now been given by them to

Hartford. It is the billiard table of familiar photographs. His Russian sleigh is also at Hartford; so is his high-wheel bicycle.

Most importantly, the great ceiling-high, carved-wood mantelpiece of the library has returned after more than a half-century. Bought by Mark Twain in 1874 from Ayton Castle, near Edinburgh, the ornate piece was the focus of most published illustrations of the room. In 1903 it was taken from Hartford, kept in storage, and in 1908 installed at Stormfield, his new home in Redding. Stormfield burned. From the beginning of the active restoration of the Hartford house it has been recognized by the trustees that someday a facsimile of the mantelpiece must be made. Two years ago a phoenix-minded farmer visited the Memorial, offering the original in exchange for a car. After the fire at Redding he had taken the mantelpiece, wiped off the ashes, and stored it in his barn. Today it is back on the wall, the charred portions replaced. Luck plays its part in the pursuit of any scholarly goal, and the Hartford group has been lucky in the number of original articles which continue to appear by magnetism. These articles are now surrounded by appropriate replacements for what is still missing. Fully furnished in this way, the house has the warm feeling of a home, the sort of home which Mark Twain wanted and for a long time had.

Other less-domestic facets of the Hartford years are displayed unobtrusively or in basement rooms. Mark Twain was not single-minded; there are many examples of his enthusiasms. His successful patented scrapbooks are to be seen, as well as his less remunerative memory-builder game and his "improved" school slate. Salesmen's dummies for his subscription books are combined with other data of his often wonderfully profitable ventures as a publisher. Some exhibits precede Hartford in date, like the original printer's stick he used when he worked in 1856 for his brother Orion at Keokuk. With it are the type-cabinet and other equipment of the Ben Franklin Book and Job Company which Orion operated. These have been loaned by the Home Insurance Company. They make an appropriate introduction to the Paige Typesetter whose development and promotion bankrupted Mark and sent him back to the lecture platform and away from Hartford. The original model of this "infernal machine" has been loaned by the Mergenthaler Linotype Company which eventually bought all rights to the Gargantua of 22,000 parts and 7,550 pounds. But as examination will show, Mark cannot be called a crackpot for believing in its possibilities. Such objects at Hartford make more than a museum of curios.

It would be absurd for the Mark Twain Memorial to hope to vie with such great collections of his manuscripts as those at Berkeley, at Yale, or at the University of Virginia. In the first place, the concentration on data directly related to the Hartford period excludes certain bibliographical and manuscript items. But within, or concerned with, the period from 1871 to 1896 many items have been assembled which are of importance to the scholar.

Hartford's substantial reference library related to Mark Twain studies is, like its collection of first editions of everything within the period, common enough but useful. They have proved particularly valuable to school-children of Connecticut and to isolated researchers from everywhere who write constantly to the Memorial for answers to questions. Other aspects of the resources are, however, less common. Nowhere else, I think, has there been an attempt physically to reassemble a facsimile of his library. The result is more than decoration, and even the catalogue of his books is rich in inference. Of great value should also be the log of his Hartford years, now being prepared; ready reference will be available for daily details. The combing of Hartford newspapers has turned up much of interest for the project. An attempt is being made to collect all known photographs of Mark Twain; in this case not limited to the Hartford years alone, the collection is being used by scholars and researchers for all periods of his life.

Every manuscript is of course unique. Hartford has the good beginning of a collection, and additions are being constantly made--particularly of his correspondences with people in the Hartford area. Letters from him, by his wife, and by the children are of varying interest but are substantive in their rewards to students. There is much material related to the performances of The Prince and the Pauper, played by the Clemens and Warner children, and by Mark himself: additions and re-writings of the text, programmes, tickets, and photographs of the case. There is a three-page fragment of the manuscript of "Huck Finn & Tom Sawyer Among the Indians" (all that exists); a note about the publication of Miscellaneous Sketches; the manuscript of an article written for the New York Evening Post but never submitted; remarks on Susy, and reminiscences of his children; Christmas wishes to the inventor of the telephone; and, appropriately, a substantial documentation of The Guilded Age, which was the first product of his Hartford life. In the Memorial's collection is the outline for the novel, along with many pages of the manuscript either in his hand or that of Charles Dudley Warner, his collaborator. There is also J. Hammond Trumbull's notebook of mottoes for its chapter headings.

Such a manuscript collection will continue to grow, and any professional student of Mark Twain ought to write to the Mark Twain Memorial, 351 Farmington Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut, to query its newest holdings. So too ought any student of Hartford's wider literary circle. For there is also an increasing collection of Charles Dudley Warner material appropriate to the friendship between Warner and Mark Twain and to the spot where their houses stood. Until a year ago one could still use the present tense for both buildings. Then, moving down upon Nook Farm like taloned hawks, the City of Hartford and its School Board seized by eminent domain the Gothic cottage where Warner lived. It was designed by the same Edward Potter who was Mark Twain's own architect. Country-wide protests to the

demolition were of no avail; Warner's house is gone, a high school will sprawl in its place. Fortunately, however, the Mark Twain Memorial has become such an established monument that it seems safe. It remains, invitingly, for those who know what a house can mean.

Yale University

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