



Mark Twain Circular

Newsletter of the Mark Twain Circle of America

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The President's Letter

Bruce Michelson
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

A Challenge for American Author Societies

If you look at the fundamentals, the Mark Twain Circle is in good shape. We are still the largest American author society, with an international membership, healthy finances, and a full slate of annual and special events; the archives, special collections, college and university centers, and historic sites, with which we affiliate, from Hartford to Elmira to Hannibal to Berkeley, are wonderful. The Circle officers and Executive Board members who keep us all solvent and moving forward—Kerry Driscoll, Jim Leonard, John Bird, Joe Csicsila, Ann Ryan, Joe McCullough, Larry Berkove, Chad Rohman—are level-headed veterans with high energy and good humor—and in the long list of ‘classic’ American writers, who but Mark Twain still makes headlines and the covers of national magazines?

Even so, as scholars and students who understand the value of studying Mark Twain—as a body of texts, a complex and compelling life, an abiding and shape-shifting cultural phenomenon—we can find ourselves in an odd condition, with regard to the larger professions with which we affiliate. In English, History, Cultural Studies, and other Humanities disciplines, we’ve been through seasons in which big, adorable, dubious general-

Dates to Circle

December 27-30, 2008. Modern Language Association Annual Convention. San Francisco, CA.

May 21-24, 2009. American Literature Association Annual Conference. Boston, MA.

August 6-8, 2009. The Sixth Annual Conference on the State of Mark Twain Studies. Elmira, NY.

(See inside for ALA and MLA information.)

izing is seen as a sexier practice than carefully-focused insights founded in actualities, in facts, in a deep understanding of the richness and complications of a single mind, a life, a moment in the narrative of America and its relations with the world. At national conventions in our various trades, the side-effects of this condition are obvious and sometimes even comical. At the predictably-gigantic MLA meeting in Chicago last winter, you could shoehorn yourself into the Grand Crystal Ballrooms (or whatever those random 4-star hotels call the biggest, glitziest auditoriums they have) to hear orations on modernity, interdisciplinarity, exceptionalism, globalization, theory, post-theory, post-historicism, post-colonialism, and endless elegant combinations of these and other great categories of something—aerobic performances of mind and language that seemed never to pause, to unpack one given writer or a single text. To draw big crowds at such a circus, your toes must never touch the ground. →

(Continued on p. 2)

In fact, *below* ground was where unregenerate people like us had to go if we wanted to hear facts and insights about specific authors. No Crystal Ballrooms for our lot. MLA Twainians will please report to Radon Room Q, three floors below the main lobby, down under Wacker Drive, one steel door in from the Lower Garage Annex. If this is an exaggeration, it's not extreme: one session I chaired last year was not only at the very bottom of the labyrinthine Hyatt Regency but also at the very bottom of the Convention Program—the last meeting on the final afternoon, when the scuffed luggage was piled high in the lobbies, and the shuttles of worn-out conventioners were loading up for the evacuation to O'Hare.

Maybe this is a condition we have to accept for the moment—a kind of second-class professional citizenship for scholars who don't quite accept that the past, and the present, and the great trove of American literary art should be regarded as a convenient blurry backdrop for huge and dubious disjunctions. It's doubtful that by forming a Rebel Alliance with the Jamesians, the Hawthornians, the Fullerites, Douglassites, Joyceans, and other riffraff, we can recover our national humanities discourse from this tyranny of sonorous abstraction. Instead, we may have to keep cool, keep confi-

dent, and wait patiently for such distracting enterprises to come tumbling down in due course, like a sub-prime mortgage lender.

But what should we do for amusement in the meantime?

One good objective is to build and diversify the membership—to be as active as we can in recruiting fresh generations of Twainians. I suspect that we all know students and colleagues whose interests would benefit from a strong connection to the Circle, its publications, and its special events—and twenty-five bucks is a cheap investment in high-quality companionship and professional opportunities. Let's make that clear and get the word out. If everyone in the Circle could bring it to the attention of one or two potentially-interested other people who aren't affiliated already, we can help ourselves, and every other author society, in this quest to climb back up into the daylight.

As we do that, we also need to think seriously about our collective intellectual future, about the need to welcome, countenance, and even strengthen some of the big-scale formulations I was poking fun at a moment ago. If the humanities are to maintain some measure of relevance and value as a cultural practice, they may require better commonalities →

To: Prof. Kerry Driscoll
Executive Coordinator, Mark Twain Circle
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1678 Asylum Avenue
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Please enroll me as a member of the **Mark Twain Circle of America** and subscriber to the *Mark Twain Circular* and *The Mark Twain Annual*. I enclose a check for \$25.00 (\$27.00 for a non-U.S. address) made out to "Mark Twain Circle of America."

(printed name)

(address)

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ABOUT THE CIRCLE. The Mark Twain Circle of America was formed at an organizational meeting held at the 1986 Modern Language Association convention in New York. Although many members are academic specialists, the Circle also includes many non-academic Twain enthusiasts.

ABOUT THE CIRCULAR. The *Mark Twain Circular* is the newsletter of the Mark Twain Circle of America. It is published twice per year (April and November) and is mailed, by the editor, to all members of the Mark Twain Circle. The *Circular* prints news of Mark Twain events and scholarship, directories of members, and current bibliography. Subscribers are distributed among 44 states and 14 foreign countries.

ABOUT THE ANNUAL. The Mark Twain Circle also publishes an annual volume titled *The Mark Twain Annual*, edited by Ann Ryan (Le Moyne College), featuring criticism and pedagogy related to Mark Twain and his works.

and connections between the theoretical and the actual—the recovered, refreshed, or radical theory, and the body of carefully-researched historical fact and carefully-focused and substantiated insight that author societies have been building up for more than a century.

If our profession right now is too much like one of those sprawling hotels, with cavernous wings and corridors where the various factions don't have to make eye-contact, then perhaps we can change that, in some small way, within our own group. We can be fostering exciting and cordial encounters between the global and the specific, between the grand formulations over there, and the complications we delight in, about Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain. □

**Call for Papers:
ALA Mark Twain Circle Sessions**

American Literature Association 2009 National Convention

The Westin Copley Place Hotel, Boston, MA, May 21-24, 2009

The **Mark Twain Circle** sponsors several sessions at this exciting and popular national meeting.

To propose a paper for an ALA Mark Twain Circle session, please contact Professor Bruce Michelson at the University of Illinois: [brucem@illinois.edu].

Please be sure to use the subject line:

"American Literature Association Mark Twain Circle"

**Deadline for receipt of proposals is
January 10, 2009**

Minutes: Business Meeting
Mark Twain Circle of America
23 May 2008
San Francisco Hyatt Regency Hotel

1. President Larry Berkove called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.
2. Executive Coordinator Kerry Driscoll gave the Treasurer's Report as follows:

Current Membership: 175 domestic; 37 international; 96 libraries.
To date, 75 domestic members and 5 international members have paid their 2008 dues.

The current balance in the Circle's treasury is \$10,500.00.

To date, the Circle has incurred the following expenses:

\$3065.22 for the printing of volume 5 of the *Mark Twain Annual* (2007)

\$786.22 for postage, envelopes, labels, and labor costs for mailing V. 5

\$200.00 for student assistance updating the Mark Twain Circle website

\$138.00 for the preparation/ mailing of 2008 renewal forms, both domestic and international

\$487.00 for this afternoon's wine and cheese reception at the Elephant and Castle

The Executive Coordinator also announced that the anticipated payment which will be made to Wiley-Blackwell in the fall for producing hard copies of Volume 6 and mailing it out to all Circle members is \$5000.00. Unless other unforeseen expenses are incurred, the Circle should therefore end the year 2008 with a surplus of approximately \$5000.00.

3. Incoming Vice President Jim Leonard spoke briefly about the Circle's new business arrangement with Wiley-Blackwell Publishers. Beginning later this year, the *Mark Twain Annual* will be one of five journals featured in Wiley-Blackwell's new online "American Literature Collection" (the other journals are the publications of the Poe, Melville, Fitzgerald, and Steinbeck societies). This collection will be sold to libraries for an annual cost of \$450.00 and promises to greatly increase the number of institutions that subscribe to the *Twain Annual*. Jim explained that Wiley-Blackwell is in the process of digitizing volumes 1-5 of the *Annual*, so that these subscribing libraries will have access to the entire run of our publication. He also stressed that the "American Literature Collection" is an entirely online publication, and that beginning with Volume 6, the only hard copies produced of the *Mark Twain Annual* will be those sent to members of the Twain Circle. Wiley-Blackwell will charge a flat rate of \$25.00 per member to cover the cost of producing and mailing these copies, which as Jim reminded everyone, equals the amount domestic members are paying for this year's dues. This new arrangement also carries the potential for future financial

profit since Wiley-Blackwell will pay the Circle a royalty representing a specific percentage of sales of the “American Literature Collection.”

4. Jim’s announcement led to a general discussion about submission deadlines for Volume 6 of the *Annual*. Incoming editor Ann Ryan stated she has tentatively identified July 15th as the deadline for essays, but indicated that she was meeting with a Wiley-Blackwell representative on May 24th and would have more specific information regarding the publisher’s timeline after that meeting. Larry Berkove then raised the possibility of producing two issues of the *Annual* per year (which would of course necessitate a change in the journal’s title) at some point in the future; however, the general consensus was that this idea—while attractive—was too ambitious to consider at this point. The next few years will be a time of transition for the *Annual* given the new arrangement with Wiley-Blackwell, and it was agreed to maintain the production of a single volume of high-quality essays per year for the foreseeable future.

5. President Berkove then made several informational announcements:
 - Chad Rohman will succeed Jim Leonard as the editor of the *Mark Twain Circular* beginning with the next issue. Jim has graciously agreed to serve as Chad’s mentor in the production of this upcoming issue.
 - A one-day symposium on “Twain and the Mississippi River” will be held in Hannibal on 19 July 2008.
 - The Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies will host a conference on *The Mysterious Stranger* on October 10th and 11th. This event is being co-chaired by Joe Csicsila and Chad Rohman.
 - Thanks to President-elect Bruce Michelson and one of his computer-savvy students, the Circle’s website has been updated and is now up and running
 - Copies of the Circle’s bylaws were distributed to all in attendance to keep on file.

6. Larry then formally announced a change in the editorship of the *Mark Twain Annual*. After serving five years as the journal’s founding editor, John Bird is stepping down, and Ann Ryan has become the new editor. This announcement was the occasion for several members to extemporaneously express their thanks to John for all his hard work in producing five exceptionally handsome volumes. John, in turn, gave Ann presentation copies of the first five issues. Kerry Driscoll then presented John with a small token of the Circle’s gratitude for his years of voluntary service. In keeping with John’s love of cigars, his gift was a framed “Mark Twain” cigar box label (circa 1930), along with a vintage “Mark Twain” brand cigar in its *original* cellophane wrapper.

7. Ann Ryan then spoke briefly about her priorities for the *Annual*, as follows:
 - 1) Get it out!
 - 2) The 2008 issue will contain a brief tribute to Jim Zwick, who died in January of complications related to diabetes.
 - 3) The theme of the 2009 issue will be “Mark Twain and Gender.”
 - 4) The 2010 issue will commemorate the centennial of the writer’s death, although no specific theme has yet been identified.

8. Larry then reported briefly on the Australian Mark Twain Society, established by Ron Hohenhaus of Queensland, who has been investigating some promising connections between Comstock miners in Twain's era and their Australian counterparts.
9. Larry also announced that MLA's policy of scheduling the second of any two sessions sponsored by an allied organization on the last day of the conference has resulted in three Twain panels in recent years being offered at the very worst time possible—the last slot on the conference program—and relegating them to dreary, inaccessible, windowless meeting rooms—which has of course adversely affected attendance. For this reason, the Circle will only sponsor one session at MLA 2008 in San Francisco and subsequent years. Larry urged Circle members to consider another, more user-friendly venue at which to sponsor panels—such as the American Humor Association. Other possibilities which incoming president Bruce Michelson will investigate include the American Studies Association and the Western Literature Association, among others.
10. Larry spoke briefly about the importance of increasing membership in the Circle which has dramatically decreased from an all-time high of about 350 a decade ago. He encouraged all members to solicit any interested parties—friends, acquaintances, strangers, enemies—to join.
11. Citing the increased cost of airfare and lodging, Larry then made a motion to increase the annual stipend for travel and other related expenses provided to Circle officers (President, Vice President, and Executive Coordinator) from \$500 to \$750. This motion was unanimously approved, and will take effect in 2009.
12. Larry then announced the recipient of the 2008 Tom Tenney Service Award for outstanding service to the field of Mark Twain Studies: Bob Hirst, General Editor of the Mark Twain Papers and Project, University of California, Berkeley. Larry presented Bob with a framed certificate and a special gift—a vintage 1840s bottle of “Perry Davis's Vegetable Painkiller”—the medicine Tom Sawyer administered to his cat in Twain's 1876 novel.
13. In closing, Larry announced the change of officers: Bruce Michelson (in the Galapagos, alas) assumes the Presidency; Jim Leonard becomes the Vice-President; and Kerry Driscoll continues as Executive Coordinator for one more year. On behalf of the Circle, Jim and Kerry thanked Larry for the many accomplishments of his two-year term, and Kerry presented Larry with a framed vintage postcard of Twain, wearing white, circa 1910. Larry made a brief speech, stating how much he had enjoyed serving the Circle.
14. John Bird made an impromptu motion from the floor thanking Larry for his tremendous efforts on behalf of the Circle, which was of course unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kerry Driscoll
Executive Coordinator

The Mark Twain Circle at the Modern Language Association (MLA) Annual Conference

San Francisco, CA, 29 December 2008

Session 505: "Mark Twain: Fresh Perspectives on a Cultural Icon."

Presiding: Gregg Camfield, University of California, Merced.

Location/Time: Union Square 14, Hilton (333 O'Farrell St.): 10:15-11:30 a.m.

1. "Mark Twain, Supersessionist Theology, and the Sacred Imagined Nation." Michael Donald Lackey, University of Minnesota, Morris.

2. "The Minor and the 'Littery' Men: Mark Twain's 'Bewildering Blunder' of 1877." Diana Hope Polley, Southern New Hampshire University.

3. "John Woolman, Quaker Saint. Mark Twain, Quaker Son?" Chad Rohman, Dominican University.

4. "Huck's Future." Peter Stoneley, University of Reading, UK.

This is a strong gathering of experienced critics, discussing Mark Twain's 21st century relevance. We'll hope to see you there!

Call for Papers: American Literature Association 20th Annual Conference

Dates: May 21-24, 2009

Location: The Westin Copley Place—10 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02116-5798 (617) 262-9600

Conference Director: Alfred Bendixen, Texas A & M University

Conference Fee: For those who pre-register before April 15, 2009: \$85 (\$50 for Graduate Students, Independent Scholars, and Retired Faculty). After April 15, the fees are \$100 and \$60.

Deadline for Proposals: January 30, 2009

The ALA website contains further details and instructions for submitting proposals as well as important information for representatives of participating author societies. Proposals from individuals and program information from author societies should be sent to Professor Alfred Bendixen via email (abendixen@tamu.edu) by January 30, 2009, following the instructions on the website: www.americanliterature.org.

Please also consult the ALA website for information about the ALA Symposium on American Fiction in Savannah, GA, on October 2-4, 2008, and the ALA Symposium on American Poetry in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, on December 15-18, 2008.

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SERIAL LIBRARIANS: The *Mark Twain Circular* is entered selectively in the annual bibliographies of the Modern Language Association and the Modern Humanities Research Association, and in the *American Humanities Index*, the *Literary Criticism Register*, *American Literary Scholarship*, and "A Checklist of Scholarship on Southern Literature" (which appears annually in the Spring issue of the *Mississippi Quarterly*).

Thanks to Jim Leonard (The Citadel) and Ken Black (Dominican Univ.) for their valuable help on this issue of the *Mark Twain Circular*.