President’s Column: Susan K. Harris

Minutes: MTC Business Meeting 2021

Twain Talk: Rebeeca Nisetich

Call for Papers: Elmira 2022

Call for Papers: Graduate Student Workshop

Membership Renewal Form

Publication information
I’ve been thinking about an interview with Barack Obama that columnist Ezra Klein published in The New York Times on June 1, 2021. At the end of the interview, Klein asked Obama what he was reading now. After detailing a couple of recent books, Obama added, “And then this one is easier. I actually caught up on some past readings of Mark Twain. There’s something about Twain that I wanted to revisit because he’s that most essential of American writers. His satiric eye, and his actual outrage that sometimes gets buried under the comedy, I thought was useful to revisit.”

Why revisit Mark Twain? And what is the outrage that Obama perceives? Outrage seems to be the American dominant emotion these days—as the columnists constantly remind us, the country is sorely divided, and each faction professes outrage at the values of every other faction. Twain’s own outrage, his fury, often focused on what he labeled the “idiocy” of his fellow humans; he could not understand how people could behave contrary to reason, blindly follow clearly incompetent leaders, or obtain pleasure from attacking anyone who looked, spoke, or believed differently from themselves.

My husband and I took a road-trip recently, our first since the pandemic. We began with four days in upstate New York, at Quarry Farm, Elmira College’s Center for Mark Twain Studies’ scholars’ retreat, where I immersed myself in some of the truly remarkable secondary literature produced by Twain scholars in the last couple of decades. After Elmira we struck west, first visiting friends just south of Cleveland, Ohio, then dropping south to relatives outside of Dayton. Obama’s words resonated as we drove through the American countryside, where, for the first time in the nearly half-century we’ve been traveling these roads, I was struck by the anger, the outright hatred, on glaring display in citizens’ yards and public buildings. In Elmira, taking a walk one day, I came on a house whose front picture window was covered by a Confederate flag, a gun across its middle, and the taunt “come and get it” written beneath. Other signs throughout the trip furiously attacked local legislators who had introduced gun-control measures. On the political front, the battles of the last election were still being fought in small towns like Wellington, Ohio, and signs threatened new
insurrections. What we did not see were any indications that people were being mindful of their own health or that of their neighbors. My husband and I spent the pandemic in Brooklyn, NY, where—still—our neighbors mask up on the streets and in the shops, where there are three Covid testing sites within a five-block radius, and where over 81% of the adults in my zip code are fully vaccinated. Rural Ohio presented a different scenario. No masks, no well-marked vaccination sites, no distancing, no restaurants with outdoor seating. I felt like I’d time-traveled back to late 2019.

Where would Twain fall in our contemporary culture wars? I can respond on one issue with certainty: he would mask up, get vaxxed, and lend his name to vaccination campaigns. The Clemens family suffered multiple illnesses and the deaths of family members during the 34 years of their marriage, including a 19-month-old son and a 26-year-old daughter, and they were passionately supportive of modern medical science and public health campaigns. I can say without doubt that Mark Twain’s satire would have targeted anti-vaxxers as bumbling idiots. Ditto, I think, on the gun issue. Despite having joined coon-hunting parties as a boy, Twain disliked the gratuitous violence that other Americans treated so lightly. You can tell that from some of his newspaper reports from his years out in Nevada Territory, and his satire of duels and feuds in his fiction. Politics are another matter: Samuel Clemens was very much engaged in political disputes, and he not infrequently took a contrarian stance in regard to political issues of his day. He was a staunch Republican until the election of 1884, when he refused to support Republican nominee James G. Blaine who, despite a reputation for blatant corruption, still maintained the loyalty of his party. Refusing to cow to that loyalty, Clemens joined the Mugwumps, a dissident group that swung support to Democrat Grover Cleveland. “Loyalty,” Twain’s character Hank Morgan proclaims in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, is “loyalty to one’s country, not to its institutions or its office holders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease, and death. To be loyal to rags, to shout for rags, to worship rags, to die for rags—this is loyalty to unreason, it is pure animal; it belongs to monarchy, was invented by monarchy; let monarchy keep it.” I suspect, then, that Clemens would not agree with the current politics of the rural U.S. And Mark Twain would most likely channel Clemens in expressing his outrage at those blinded by party loyalty.

Why, then, revisit Mark Twain? Because he reminds us that our country stands or falls on courage—the courage to go against the tide, to embrace rationality, and to protect the community’s safety. Twain had the audacity to call out his country when he saw that it had veered from its principles. Over a century later, we revisit Mark Twain’s writings to remind ourselves that the strength of America depends on our own determination to do likewise.

—SKH
Began: 11:06 a.m. (28 total attendees)
Meeting adjourned 12:12 p.m.

President Susan K. Harris, Vice President Harry Wonham, Executive Coordinator Jarrod Roark.

I. After opening remarks, Susan Harris led a discussion of MTC Awards
   1. Louis J. Budd: Distinguished Scholarship
   2. Thomas Tenney: Lifetime Service
   3. Olivia Clemens: Scholarly creativity and innovation
   4. The committees discussed whether or not we should, over time, replace the names of past generations with newer scholars
   5. The committees decided to keep the CMTS and Circle awards separate in order to support the different missions of the two institutions. The awards will continue to be presented every four years at the Elmira conference
   6. All awards should come with plaques and be advertised in the Circular which immediately precedes the conference as well as other venues (ALA, etc.)
   7. Committees are working to establish and fund a new award for Emerging Scholars in order to attract younger scholars and foster new approaches

II. Susan moved to the topic of our new graduate student Workshop
   The workshop would take place immediately after the Elmira conference, and would invite five graduate students who are working on turning an essay on Twain into an article.

III. Circle Support of CMTS Content
   The Circle has created a committee to solicit material for the Center for Mark Twain Studies website in order to support Matt Seybold’s growth of the site. Kerry Driscoll and Nate Williams will serve for two years and will solicit and edit five blog posts for Matt. In year two we will ask two other people to join the Blog Committee, providing overlap and continuity.

IV. Reports
   1. Jarrod Roark, Executive Coordinator
      - Current Membership: 146 active national; 13 international members
      - Financial Statement: bank and PayPal balance: $15,060
      - The Circle sent donation checks to: The Bancroft Library, the Center for Mark Twain Studies, the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum
      - Discussion of increasing (long-unchanged) membership dues might make
sense given our new projects. But it’s pointed out that Circle members belong to multiple professional organizations, and we want to keep membership affordable. Courtney Bates suggests adding a line to the “Join/Renew” form that would allow gifted memberships to students and colleagues.

2. Ben Click, Editor; Joe Csiscila, Associate Editor, The Mark Twain Annual
   - The number of viewed articles is significantly up this year in both JSTOR and Project Muse. Submissions were strong in spite of COVID
     • 8-9 Critical Articles
     • Special exchange between Bruce Michaelson & Jim Caron
     • Nate Williams will provide book reviews
   - Next year’s issue will be a special issue on Mark Twain & The West as a 150-year celebration of Roughing It
     • This will happen in conjunction with the CMTS 2021 Symposium
     • Bruce Michaelson will present the keynote

3. James W. Leonard, Webmaster and Editor, Mark Twain Circular
   - Circular redesign seems well-received; will encourage submission of short research-related notes and observations in order to supplement the “newsletter” function and engage interest
   - The website redesign has helped organize renewals, etc., and we will continue to pursue options for migrating membership data to a true database for further streamlining

4. Joe Lemak and Matt Seybold, CMTS Presentation
   - 2021 Roughing It Symposium
     • First weekend of October; will be limited to 25 people because of COVID
     • Will be recorded and available on the CMTS website
   - 2022 Quadrennial
     • Chaired by Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Tracy Wuster, keynote by Jimmy Santiago Baca
     • Call for papers will likely come out in January
   - 2022 Symposium in preliminary discussions, topic will be abolition studies
   - CMTS will continue to record and post presentations (Trouble Begins, etc.)
   - New CTMS podcast (hosted by Matt Seybold)
     • Encourages the submission of ideas for new episodes, series, etc.
   - CMTS would like to continue its project of digitizing inaccessible and/or out-of-print Twain materials in order to create a searchable database with annotations
   - Quarry Farm Fellowships are back to normal

V. From the floor
   - John Bird raised objection about staying at Hannibal-LaGrange University, because of issues with inclusivity, homophobia, etc. Others agreed.
TWAIN TALK:
Rebecca Nisetch
Not to drift too far toward “The Turning Point of My Life,” but do you recall any early experiences with Mark Twain that contributed to your later scholarly interests?

I think early experiences reading The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and even seeing both the Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn movies as a kid, piqued my interest. Reading Pudd’nhead Wilson in graduate school and diving into the scholarship about that novel is what really got me into the idea of writing about Twain.

What was your dissertation topic, and who directed your dissertation?

My dissertation, Contested Identities: Racial Indeterminacy and Law in the American Novel, shows how Charles W. Chesnutt, Nella Larsen, and William Faulkner create characters whose identities are not clearly articulated, defined, or knowable. With a focus on racial indeterminacy (as opposed to racial admixture) these authors tactically undermine the “one-drop” conceptions of racialization at the forefront of early twentieth century American notions of citizenship and selfhood. The law treats race as a matter of fixed identity; my dissertation exposes the law as crucial, instead, to the racial formation of individual characters. My primary advisor was Dr. Clare Eby at University of Connecticut.

Your scholarly work involves a strong focus on twentieth-century American literature. I’m in a similar position myself. What do you think it is about Mark Twain that attracts us 20th-c specialists?

What I find so interesting about Twain is the way that he is at once ahead of his time and also very much of his time—for example, the ways that he subverts American culture but is also very much a product of that culture. His critiques of racism, enslavement, etc., are really interesting for the ways that he ends up sometimes replicating the issues he’s seeking to challenge. I like the complexity of this, and love
the ways that this complexity plays with early-mid 20th century writers. I also study William Faulkner, and I think some of the complexity and contradictions in his work are similar to Twain’s.

**Have your impressions of Twain and his work changed at all over the years?**

The Twain oeuvre is so massive, my impressions have changed over the years in part because I’ve been able to delve more deeply into his lesser-known work. I’m becoming especially interested in his nonfiction and periodical writing, and his advocacy writing is fascinating (e.g. King Leopold’s Soliloquy, “A Dog’s Tale,” “Letter to the London Antivivisection Society,” etc.). He was pretty prolific, and the more of his work I read, the more complex my understanding of his work becomes.

**What, if anything, have you grown to dislike about the man?**

Honestly, I like Twain a lot more these days than I did when I first started studying him. I think discovering his writing about animals, and learning about his advocacy work regarding anti-vivisection and anti-imperialism, gave me a more nuanced understanding of his satire. At first blush, his humorous or satirical writing can strike me as one-dimensional: understanding more about his life, his personal beliefs and his actions has helped me to better contextualize this aspect of his work.

**Do you have any Twain-related projects in the pipeline right now?**

I do! I’m working on an article that looks at Twain’s animal rights activism and his abolition/antiracist work, and applies these aspects of his approach to his fiction writing.

**How do you hope to see the field (of Twain Studies) evolve over time?**

I share the vision of many of my colleagues on the MTC executive committee: I want to see Twain Studies continue to grow, in terms of both the numbers of scholars writing about Twain and the numbers of people (within and outside of the academy) engaging Twain’s work, but, perhaps most importantly, I want to see our approaches to Twain’s work broadening. I would love to see more diverse scholarship on Twain, new perspectives on Twain’s work, and would love to see more scholars put Twain’s work into conversation with marginalized writers in his time and ours. As our field (American Literature) moves increasingly away from single-author study, I think author societies like ours need to adapt by putting Twain into context and conversation with new and different voices and perspectives.

**Finally, what is your best advice for scholars just beginning their journeys into Twain Studies?**

Hmm, well, I still see myself as a scholar who’s also just beginning her journey in Twain Studies… but I think here are 3 things I would offer:

1. Don’t travel well-trod paths: Twain’s body of work is huge! So, if you’re dying to write about one of his better-known works, try to contextualize it or put it into conversation with something.
2. Connect with MTC colleagues: my experience joining this society has been overwhelmingly positive. This is honestly one of the most collegial and supportive groups of scholars that I’ve ever had the pleasure of connecting with. Not every field is like this, and we’re so lucky to have such amazing senior scholars who are willing to go above and beyond to bring up-and-comers into the fold.

3. And always, make it fun. When I stopped taking Twain (and myself) so seriously, I started enjoying the work a lot more. Even in his most serious moments, Twain had a real sense of play and humor. That’s a strength I think we could all cultivate a bit!
BEN CLICK, EDITOR

The Mark Twain Annual is the official publication of the Mark Twain Circle of America. The journal offers essays related to Mark Twain and those who surrounded him and serves as an outlet for new scholarship as well as new pedagogical approaches.

The Mark Twain Circle of America encourages interest in Mark Twain and fosters the formal presentation of ideas about the author and his work, as well as the informal exchange of information among Circle members.

Current pricing:
psupress.org/Journals/jnls_MTA.html

Submissions:
editorialmanager.com/mta
CALLS FOR PAPERS

Elmira 2022: The Ninth International Conference on the State of Mark Twain Studies

The conference will be held from Thursday, August 4 to Sunday, August 7, 2022 on the campus of Elmira College in Elmira, New York. In addition to scholarly presentations, the conference will have events that provide contexts for Mark Twain and his life in Elmira, and will also feature a keynote by Jimmy Santiago Baca, an award-winning writer for whom Twain has been an important influence.

An important focus of the conference will be scholarly discussion of the study of Mark Twain and how the field might grow and change in response to changing conditions in the world, in the academy, and in the field of Twain Studies. We encourage all proposals to address how your scholarship might help us think about growth and change in the context of our studies of Mark Twain. We have included a list of questions at the end of this announcement to help spark your thinking.

Submission
In keeping with the theme of the conference, we encourage scholars to consider how different ways of presenting your scholarship to the audience might encourage growth and conversation. We encourage you to be open to ideas such as flash presentation sessions in addition to standard 20-minute paper presentations and as roundtables.

Paper presentation
20-minute presentations of scholarly arguments and discoveries.

Roundtables
Groups of 3-5 scholars, each presenting for roughly 10 minutes on a theme or topic, leaving significant time and space for discussion.

Flash Presentations
In addition to roundtables and sessions comprised of individual papers, we will be forming several sessions in which scholars each present for up to 5 minutes on a central subject as a way to spark conversations. Topics might range from “fresh pedagogical approaches to teaching Connecticut Yankee” to “which work by Twain does not get enough attention” to “how can we continue to grow and expand Twain studies.” Please indicate in your submission whether you might be interested in participating in a flash session, and do share suggestions for topics for flash sessions.

Each person may present a paper OR participate in a roundtable. However, you may participate in a flash session in addition to presenting a paper or being on a roundtable.

We encourage you to connect your proposal to the theme of “growth” and to think about how your scholarship can help to grow and change the field.

Proposals for presentations or roundtables (700 words) should be emailed as a Word document to Joseph Lemak at jlemak@elmira.edu by Friday, January 7, 2022. Include a cover letter containing your contact
CALLS FOR PAPERS

information (name, mailing address, etc.) in the body of the email. Proposals will be blind reviewed by members of the conference planning committee.

- How might Twain scholarship change in the future?
- What are the dynamics of growth and change in Twain’s ideas, moral attitudes, literary aesthetics, etc.?
- What lessons about coping with change can Mark Twain teach us?
- How did changing circumstances in Twain’s life shape changes in his thinking and writing?
- Why and how do Twain’s characters grow or change?
- How does travel— in the U.S. and abroad— change Samuel Clemens and the works of Mark Twain?
- How might we look at Mark Twain and his era in new ways?
- How does our understanding of Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain change when scholars consider disease, financial panic, and cultural upheaval?
- How can or should our teaching of Mark Twain and his time change?
- What impact did the radically shifting racial structures in the U.S. have on Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain?
- How can the study of Mark Twain and his era help scholars and students understand systemic racism?
- How might Mark Twain fit into an anti-racist pedagogy?
- How has America’s response to Mark Twain changed over time?
- When Mark Twain’s works are translated into other languages, how do they change and what cultural work do they do?
- How have responses to Mark Twain around the world changed over time?
- How do we grow and change as scholars? As teachers?
- What previously neglected texts by Twain speak to us today and deserve to be reconsidered?
- What ideas that we had earlier would we now change or reject?

Important Dates and Deadlines

Paper and panel proposal deadline – Friday, January 7, 2022
Decisions deadline – Friday, February 26, 2022
Conference registration begins – Friday, February 26, 2022
Conference registration deadline – Friday, July 15, 2022
Elmira 2022 Conference – Thursday, August 4 to Sunday, August 7, 2022

*Please follow this link to read the full announcement from the Center, including information about fees and lodging, as well as the committees and co-chairs working to make this conference possible.*
From Seminar Paper to Publishable Article: A Graduate Student Workshop

The Mark Twain Circle of America, in conjunction with the Center for Mark Twain Studies at Elmira College, is happy to announce their first Graduate Student Workshop. This in-person workshop will provide an intensive writing experience for students hoping to transform a seminar or conference paper into an article ready to submit for publication. Although all approaches are welcome—and interdisciplinary approaches are encouraged—the paper must give substantial attention to Twain.

Ph.D. candidates are invited to apply for the 4-5 day workshop, which is scheduled to take place immediately following the August 4-7, 2022, Ninth International Conference on the State of Mark Twain Studies. Students will work with a mentor and with each other, with ample time for writing and with access to the Twain archives at Elmira College and at Quarry Farm. Successful applicants will be housed, free, in Elmira College dormitories and provided with breakfasts and lunches for the duration of the workshop, which will take place both on campus and at the Farm. They will also be provided with a $200 stipend and, depending on need, up to $300 more towards travel expenses.*

Applications are due by Friday, January 7, 2022. Applicants should provide a cover letter giving their name and institution, their program and their current progress within it (i.e., second year Ph.D., ABD, etc.), and their dissertation project where determined. Please also provide a 500-word abstract of the paper to be transformed in the workshop.

Applications should be submitted simultaneously to John Bird and to Judith Yaross Lee. Applicants will be informed of their acceptance by late February.

* Special Offer: Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit proposals to and/or attend the Ninth International Conference on the State of Mark Twain Studies as well as the workshop. The conference theme is “Growth: The Most Rigorous Law of Our Being,” and is intended to stimulate conversation about 21st-century issues as well as 19th. The workshop, then, will be preceded by four days of lively discussion about Twain, his times, and the links between his times and ours. Students selected for the workshop who also choose to attend the conference will have their conference fees, lodging, and food waived—a $600 package.

Why Elmira? Elmira was the home of Twain’s wife, Olivia Langdon Clemens, and the Clemens family spent more than 30 long summers there. Quarry Farm, where the workshop will take place, belonged to Twain’s sister-in-law, and was the original site of the octagonal study that now graces the College campus. In it, Twain wrote many of his most famous works, including Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court. Now a scholarly retreat, Quarry Farm has a fine collection of primary and secondary Twain materials. Moreover the library at Elmira College, which will be open during both the conference and the workshop, boasts a special Mark Twain archive that contains books, manuscripts, and other documents related to Twain’s own life and writings and to the lives of his family and friends.
RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN THE
MARK TWAIN CIRCLE OF AMERICA FOR 2021

$30 Individual
$15 Graduate Students and K-12 Educators
$75 Three-year Individual

Membership helps support the educational and social activities of the Circle, including scholarly panels at academic conferences such as MLA and ALA. It also includes our newsletter, the Mark Twain Circular, which will keep you connected to all things Twain, and The Mark Twain Annual, published by Pennsylvania State UP. Previous issues are available to members through JSTOR.

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For Annual submission information or to submit a manuscript, visit the Annual's Editorial Manager website:
editorialmanager.com/mta/

Memberships now payable online via PayPal (credit, debit, or PayPal account):
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Or, send your check—payable to the Mark Twain Circle of America—to:
Jarrod Roark, Executive Coordinator
Mark Twain Circle of America
3725 Thompson Circle
Kansas City, Kansas 66103

Name:

Address:

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(if any)
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Drea Fournier is the *Circular’s* Design Editor.

**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, 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*).

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