AN EXHIBITION:

MARK TWAIN: MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

Curated by:
Chatham Ewing, Michael Greenlee, Jennifer Lieberman, and Kerstin Rudolph

Introduction by:
Bruce Michelson

A Selection of Exhibits from the Library’s Collections, and particularly the

Franklin J. Meine Collection

Including:
Rare Editions, Scarce Photographs, Unique Ephemera, Inventions, etc., etc.

ON PUBLIC DISPLAY!

Trouble Commences at 8:30 a.m. Monday—Friday
Though Samuel Langhorne Clemens has been gone for exactly one hundred years, Mark Twain isn't likely to vanish anytime soon. The name pops up everywhere -- on steamboats and hotels and restaurants, on casinos and banks and car dealerships, travel agencies, country clubs and golf courses, a National Forest, two California hospitals and even a pizzeria. There are high schools and middle schools named after him from New York City all the way to San Diego -- honoring a writer whose formal education didn't carry him past the sixth grade. A few years ago, one of those schools had a public fight about banning “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” from the required reading lists. Where Mark Twain goes, the ironies and controversies go too.

Beyond the many fascinating editions of his books, Sam Clemens left behind an enormous legacy: literally thousands of manuscript pages and personal letters; photographs, business records, published and manufactured keepsakes and memorabilia, even inventions and fiascos. The curators of this exhibition in The Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Chatham Ewing, Michael Greenlee, Jennifer Lieberman, and Kerstin Rudolph, have explored the enormous holdings of the Library to assemble and present this glimpse of Mark Twain the author, publisher, erstwhile tycoon, and world-wide celebrity ... and Sam Clemens the husband, the father, and the friend.

-- Bruce Michelson, Professor of English, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, President, Mark Twain Circle of America

Case 1: The Book Trade

For about three decades of his career (beginning with “The Innocents Abroad” in 1869 and ending with “Following the Equator” in 1897), most of the books that Mark Twain sold in the United States were marketed by subscription. Working on commission, an army of traveling salespeople (the publishers favored comely young women, and conspicuously-wounded Civil War veterans) canvassed within reach of the vast and relatively new American railroad network. These drummers carried thin, light sign-up books with samples of Mark Twain's prose, a few choice illustrations, and a selection of bindings in which the volume could be ordered. Our exhibit displays the publisher's prospectus of “A Tramp Abroad” (1879), which these drummers used to sell the novel for an 1880 release date.

The American subscription books these traveling salespeople were peddling were often big and gaudy and loaded with pictures, as you can see in the American bindings of “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” (1876) and “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” (1885). They provided interior décor, as some of the full-page illustrations were 'tipped in' (printed on one side only), making them easier to snip from
and pin up on the walls of subscribers' homes. Around 1880, nearly two thirds of the books sold in the United States were sold by subscription. Although the genteel publishing houses looked down on this trade, Samuel Clemens—ever the enterprising upstart—capitalized on subscription sales to reach the widest possible audience.

In England, however, where the population business was more concentrated and the book-retail system was better organized and more firmly established, Sam Clemens worked with legitimate trade publishers like George Routledge and Chatto and Windus - dignified houses headquartered in London. In many cases, the contents of the British editions were nearly identical to the American ones; but the covers of these London volumes were less over-the-top, more suggestive of a genteel and high-quality reading experience, as you can see in the British binding of "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (released in 1884, a few months prior to the American release date).

On the lecture circuit, the name "Mark Twain" became more than a journalistic pseudonym—it evolved into an alternate identity for Clemens, and a playful experiment in blending and sorting out a public and a private self. This entailed work as well as fun, and the images presented in this case are meant to illustrate the author's many (un)recognizable faces. While the series shows Clemens throughout different life stages, his photograph taken in the late 1860s betrays more than youth. Without a mustache, Clemens feels oddly unrecognizable, like a mysterious stranger waiting to become a national celebrity. At this point in his life he had been a printer, a riverboat pilot, a prospector in the Wild West, a reporter, a sketch writer, a standup comic – but not yet a true success.

The images from later in his life create a stunning contrast. We have Clemens in his white suit — an outfit he adopted for regular public wear only in the last five years of his life—playing with a kitten, possibly at his Elmira, New York summer hideout, away from admiring throngs — but obviously a photographer is here, and the pose is casual, intimate, yet also mannered. Is he on duty here, or off? Is he Mark, or is he Sam?
His satirical self-portrait perhaps best illustrates his gift of making fun of himself while simultaneously capitalizing on his image. Quipping that he could not draw a mouth but that “there is enough of it anyway,” he made sure to produce copper engravings of this self-portrait for his 67th birthday dinner in New York in 1902. Each invited guest could take a souvenir home—and what better souvenir than the face of the Famous Author, drawn by the very hand that also wrote the books?

Case 3: High Culture, Mass Culture, Pop Culture

A holograph letter to his friend and editor William Dean Howells shows us Samuel Clemens in a moment of freewheeling literary judgment. As a famous novelist in his own right, editor of “The Atlantic Monthly”, and an established arbiter of American literary taste, Howells embodied gentility in his public persona, while Mark Twain represented insouciance and play—and enjoyed shocking his good friend with outlandish jokes and dismissive judgments:

I have to write a line, lazy as I am, to say how your Poe article delights me + charms me; + to add that I am in agreement with substantially all you say about his literature.

To me his prose is unreadable — like Jane Austen’s [sic]. No, there is a difference: I could read his prose on salary, but not Jane’s. Jane is entirely impossible. It seems a great pity that they allowed her to die a natural death.

Another thing: you grant that God + circumstances sinned against Poe, but you also grant that he sinned against himself—a thing which he couldn’t do + didn’t do.

While Clemens developed friendships with the literary elite, he also shared his bawdy sense of humor with the wider public, as a playful journalist and spectacular lecturer. Indeed, he created the moniker “Mark Twain” while writing for the “Virginia City Territorial Enterprise.” His pseudonym—a steamboatman’s call for two fathoms—signified the border between safe and unsafe depths, perhaps denoting Clemens’s desire to straddle genteel and mass cultures.

Sensitive to the way his image could be sent through the popular culture ringer, he continued to write about his journalism long after he abandoned the trade. As a result, even his more genteel performances—like his tour and concomitant feud with George Washington Cable—would become mass media events.

Case 4: Places to Be! Follow in Mark Twain’s Footsteps During Your Summer Vacation

The tension between highbrow and lowbrow that characterized Clemens’s public existence was also reflected in the places he called home. Starting out humbly during mid-century, his boyhood home in Hannibal, Missouri served as inspiration for many of the locales readers would later come to love in his boyhood adventures. Like Clemens’s own rise to national celebrity status, even this humble abode gained in cultural currency over time. Posing at his childhood home in 1902, we can see how far the author has come.

Item 16: Twain’s boyhood home, Hannibal, MO
The opulent house he built in 1874 was a study in contrast to his beginnings. Grandiose, the uniqueness of the house speaks to Clemens’s passion for modern inventions and his comfort in flaunting his commercial and literary successes. But the Hartford, Connecticut location of his new home in combination with his marriage into one of the old-money families of New England, also reflects a stark contrast to his Southern roots.

If his Hartford home put on display Clemens’s modernity, his in-laws idyllic “Quarry Farm” home in Elmira, New York evoked a transcendental unity with nature. Whether in the verdant study at Elmira, where he crafted portions of his boisterous Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, or in his unconventional home, Clemens self-consciously marketed his authorial style as both highbrow and lowbrow.

Case 5: America’s Favorite Author Invents Book with No Words!

Before he invented “Tom Sawyer” (1876) or “Huckleberry Finn” (1884), Clemens created his PATENT SCRAP BOOK® (1873). An avid scrap-booker himself, Clemens enjoyed keeping a record of his lectures, books, and performances; but the old style of scrap-booking meant wasting time with hardened or lost paste. Always the entrepreneur/inventor, Samuel Clemens filed for a patent on May 7, 1873. The result was “Mark Twain’s Self-Pasting Scrap Book” (Patent No. 140,245)—a book that lets you capture the story of your own life in a Mark Twain binding. And, it seemed that the public enjoyed telling its own stories almost as much as it enjoyed reading Mark Twain’s. By 1885, he had made $200,000 from all of his authored and co-authored books combined, while he earned $50,000 from his scrapbook alone!

Of course, by 1885 Clemens had a few more inventions under his belt, including Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, and “Mark Twain’s Memory-Builder: A Game for Acquiring and Retaining All Sorts of Facts and Dates.” The game made learning about kings and battles “fun,” four years before Mark Twain made fun of kings and battles in “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court.”
Case 6: “Known to Everyone, Liked By All”

Sam Clemens ensured that “Mark Twain” became a commodity that he could defend against usurpation. Several times in his career, his lawyers brought suit against charlatans who tried to pass themselves off as the ‘real thing.’ When there was money to be made, his agents allowed the Mark Twain name and face to appear on endorsements and advertisements for all sorts of products, from postcards to cigars to beer. In his later life the name was copyrighted, and long after his death the Mark Twain Company defends all the intellectual and cultural property that hasn't fallen into the public domain.

As a result of his self-promotion, his face and signature started to appear everywhere—on his own projects, and on items he did not expressly endorse. Note that the cigar advertisement, “Mark Twain: Known to Everyone—Liked by All” (c. 1900) is copyrighted by Wolf Brothers, not Clemens. The advertisement is based on a photograph by Napoleon Sarony that Clemens famously disliked, and it lacks an endorsement or authentic signature from the author.

Nonetheless, while Clemens fought against unauthorized reproductions of his novels, he could have a sense of humor about the reproduction of his own face. On display we exhibit a Mark Twain postcard that the author found while traveling with family. He bought the card and sent it to a friend, noting that he thought the picture was a good likeness “but the family don’t.”

Case 7: Mysterious Stranger

The 1908 bronze casting of Clemens’s right hand, prepared by Kendall Banning, leaves more than an eerie imprint of Twain’s humanity. As he neared the end of his life, “Mark Twain” had ceased to be a prized possession.

Published in 1916—six years after his death—“The Mysterious Stranger” is a case in point. With illustrations by Newell Converse Wyeth, this unfinished work had been left in multiple manuscripts. Nevertheless, his biographer and literary executor Albert Bigelow Paine cobbled the unfinished drafts together erroneously, and made extensive alterations to the text. The University of California Press published a scholarly edition in 1982, relying on critical scholarship to approximate Clemens’s intentions. Such interest in capturing the authentic Clemens attests to the sustained attraction of this familiar, but nonetheless mysterious author.
### List of Exhibits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Postcard. Photograph of Mark Twain in bed with inscription, “The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don’t want...” 1897. MEINE 139</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Illustration](image-url)
Case 4: “Places to Be! Follow in Mark Twain's Footsteps During Your Summer Vacation”


Case 5: “America’s Favorite Author Invents Book with No Words!”


18. Twain, Mark, 1835-1910. “Mark Twain's Memory Builder: A Game for Acquiring and Retaining All Sorts of Facts and Dates.” Hartford : [s.n.], 1891. MEINE Q. 79373 C59m


Case 6: “Known to Everyone, Liked By All”

20. “Mark Twain, known to everyone, liked by all.” Graphic. Chromolithograph Cigar Label Print. Wolf Bros. 1900. MEINE 74167 M34

21. Mark Twain to Molly Clemens, 24 May 1898. Holograph postcard, signed. MEINE Q. B. C625c1

22. Book Plate. Reproduction of Twain's self-portrait, bordered by Twain quotations, (1941?) MEINE 190

Case 7: “Mysterious Stranger”


24. Bronze casting of Mark Twain's hand. Prepared by Kendall Banning, 1908. MEINE 447

Item 9: Advice from a stranger

Catalog of an exhibition held 16 April through 29 June 2010 in The Rare Book & Manuscript Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Photographs and design by Dennis J. Sears

Copyright ©2010 by The Rare Book & Manuscript Library and the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois
All rights reserved
Manufactured in the United States of America