

# MARK TWAIN

Mark Twain is probably the best remembered of all Missouri writers. Who hasn't heard of Tom Sawyer, or Huck Finn, or Becky Thatcher?



Mark Twain

Mark Twain was the pen name used by Samuel L. Clemens, born in 1835 in Florida, Mo., near Hannibal.

Living near the Mississippi River provided Twain background material for his writings. It was said that his childhood "was a mixture of simple and often mischievous

pleasure," while he witnessed many frontier struggles that found a place in his books.

Twain began his career as a printer's devil on two Hannibal weekly newspapers, one owned by his brother, Orion. A printer's devil was a boy who cleaned up the shop, ran errands, wrapped and delivered the newspapers, and did any other chores his boss suggested. Later he might learn to set type, as Twain did. In those days newspapers were printed with type, set one letter at a time, in lines that were put together to make stories. There were no computers as newspapers use today.

On a trip down the Mississippi, he persuaded a steamboat captain to teach him how to pilot. He earned his license and served as a river pilot until the

Civil War. Taking the name, Mark Twain, he wrote stories for New Orleans newspapers, describing sights along the river from St. Louis to the Gulf of Mexico. He was a great observer.

After the river years, Twain and his brother, Orion, moved to Nevada. Twain sent stories to the Territorial Enterprise in Virginia City where he wrote his famous "The Petrified Man" story, claiming a mummified man had been discovered. This newspaper is still published, primarily for tourists seeking to see what the West was like years ago.

Twain acquired something of a reputation as a literary comedian. One of his most famous stories, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," started Twain's career as a humorist since newspapers across the nation reprinted it.

Eastern readers wanted to read more about Twain, and see him lecture, so the Twain family moved to Hartford, Conn., where he was involved in unsuccessful business deals. In order to earn money to pay his bills he went on an around-the-world lecture tour.

In later years Twain was honored by many schools, including the University of Missouri in Columbia, which presented him an honorary degree in 1902. He was also made an honorary member of the Missouri Press Association.

Twain's career began in newspapers that provided opportunities for him to expand his writing, his traveling, and his observation skills. At times his humorous talent often made it difficult to tell the difference between the truth and Twain's imagination in his stories. Twain died in 1910 and was buried in Elmira, N.Y.



Twain's Boyhood Home



— Written by Dr. William H. Taft, Missouri Press Association Historian