

Photo Essay: The Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum—Hannibal, Missouri

Alissa Burger, Associate Professor of English

Megan Rapp, Executive Director of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum

The Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum in Hannibal, Missouri welcomes visitors into Mark Twain's life and work, with a particular focus on his time in Hannibal and the lasting influence of the town on his writing.

The Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum consists of eight buildings: the interpretive center, the Huckleberry Finn House, the Mark Twain Boyhood Home, the Boyhood Home Gift Shop, the Becky Thatcher House, the Justice of the Peace Office, Grant's Drug Store, and the Museum Gallery, which includes a collection of Norman Rockwell's illustrations for Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). Visitors are welcome to go through the exhibits at their own pace, with additional information available through an audio tour.

Visitors should begin at the Interpretive Center, which is located at 415 North Main Street in Hannibal. More information about the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum is available at <https://marktwainmuseum.org/>.



The Interpretive Center is home to an exhibit that mirrors Mark Twain's study in Elmira, New York, where Twain did much of his writing as an adult after leaving Hannibal. The unique octagonal shape of the structure welcomes visitors into Twain's creative space, while Twain's own words in the windows show how he took youthful memories and turned them into stories beloved around the world.



The Huckleberry Finn House is a reconstruction of the home of this fictional character, designed and built from historical materials in the same location with the help of photographs. The Huckleberry Finn House connects fiction with reality, as visitors inhabit this imaginative space while exploring museum displays about Twain's writing style, the impact of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the way it reflects the unique time and place in which it was written, and how the themes still resonate today.



Grant's Drug Store was a key location in young Samuel Clemens's life, when his family encountered financial difficulties and moved in with the Grant family in the rooms above their drug store. The Grant's Drug Store building provides visitors with a look at both the drug store and domestic quarters the two families occupied upstairs.



After leaving Hannibal, Twain was a steamboat pilot and the upstairs landing of the Museum Gallery puts visitors in the pilot house, with its large steamship wheel and expanse of glass that looks out over the Mississippi River, which featured prominently in Twain's life and work.



Throughout the museum campus, there are numerous tableaus of Twain in different settings, including the Boyhood Home, Grant's Drug Store, and here on the main floor of the Museum Gallery, where he sits with a book, joined by two of his fictional creations: Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.



As visitors make their way through the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum, they are invited to experience Twain's life and put themselves in the fictional worlds of his novels, including taking their own turn at whitewashing Tom Sawyer's fence.



As visitors start to make their way through the exhibits at the Becky Thatcher House, they are invited to choose a character card: Becky Thatcher, Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, or Jim, the young enslaved boy in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (not to be confused with Jim the adult enslaved man in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*). Guided by this connection, visitors can “Experience what life would be like if your character were living in Hannibal of the 1850s,” including how that character would spend their time, the educational opportunities available to them, the work expected of them, and where and how they would live. By putting themselves in the position of one of Twain’s fictional characters, visitors gain a new and personal perspective of the time, place, and culture at the heart of Twain’s novel.



As visitors prepare to leave Grant's Drug Store, which includes several exhibits on mortality rates, illnesses, and epidemics during the time period, they can try their luck and spin the Wheel of Misfortune, seeing whether they will live or die (and if they die, their cause of death).



As visitors enjoy educational videos on the main floor of the Museum Gallery, they are invited to climb aboard a raft, much like the one on which Huck and Jim traverse the Mississippi River in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, with a mural of the nighttime river on one side and the trees and vegetation of the “shore” on the other.



Each year, Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher return to the streets of Hannibal, as goodwill ambassadors who welcome visitors, bringing history and Twain's fiction to life.



The Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum is also dedicated to celebrating the lasting legacy of Twain's work, including displaying many different copies of Twain's books, including international editions of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.



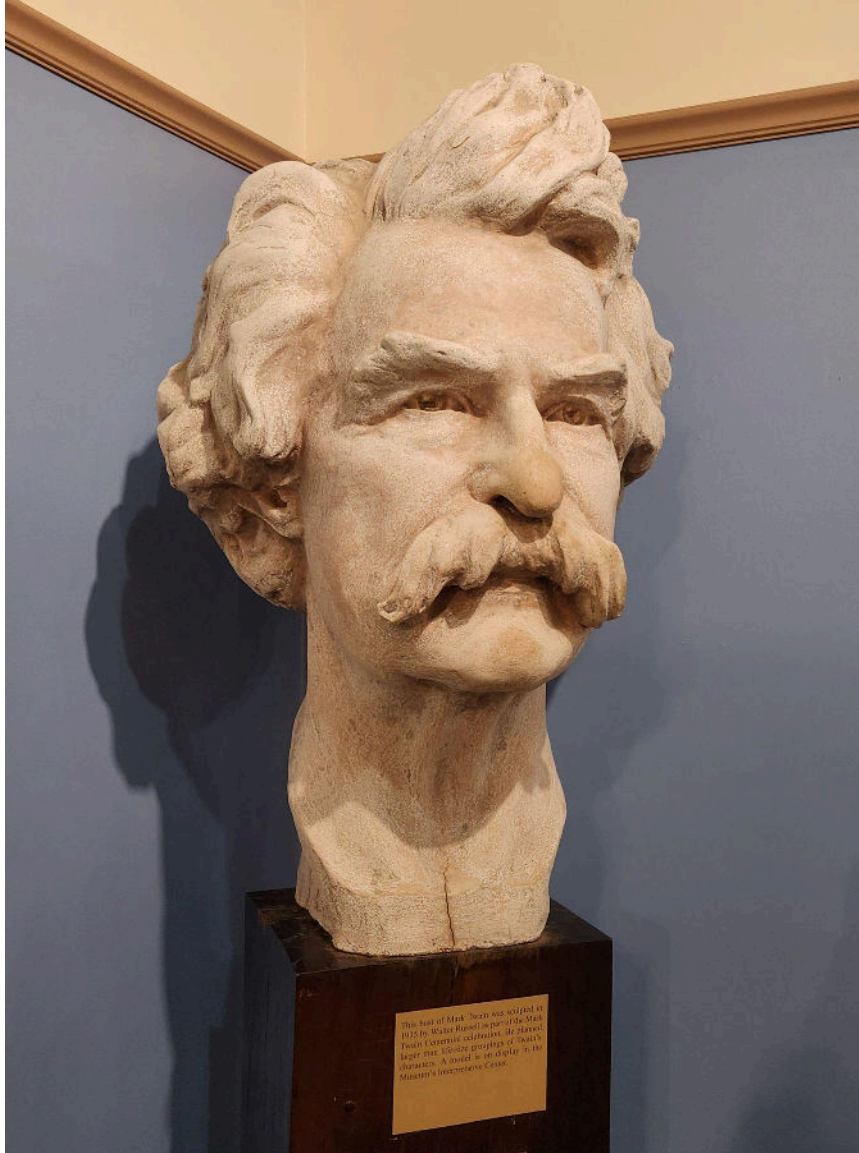
The Museum Gallery is home to an extensive collection of original Norman Rockwell paintings created for special illustrated editions of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The Rockwell gallery featuring the artist's illustrations for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* includes both Rockwell's sketches and paintings, reflecting adjustments and changes he made to his illustrations after visiting Hannibal.



Twain's work has inspired countless film and popular culture adaptations. Advertising posters and art for several of these adaptations are on display on the second floor of the Museum Gallery.



The ground floor of the Museum Gallery features a faux cave through which visitors can walk, following in Tom and Becky's terrified footsteps when they become lost in the cave toward the end of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. One of the alcoves of this cave features a very special resident: one of the prop bats from the 1938 David Selznick film *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.



The Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum celebrates Twain and his works, as well as the time and place that inspired it. Through exploring the museum's educational and interactive exhibits, visitors can situate themselves within this unique history and Twain's larger legacy.

Culver-Stockton College is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities and with support from the Missouri Humanities Trust Fund.