

Mark Twain's Boyhood Brought to Life

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by Andrew Walker

Growing up in Hannibal, Mo., gave Samuel Langhorne Clemens plenty to write about.

The famous author, who would eventually be better known as Mark Twain to readers all over the world, used Hannibal's waterside location along the grand Mississippi River, as well as a town full of colorful characters, as the basis for such novels as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

And although it has been nearly 100 years since Twain's death, the city of Hannibal has certainly not forgotten about its most famous son.

The Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum in Hannibal includes eight buildings and two museums that strive to capture Twain's influences and why he commonly chose to portray adolescents in his writings.

According to Dr. Regina Faden, executive director of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home Museum, Twain would come back to his childhood home in Hannibal to reflect on his childhood in order to better understand his adult life.

Visitors are encouraged to enter the Interpretive Center first, which focuses on Twain's childhood in Hannibal. Unlike many traditional museum settings, the Interpretive Center utilizes a user-friendly format to engage visitors.

A timeline on the wall includes autobiographical quotes with many colorful pictures. In addition to an old printing press that would be similar to the one that Twain's brother used for his own newspaper, the center also has copies of the first edition of *Huckleberry Finn*.

The childhood section features a replica room full of quotes and interactive exhibits of spin-wheel motion pictures. Although Faden mentioned that the museum strives to focus primarily on the life of Twain and not on the characters in his books, one of the highlights of this section includes comparisons between Twain and his character, Huckleberry Finn.

The next stop, the Huckleberry Finn house, is a must-see replica for all fans of the novel.

One of the main purposes of this building is to explain the controversial topics that the novel encompasses. It is also the home to writing seminars for children on race and how people treat each other.

A short distance from the Huckleberry Finn house is Twain's actual boyhood home. Although no items in the home actually belonged to the author, the artifacts are from the era in which Twain lived.

Statues of Twain in each room put the 5-foot-8-inch redhead in adult form back in his two-story home, which was given to the city in 1912 and was restored in 1991. One room named "Tom's Room" features an unmade bed and marbles on the ground, signifying Twain's childhood tendencies.

A couple blocks away from the childhood home is the Museum Gallery. For those looking for an up-close experience with scenes from Twain's novels, the gallery is the place to go.

The first floor includes many interactive exhibits, such as a replica raft, a replica cave with prop bats from the Tom Sawyer movie and old movie posters.

The top floor of the Museum Gallery houses some of Twain's most valuable personal possessions that showcase his intellectual personality. These include his old fountain pen, top hat, pipe, jewelry case and typewriter.

Displayed on three walls are Norman Rockwell paintings. In 1935, Rockwell donated 15 original paintings and signed lithographs of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn illustrations.

Other attractions, such as the Mark Twain Cave and Mark Twain Lake, are just a short drive off the beaten path. Visitors can also experience it all with the Mark Twain Walking Tour, which features "Mark Twain Himself," a live show starring Richard Garey acting as Twain.

Information about the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum is available by calling 573-221-9010, or by visiting www.marktwainmuseum.org.