



# The Mark Twain House & Museum



## > THE HISTORY OF THE MARK TWAIN HOUSE

**I NEVER SAW ANY PLACE WHERE MORALITY AND HUCKLEBERRIES FLOURISH AS THEY DO HERE.**

*- Mark Twain on Hartford, 1868*

Although Samuel L. Clemens, more commonly known as Mark Twain, is usually associated with the Mississippi River, he wrote his most famous books on the banks of the Connecticut. Between 1874 and 1891, Clemens raised a family, and published eight major works, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Prince and the Pauper* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, while living in this distinctive Gothic-style home at 351 Farmington Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut.

Today, The Mark Twain House & Museum is dedicated to preserving and promoting the author's legacy. Each year, more than 60,000 visitors take the opportunity to tour this unique home's 19 rooms, including the famous billiard room where he worked.

### The House and the Clemens Family

In 1871, Clemens moved to Hartford, which he had gotten to know while visiting his publisher, Elisha Bliss of the American Publishing Company. The author and his bride, Livy (the former Olivia Langdon), used funds from her inheritance to purchase a building site across the lawn from the home of Harriet Beecher Stowe, an author famous for writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

In 1873, the couple commissioned New York architects Edward Tuckerman Potter and Alfred H. Thorp to design their new house. Built in the Picturesque Gothic style, the Clemens' house attracted attention even before its celebrated owner moved in. *The Hartford Daily Times* commented, "The novelty displayed in the architecture of the building, the oddity of its internal arrangement, and the fame of its owner, will all conspire to make it a house of note for a long time to come."

The elaborate woodwork, intricate brick patterns, and several large balconies, have led some to claim that the house was modeled after an elaborate Mississippi River steamboat, reflecting Clemens' career as a riverboat pilot. These rumors, however, are exaggerated. The high balconies around the home's third floor might resemble the pilot house of a riverboat, but were likely built to take advantage of the sweeping views that could be enjoyed from the property.

In 1881, after the success of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), the couple turned to Louis Comfort Tiffany and his firm, Associated Artists of New York, to complete their home's interior with ornate stenciling and glasswork. The firm's partners—Tiffany, Lockwood de Forest, Candace Thurber Wheeler, and Samuel Colman—were among the most innovative and influential designers of the late 19th century. Louis Comfort Tiffany was, after all, the son of the founder of luxury brand Tiffany & Co.

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### FACEBOOK FAN PAGE

The Mark Twain House & Museum

### TWITTER

@TwainHouse

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marktwainhouse.blogspot.com/

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### LOCATION

351 Farmington Avenue  
Hartford, Connecticut

*Directions available on our website*  
[www.marktwainhouse.org](http://www.marktwainhouse.org)

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### HOURS OF OPERATION

*Visitors should allow a minimum of two hours to tour the home & enjoy the museum.*

Monday – Saturday: 9:30am to 5:30pm  
*Last tour leaves at 4:30pm*

Sunday: Noon to 5:30pm  
*Last tour leaves at 4:30pm*

*Closed Tuesdays from January – March,  
New Year's Day, Easter Sunday, July 4,  
Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve & Christmas Day*



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Sam and Livy Clemens brought up three daughters in the house: Susy, born in 1872; Clara, born in 1874; and Jean, born in 1880. A son, Langdon, had been born in 1870, but sadly died only two years later.

The girls were educated in the home's second-floor schoolroom. It had originally been Clemens' study, but his daughters' interruptions forced the author to move his workplace to the upstairs billiard room. In this sanctuary, Clemens would organize his manuscripts by spreading the pages out on the billiard table and later present new work to Livy for editing.

Clemens' success as a writer continued through the 1880s with the publication of *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). But as the decade drew to a close, the author faced financial ruin. Poor personal investments, including the "Paige Compositor" automatic typesetting machine on display in the Museum Center, dealt the Clemens family serious financial blows. In 1891, they left Hartford for Europe, where the cost of living was lower.

In 1896, while Clemens and the rest of the family were in England, eldest daughter Susy returned to Hartford for a visit. During her stay, she contracted meningitis—from which she never recovered. After Susy's death, the family never occupied the house again. Clemens sold the property in 1903.

### **A Literary Landmark**

The house was eventually turned into a boys' school, and later an apartment building. In 1919, a group of local citizens recognized the home's historic significance and developed plans to preserve it.

Ten years later, the state-chartered Mark Twain Memorial and Library Commission purchased the property. To help meet expenses, the Memorial leased the first floor to the Mark Twain Branch of the Hartford Public Library. Mark Twain artifacts and memorabilia were displayed in one room of the library, while apartments continued to be rented on the upper floors, the servants' wing and the nearby carriage house.

In 1955, the mortgage was paid off and the board of trustees began the daunting task of restoring the house. Their goal was to complete the project in time for the home's 100th anniversary in 1974. The effort stimulated donations of important Clemens memorabilia, objects of decorative art and archival materials.

In 2003, a 2,000-square-foot Museum Center on the grounds was opened to the public. The nation's first LEED-certified museum, it features the Aetna Gallery permanent orientation exhibit, "I have sampled this life"; a video introduction by acclaimed director Ken Burns; rotating exhibits on Twain's work and influence; two classrooms; and a 178-seat auditorium for special programs.

The museum's collections now contain approximately 50,000 artifacts, including Clemens' original manuscripts and first editions, historic photographs, family furnishings and Tiffany glass.