

# The Return of Mark Twain



by  
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Mark Twain's still got it! America's most famous author loved a practical joke or a good-natured spoof. I can almost hear him laughing now as his dying wish is coming true! The creator of Tom Sawyer left behind 5,000 unedited pages of memories. When he died in 1910 at age 74, he left handwritten instructions that the pages were not to be published until he had been dead for a century...which just happens to be right now. The first volume of his autobiography hit bookstores recently and is selling like hotcakes!

Twain very much enjoyed his celebrity status in his day, and by delaying his autobiography for 100 years he thought that people would still be talking about him well into the 21st century. Well, he was right! The book is already on many bestseller lists, and gone back to press six times. Stores cannot keep this book on the shelf! If he lived today, Mr. Twain would do well in the marketing business. I'm quite sure he would have his own blog and Facebook page.

✖ Americans have an enduring love affair with Mark Twain. Ernest Hemingway himself said, "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn...all American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing good since." William Faulkner wrote that Twain was, "the first truly American writer, and all of us since are his heirs."

As a resident of Fairhaven, MA, I have a passion for local history and have discovered that Mark Twain spent some significant time here. In 1893, Mark Twain was introduced to industrialist Henry Huttleston Rogers, the Vice President of Standard Oil, who happened to grow up in Fairhaven. As he got older, Rogers summered in Fairhaven in an 85-room mansion, and eventually was the town's most famous benefactor.

Rogers helped Twain at a time when his finances were in a tangled mess and he was on the verge of bankruptcy. Rogers helped save Twain's copyrights, as well as his sanity, and they became close friends for the remainder of their lives. Twain and Rogers were drinking and poker buddies, and Twain would visit the Rogers' family many times at their home in Fairhaven, as well as travel together on the Roger's yacht, *Kanauha*.

Twain was also present at many building dedications in Fairhaven. He gave the dedication speech at the opening of the Fairhaven Town Hall on Feb. 22, 1894 (the manuscript of the speech is on display at the Millicent Library). He also gave a humorous address at the laying of the cornerstone of the Unitarian Memorial Church. The following is the letter that Mark Twain read at the dedication of the Millicent Library :

*Fairhaven, Feb. 22, 1894*

*To the Officers of the Millicent Library:*

*I am glad to have seen it. It is the ideal library, I think. Books are the liberated spirits of men, and should be bestowed in a heaven of light and grace and harmonious color and sumptuous comfort, like this, instead of in the customary kind of public library, with its depressing austerities and severities of form and furniture and decoration. A public library is the most enduring of memorials, the trustiest monument for the preservation of events or a name or an affection; for it, and it only is respected by wars and*

*revolutions, and survives them. Creed and opinion change with time, and their symbols perish; but literature and its temples are sacred to all creeds, and inviolate. All other things which I have seen today must pass away and be forgotten; but there will still be a Millicent Library when by the mutations of language the books that are in it now will speak in a lost tongue to your posterity.*

*Truly yours,*

*Mark Twain*



Mark Twain and  
Huttleston Rogers:  
1908

The tycoon and the writer were kindred spirits and both fond of poker, billiards, practical jokes and mild profanity. Twain was grief stricken when he heard of the death of his dear friend, Henry, in 1909 and was a pall bearer at his funeral. Twain himself died less than one year later.

He wrote in 1909: "I came in with Haley's comet in 1835. It is coming again next year and I intend to go out with it." And so he did! Haley's comet can be seen in the earth's skies once every 75-76 years. It was visible in November 1835 when Mark Twain was born, and it was also visible on April 1910 when he died.

Mark Twain's memoir, which contains letters, diary entries, pictures, and personal notes, is a book to be read in small bites. It's the kind of book you could read a little bit of every day of your life. With the holidays approaching, I would suggest Mark Twain's autobiography to any book-lovers on your Christmas list-that is, if you can find one!