

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Traveling America (IV)
Room Service for Dogs, A Bar in West Virginia, The 1811 National Highway,
The Zane Grey Museum, Mark Twain's Home**

Traveling America (IV): National Highway and Mark Twain's Home Report One: Room Service for Dogs

October 2 and 3, 2006

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. I have not sent a report to you for several weeks. I've been busy relocating from the east of America to the west. Your Reporter, Reporterette, and dog Milli recently moved from Virginia to Idaho. This report covers several stops on our way. The segment from Pentagon City, Virginia, to Hannibalm Missouri, is seen in Figure 1.

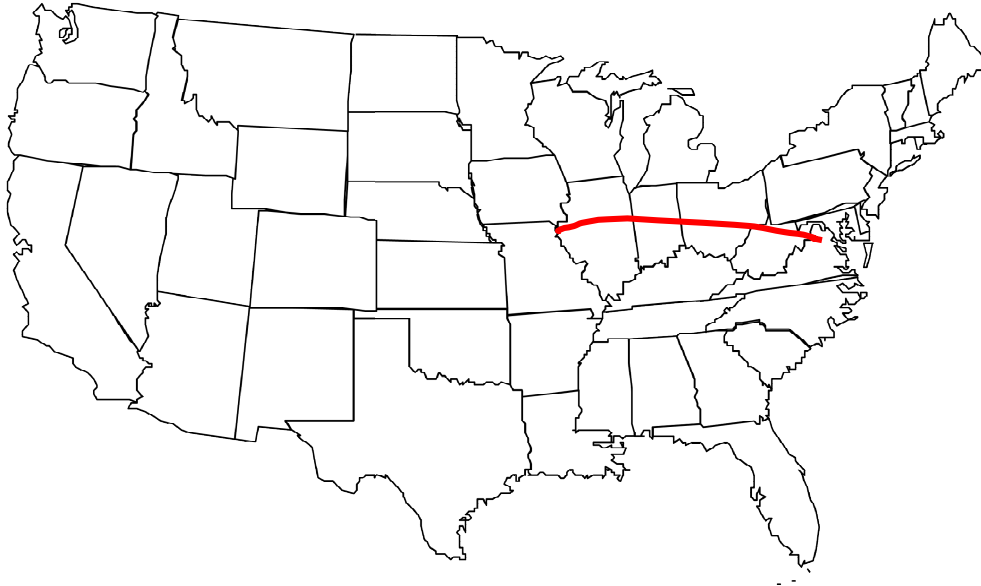


Figure 1. Route for Traveling America (IV).

I have been busy dealing with *stuff*. If you've experienced moving your stuff--- accumulated over several decades---you can understand my preoccupation with this operation. It consisted of packing-up tons of forgotten relics from a deep storage area in an ignored basement.

I had not visited this part of my home for years. After I opened the door to this treasure, I realized I did not recognize its contents. But the storage area belonged to me so I assumed I belonged to its contents. It was from another era of my life and, therefore, important for reminisces in my old age. Thus, this stuff was transported across the continent to a deep storage area in a soon-to-be-ignored basement in Idaho, an area I may never visit again.

Why do we do it? We have enough encumbrances on our minds and shoulders. Why burden ourselves with stuff whose only viewing will be a few days after the viewing of our dead body at the funeral home? At that time, our children will take a cursory look at our artifacts, gather-up this discarded desideratum of our lives, and transport it to the nearest garbage dump.

Which reminds me of a Mark Twain saying, "The habits of people are determined by their stuff. The Bermudians lean upon barrels because of the scarcity of stuff."

Mark didn't say those words exactly, but it was close.¹ Anyway, my point is that we modern humans seem to be obsessed with material possessions. I am not immune from this "hardship." I consume far more than I need. I live a materialistic, stuff-oriented life because I buy stuff not needed to keep me going.

For example, bottled water. Water in a bottle costs as much as soda in a bottle. A sizable number of people in this world would give up their beloved dog, maybe even a wife or child, to drink water---bottled or unbottled. Think of it: All the person wants in life is water, the liquid we put on our rose bushes and aquariums.

This modest desire relates to an episode your reportage team experienced as we began our move to Idaho. It occurred in Falls Church, Virginia, just a few blocks north from our now vacant home. After packing up tons of stuff, the team prepared to leave the Northern Virginia area. We decided an Interstate Motel 8 would be a second choice to a Ritz-Carlton. We were tired and had little motivation to do much more for the day.

I mention our stay at the Ritz-Carlton for two reasons. First, pets were allowed. Even more, Milli was provided room service. A waiter brought-up a dinner tray for her---and her alone. The waiter delivered dog food, a water dish, a bottle of Evian water (no joke), and several fancy-looking biscuits. Second, we had a fine view of the Air Force Memorial located a few blocks away, still under construction, and soon to be inaugurated with a speech by President Bush.

Room Service for Dogs

Holly and I had not yet settled-in when: Knock, knock, "Room service. Hello folks. Here are some treats for Milli. Have a good evening." The waiter knew Milli's name because I had registered her at the front desk.

I confess. I was impressed, so impressed that I commandeered Milli's water, and poured H₂O from a facet into her Ritz-Carlton water dish. I confess again. I sampled her Ritz-Carlton dog biscuits, shaped as bones. I was disappointed because the food was over-cooked, not what one would expect from a Ritz-Carlton kitchen.

I marvel at America's bounty. Room service for dogs. If I were so-disposed, this scene could have left me feeling guilty because I had quaffed down my dog's Evian Water and part of her meal. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic in Africa, folks are dying from no water at all. But they don't have to worry about feeding their dogs any bones because they have eaten their dogs.

So what? What am *I* supposed to do about Darfur? I'm only one person. And, after all, Piggly Wiggly has not yet reached many parts of the world where T-bone steaks and Evian water are hard to come by. In these lands, the pathetic output of a sparse garden belonging to a friend across the alley is a prime target for a raid to kill that neighbor and take his food and water. I read about it in the papers and wonder why those folks can't manage to feed themselves.

How about you? Maybe it is because they do not practice democracy. Maybe it is because they aren't Christians. Maybe it is because we Westerners got a head start on those folks centuries ago and have not relinquished the lead. But how did we get the head start in the first place? A subject of another time. For now, back to room service for dogs.

Deciding to let Milli have her meal to herself, we ordered room service and dined while looking at the new Air Force Memorial from our window. (See Figure 2, taken the following

¹ He said, "The habits of all people are determined by their circumstances. The Bermudians lean upon barrels because of the scarcity of lampposts. From his "Some Rambling Notes of an Idle Excursion," and R. Kent Rasmussen, editor, *Mark Twain, His Words, Wit, and Wisdom* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1997), 118.

morning). Rising early, we headed-out to see a bit of America. Our itinerary was to drive through the mid-west, visiting several Presidential homes, libraries, and museums.



Figure 2. The New Air Force Memorial, still under construction.

Traveling America (IV) **Report Two: A Morgantown, West Virginia, Bar**

October 2 and 3, 2006

Before the reportage team departed Northern Virginia, we debated how far south we would go. I had watched a television program this week about the hometown of Dean Martin. Steubenville, Ohio, was too far south for us, but I put Dean's home on my list of future visits because he is one of my favorite singers.

I still listen to "Memories are Made of This." Not so much because of the song itself, but because it brings back memories of a high school girl with whom I was hopelessly in love. She knew the words to Dean's song and would softly sing them to me as we Texas-two-stepped/dirty danced across the Youth Center floor in my hometown. Memories of soft timbres drifting into my ears from tender, nearby lips:²

*Take one fresh and tender kiss.
Add one stolen night of bliss.
Memories are made of this.*

Mark Twain once said, "Remember all thou canst---*seem* to remember all else."³ Memories keep us intact, aligned to our past. They provide a way to hold on to the present, in spite of a dim outlook for the future.

The television program showed one of Dean's hangouts, Maple's Spaghetti House. It also showed a memorial mass conducted for Dean. On the altar of the church was a picture of the singer and this quote, "Lord, receive the gift we offer for brother Dean Martin." How can we not love America? I will wager this sort of ceremony would never happen in Rome or Mecca.

Have Pet, Will Travel

Traveling with a dog presents new challenges to a person who has not owned a dog since he was ten years old. Finding a hotel or motel that accepts pets is not as straight-forward as it might appear. And when a pet-friendly room is found, rules usually proclaim the following: (These quotes are taken verbatim from several motels along the Interstates.)

- "Pets must be accompanied with a human." That is to say, Milli is not allowed to saunter unattended to the hotel bar for a drink. Also, unless accompanied by a human, Milli cannot use the Jacuzzi, because someone must be present to turn-on and turn-off the bubbles.
- "Pets must be kept on a leash when pets are outside the room." Even if Milli were allowed to take on some Evian water in the hotel saloon, she would have to be haltered, which takes the fun away from bar hopping.
- "Pets must clean up." Instructions lay a heavy burden on Milli, carry around a plastic bag when she mills-around the motel lawn.

² First stanza from Dean's song.

³ R. Kent Rasmussen, 175.

- "No pets in restaurant or bar." Ritz-Carlton solves this problem with room service for dogs. Motel 8 has no such service. But then Motel 8 has no restaurant or bar.
- "Pet must be kept in a cage when pet is in the room." This was not a universal requirement, but I came across the rule in two of the motels where we stayed.
- "Pets may not occupy a room alone. " I am pushing the envelope here, but what tourist would go to the expense of renting a room just for a dog?
 - Reservationist, "How many rooms would you like to reserve for this evening?"
 - Tourist, "One single, and one double."
 - Reservationist, "King size or Queen?"
 - Tourist, "Doesn't matter, but we need a cage in the single room."
- "Fifteen minutes prior to your departure, call the front desk. A staff member will come to your room to check for any dog shit left on the carpet." The rule actually reads, "Fifteen minutes prior to your departure, call the front desk. A staff member will come to your room to assist you with your final pet check-out."

Morgantown, West Virginia

Our first overnight stop was off the Interstate in Morgantown, West Virginia. We secured a room successfully, but I had to walk to a local restaurant to bring in food for the reportage team. Milli was not allowed to stay in the room by herself, so we played by the rules. Holly dog-sat, while I foraged for food.

I ordered our meals and went to the restaurant bar to await their frying. The bar was a small U-shaped arrangement, and occupied by a tired truck driver, who was tossing-down shots of Jack Daniels; a young couple who had bottles of Bud in front of them; a salad eater, who was washing-down his possibly toxic veggies with Miller Lite.

- I sat down and said to the barmaid, "Johnny Walker Red with soda."
- Barmaid, "Not sure we have any Johnny Walker."
- As she started a search for the booze, the truck driver asked me, "Say, have you ever had Johnny Walker, Blue Label?"
- I replied, "Yep, but not very often. Costs over \$100 a bottle. Truth is, I was going to order a glass of Pinot Noir, but I didn't see any wine bottles around."

The four patrons and the barmaid gave me a disdainful look: *Elitist!* First, scotch whiskey. Then wine. Even worse, wine with a name.

I come from a modest background. In my father's younger days, he sheared sheep for a living. In my younger days, I slopped hogs, gathered eggs, and hoed weeds. I should have been a politician: my humble-background resume is tops. If I have any elitism about me, it comes with an appreciation of the blue-collar world.

Whatever their views might have been about me, I was enjoying their company. Our food was still being fried, and I wanted to continue the repartee. So, I changed my order, "Never mind, just bring me a Coors Light."

More stares from the patrons. Another West Virginia *faux pas*. Bud is what Americans order in West Virginia. So, I offered, "I'm from New Mexico. In my college days, we drank Coors."

Elitist! Tossing names around, like college. I backtracked, "But that was a long time ago. Ma'am, make it a Bud."

The man of the couple broke the ice. "Coors ain't so bad, but around here, we call it Lady Light."

Coors! The kick-ass beer of my college days? And Bud? Talk about a testament to water. Anyway, the man eating the salad and drinking Miller Lite said,

- "I've been through your part of the country on my bike. Can't believe how much of nothing there is between Roswell and Dallas."
- "Yeah, I've been through that area many times. How did you pass the time? Did you listen to music?"
- I could picture the cool dude plugged into some of Bob Dylan's blue highway borrowings.
- "No, that would have distracted me from the ride."

If I had been in his boots, I would have done almost anything to distract me from hundreds of miles of straight road paved over a featureless landscape. I prefer traveling America's highways that meander through mountains and trees. Some of my relatives from the flat terrain of southeastern New Mexico complained their visits to our home in Virginia---with its tree-lined highways---gave them a sense of claustrophobia. I suggested they suffered from the Freudian malady called tree envy.

On the other hand, as I have become accustomed to living in places with high hills and high populations of pines and aspens, I have begun to appreciate what is called the Big Sky Country, that part of America where I was born and reared. The sky seems big, because there are no mountains and trees to obstruct the view of its expansive horizon.

Anyway, if I have learned anything in life, it is how to win friends and influence people in bars: Buy everyone drinks. I called over the barmaid, and proclaimed to all present, "Hey everyone, the drinks are on me!"

I was no longer an elitist. No one cared if I drank scotch or a labeled red wine. No one was concerned about my college contamination of his or her milieu. I was now one of the boys (and girl) at the bar. "Order up. Anything you like."

At which time, the truck driver put in an order for a double Jack Daniels and the couple switched to tequila. But the biker opted for another Miller Lite. I supposed this guy was in training.

The truck driver, upon making his order, was gracious about the double, "Are you sure about this? A double OK with you?"

"Yep. I'm buying the drinks with my wife's social security check."

Whoa! Cheers and whoops from all the males. After all, a man who would spend his wife's social security check on beer and booze must have something going for him.

Shortly, our fried cuisine arrived. I hoofed it back to the motel room and explained to my wife that I had spent her social security check on local bar patrons.

Holly replied, "But I don't receive social security payments."

"When you do, the first check belongs to me."

Traveling America (IV) **Report Three: The National Highway and the Zane Grey Museum**

October 3 and 4, 2006

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. During the first part of this journey, we traveled on U.S. Highway 40 and Interstate 68. Pausing at a rest stop around Cumberland, Maryland, we found ourselves at the end or beginning---depending on one's direction of travel---of the famous National Road, also called the Cumberland Road or the National Highway. It is known as America's first highway. Because it passed through many towns and cities, from Cumberland to Vandalia, Illinois, some people named it the Main Street of America.⁴

Construction began on the road in 1811, but its history goes back to the preceding century.⁵

As with so many major human accomplishments, the National Road had its roots in the desire to make money. In 1751, the Ohio Company of Virginia hired a Delaware Indian named Nemacolin to blaze a path to its holdings near what is now Brownsville, Pennsylvania. Two years later, as a Colonial Army major, George Washington rode that same trail to demand that French commanders pull their troops from Pennsylvania—a request that was not only rebuffed but also touched off the French and Indian War. In subsequent years Washington widened the trail when he built, then surrendered, Fort Necessity and helped command a force that improved the route again when he served as an aide-de-camp to British Gen. Edward Braddock during a disastrous campaign against the French.

After the Revolution, Washington worried about the fate of the young country's western territories, which were still wedged between conflicting European powers. He feared the residents might align themselves commercially and politically with "the Spaniards on their right, or Great Britain on their left."

The solution, he declared, was to "open a wide door, and make a smooth way for the produce of that Country to pass to our Markets before the trade may get into another channel." The dream of a national road was born. Congress passed a bill to create the road in 1806, and Thomas Jefferson signed it.

Thus began a rich legacy for America, one that did not happen overnight. Building the road over the Appalachian Mountains was a difficult and time-consuming task. Construction ended around 1852 because of the increasing use of railroads to support western migration. Still, the road had a great impact on America during its young years. It served as an important artery into America's west.

Figure 3 shows a map of the road, as displayed at the National Road and Zane Grey Museum. The map and resulting image do not lend themselves to a graceful depiction on a small

⁴ "National Highway," *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia*, and visit to the National Road and Zane Grey Museum.

⁵ "National Highway," sidebar, *Encarta*, in William Newcott, article, 1998 *National Geographic* article.

page, so I have added annotations showing the major cities and towns the highway passed through.

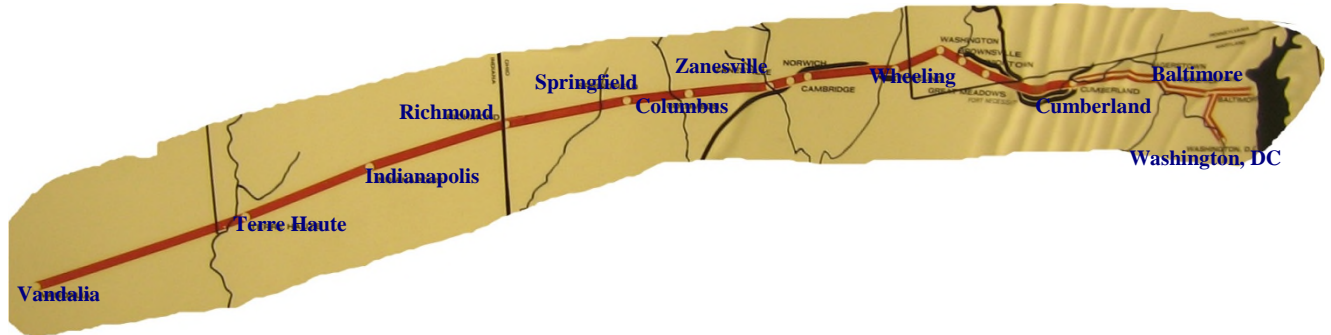


Figure 3. The route of the National Highway.

Zanesville, Ohio

On our second day of travel, we approached the city of Zanesville, Ohio. I saw a mileage marker for the town and mentioned to my team, "I'll bet that place is named after Zane Grey, the famous writer of inaccurate books." I was off-base on two counts. First, Zane Grey wrote fiction, which is supposed to be inaccurate. Second, the town was named after Ebenezer Zane, who forged a trail through the area and was later given land nearby. Originally called Westbroune, in 1801, it was renamed Zanesville. I would have preferred Ebenezerville. Anyway, Zane Grey was a descendent of Ebenezer Zane.

A few miles outside of Zanesville, we spotted a sign, "The National Road and Zane Grey Museum." An interesting combination. Maybe Zane Grey, with his trail blazing fantasies, had something to do with the National Highway. We took the exit and pulled up to a crossroads. The problem was that a second sign was not available to direct us left or right. Luckily, we turned right and saw the museum a few miles down the road.

- Museum person, "Hi folks. Welcome. You're the first today."
- "Thanks. Say, you need to place a sign at the Interstate off-ramp that directs a driver which way to turn."
- "Which direction are you going?"
- "West."
- "We have a sign at the off-ramp if you're going east."
- We nodded. I responded, "I see."
- What could I say? I sought a Clint Eastwood retort, but nothing came forth. If this man did not understand the two-way nature of highway traffic, who were we to educate him?
- Reporterette gave up and entered the exhibit. I hung around to satisfy my curiosity, "Why does the museum have two names, National Road and Zane Grey? Did Grey help build the National Highway?"
- "No. We thought two attractions would be better than one."
- "Really? Why not bring in an airplane and name the place The National Road, Zane Grey, and Air and Space Museum?"
- "We don't want to mix-up our themes."

I let it go. And in fairness, the museum is worth a diversion from the Interstate to see old bridges and covers of Zane Grey's paperbacks. The more interesting exhibits were dioramas

depicting the building of the National Road. I took a picture of one exhibit that showed (and explained) the tedium of building the road across hundreds of streams and rivers. Initially, small wooden bridges were constructed, as seen in Figure 4. Later, steel bridges or culverts were put into place, especially when the automobile came along in the early part of the 20th Century.



Figure 4. Initial efforts.

The planners intended the road's financing to occur from sales of public lands in the states through which the road would traverse. The inevitable shortfall of funds for highway construction is not a recent phenomenon. For this project, the federal government had to pony-up an additional \$6,821,246 to complete the road. I wonder how many yards of road seven million dollars would fund today?

Birth of the Roadside Motel

I am devoting a lot of space to the National Road. One reason is I love dioramas. Also, this road was the birthplace of roadside motels---places in which I have slept-away many hours of my life.

Like the inns of yesteryear in Europe, local citizens along this highway began to offer their homes for lodging to travelers. As traffic increased, the homes' bedrooms became crowded. Unlike the old times, where travelers (even strangers) would share the same room and bed, the innkeepers began to build small cottages next to the main house. Meals and bathing would take place in the big house. Sleeping would take place in the little houses. We still see these structures in some parts of the country, now abandoned or used as storage sheds for America's stuff.

Several of the museum exhibits displayed wax figures showing scenes from the first days of these motels. My favorite is depicted in Figure 5. Two travelers have sat down for their meal in the big house kitchen. The man on the left seems to be hungry, as he has ordered an entire pot of soup. The man on the right seems chagrined by this state of affairs, possibly because the pot of soup constitutes the motel's entire menu for the evening. As they say, "First come, first served."



Figure 5. Jostling for vittles.

The Zane Grey Part of the Museum

The Zane Grey exhibits did not hold my interest as much as the National Road displays. Still, it was fun to learn more about this novelist. Holly was interested in Grey, as she and her family have a cottage on Catalina Island. Zane Grey spent a lot of time there, and a local hotel is named after him.

Below is an excerpt from *Microsoft's Encarta* description of Mr. Grey, altered by your Reporter. (Encarta's original text is provided at the end of this report.)

Zane Grey (1875-1939), American novelist, noted for his careful research and for his accurate portrayal of the American West. Born in Zanesville, Ohio, Grey was trained as a dentist, but in those pre-Novocain days, he was not into pain. So he turned to the even more painful career of writing in 1904, when his first book was published. (Actually, he began writing just a bit before his first book came out, but who's parsing Microsoft's sentences?) That novel, *Betty Zane*, was based on the experiences of one of his ancestors. He had considered writing about another ancestor, Ebenezer Zane, but this man's first name was too difficult to spell, so he settled on Betty. Grey wrote more than 50 novels---an astounding feat in those days before writers were allowed to borrow words from other writers. Most of the books were tales of adventure with a Western setting, including *The Last of the Plainsmen* (1908), *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912), *The Thundering Herd* (1925), *Code of the West* (1934), and *West of the Pecos* (1937). His nonfiction works include *Tales of Fishing* (1925), which is a contradiction in concepts, because the very subject of fishing leads only to tales

of fiction. Many of Grey's novels continue to be extremely popular, and several have been adapted into motion pictures, starring such cowboy heroes such as Gene Autry, Whip Wilson, John Travolta, and Dustin Hoffman.

It was time to continue our travels. Before leaving, I searched for a Zane Grey T-shirt in the museum's gift shop. No luck. I contented myself with a travel brochure of Ohio.

As for the actual text about Zane:

Zane Grey (1875-1939), American novelist, noted for his careful research and for his accurate portrayal of the American West. Born in Zanesville, Ohio, Grey trained as a dentist but turned to writing as a career in 1904, when his first book was published. That novel, *Betty Zane*, was based on the experiences of one of his ancestors. Grey wrote more than 50 novels, most of them tales of adventure with a Western setting, including *The Last of the Plainsmen* (1908), *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912), *The Thundering Herd* (1925), *Code of the West* (1934), and *West of the Pecos* (1937). His nonfiction works include *Tales of Fishing* (1925). Many of Grey's novels continue to be extremely popular, and several have been adapted into motion pictures about the west.⁶

⁶ "Zane Grey," *Microsoft Encarta*, 2006.

Traveling America (IV) Report Four: Mark Twain's Home

October 7, 2006

We took to the roads early this morning, leaving Springfield, Illinois, on Interstate 72, and headed for Missouri. These past two days had been spent touring the home, museum, and tomb of Abraham Lincoln, a visit covered in the *Presidential Places* reports.

Our goal for the day was to reach Independence, the home of former President Harry S. Truman. As we were crossing the Illinois-Missouri border and the Mississippi River, we spotted a road sign informing us Hannibal, Missouri, was at the next exit.

- Reporter, "Say, the name Hannibal rings a bell. I believe this town is famous for its namesake. That would be the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, born 247 BC, died 183 BC, who coincidentally, was the son of Hamilcar Barca."
- Reporterette, "Yes, indeed, this town's name is well-known because Hannibal led 40,000 Carthaginian troops in a march across the Alps to battle with Rome. He used elephants for transport and executed one of the greatest feats in military history."
- Milli, *Pedants. Phonies. The town of Hannibal is famous because Mark Twain spent his childhood there.*

Sorry Milli, just trying to lay out some facts.⁷ Anyway, we pulled off the Interstate to spend a few hours at the hometown of one of my favorite writers of folklore, who embellished his observations of America with an extraordinary imagination.

Visiting Hannibal this time of year gave us ample space to wander around. After talking with the citizens, I recommend you try to avoid the summer months. The town is packed with tourists, and it is difficult to find sleeping accommodations.

While Mr. Twain spent many of his young years in Hannibal, he was born in the small town of Florida, Missouri. In his autobiography, he describes this village, his early home, and that of his uncle, where he spent much of his youth.⁸ The dates were mid-to-late 1830s.

That was a long time ago. Still, I recall my early days on a ranch in New Mexico and my visits to Mom's relatives in Central Texas. Many of the scenes from Twain's childhood, our ranch, and our relatives' farms are the same. No electricity. No indoor bathrooms, at least at our relatives' homes. Dad was a state-of-the-art toilet man and installed plumbing in the main ranch house. He relegated the hired hands to outdoor Johns.

In those days of long ago: Dry or muddy roads---nothing in-between---no pavement within miles. Solitude. Manual labor throughout the day. Arid, innervating heat from sunrise to sunset, occasionally assuaged with cool windmill water, pumping through a chilly pipe onto the face and into the mouth of a dehydrated boy. After the noon meal, a short swim in a cattle tank. The dip into the cold water was a bit of heaven, however temporary, on the dry and stifling prairies of New Mexico.

We had food galore: beef, pork, catfish, fried chicken, venison, biscuits, cornbread, fresh vegetables from the garden, milk straight from the cows' teats; "clabber," fresh pies, freshly

⁷ "Hannibal," quotes, *Microsoft's Encarta*.

⁸ Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1959), chapters 1-9.

churned butter, iced tea. No one was overweight, yet we consumed calories on a par with that of our pigs.

I recall we sometimes had two or three kinds of meat at a meal. But for some reason, our cook placed pork only on the breakfast table, but never for dinner (lunch) or supper (dinner). I did not taste pork chops for "dinner" until my freshman year in college. (Look up the word *parochial* in the dictionary: my picture is accompanied with a definition.)

I recall going through the cafeteria line at the men's dorm and watched in disbelief as the server placed two pork chops onto my tray. I was baffled, offended. *What are these guys up to? Pawning off paltry pork for dinner! They need to broaden their horizons.*

Granted, perhaps I did not think those witty thoughts. As Mark said, "When I was younger, I could remember anything, whether it happened to me or not."⁹ Same goes for me, but I recall going to my table, sitting down with my friends, and commenting on the low-grade of meat served at the supposedly high meal of the day. My eastern buddies, after commenting on my cultural voids, explained pork was an acceptable menu entry for the evening repast.

Mark Twain's Home

Many of Mark Twain's characters are based on his friends and relatives. Many of the props for his stories are taken from natural and manmade assemblies he encountered in his day-to-day life.



Figure 6 shows a picture of his home in Hannibal (the white clapboard house). On numerous occasions, he writes about this house. He paid a call on the place later in his life (1912). At that time, he offered comments about the locations of several Tom Sawyer episodes. Twain's tales made the fence to the right side of the house one of the most famous fences in American literature: Tom Sawyer's fence. According to the signs around the area, here stood the fence where Tom's friends paid him for the privilege of their whitewashing it.

Figure 6. Mark Twain's childhood home and the white fence.

In the early times of his life, Mark (and your writer) were often sent to Sunday school and then to the Sunday church service. I think Mr. Twain's minister was more even-handed than mine. My Southern Baptist minister scared the bejusus out of me: I was afraid to pray, halfway expecting some great hand from the sky (the location of heaven) to scoop me up and toss me into Hell. All because my prayers weren't sincere. Mostly, I prayed because I was afraid not to.

But not Mark. He was blessed with more practical and kinder mentors. His elementary school teacher, Mrs. Horr, explained the prayer, "Ask and ye shall receive," if prayed hard enough, would be answered. Given this advice, here is what happened to Mark.

I was so forcibly struck by this information and so gratified by the opportunities, which it offered, that this was probably the first time I had heard of it. I thought I would give it a trial. I believed in Mrs. Horr thoroughly, and I had no doubt as to

⁹ Twain, *Autobiography*, 4.

the result. I prayed for gingerbread. Margaret Kooneman, who was the baker's daughter, brought a slab of gingerbread to school every morning; she had always kept it out of sight before, but when I finished my prayer and glanced up, there it was in easy reach, and she was looking the other way. In all my life, I believe I never enjoyed an answer to prayer more than I enjoyed that one, and I was a convert, too. I had no end to wants, and they had always remained unsatisfied up to that time, but I meant to supply them and extend them now that I had found out how to do it.¹⁰

But reality sat in. The next time he prayed for gingerbread, he had no success. Eventually, he decided it was more rewarding to keep his eye on the gingerbread than to pray for it.

The Museum

Hannibal's downtown area is adjacent to the banks of the Mississippi. The town's citizens, recognizing a good thing when they see it, have attempted to retain its old, village atmosphere. Practically every business in a five-block span is devoted to Mark Twain in one fashion or another. Shops and sandwiches are named after Mark, as are ice cream cones and drinks. Along this way, a couple blocks down the street from Twain's home, is a museum containing some of his belongings and examples of life in Hannibal when he was a resident. A visitor can see old carriages, dioramas, and a model of the bridge of a Mississippi paddle boat.

On the second floor are two walls of Norman Rockwell originals. This display was my favorite part of the museum. I recognize we sophisticated, urbane Americans are no longer supposed to care for Rockwell's work as they are, according to art critics, sentimental and trite. Maybe, but at least the man could render onto the canvas what was before him. A piece of asparagus in his painting was undeniably a piece of asparagus.

I took the snapshot of a Rockwell piece hanging on the Hannibal museum wall. It is shown on the left side of Figure 7. I took the photo on the right side of the figure from a wall in the Smithsonian East Gallery. It is a painting by Ellsworth Kelly, one of America's most respected abstract artists, best known for his use of color and successive murals of only one color. I trust one example is sufficient. I will not belabor the point, but if you want a diatribe on abstract, modern art (the minimalist school), I'll send you my "Confessions of a Modern Art Luddite."

I close this report with another quote from Mark Twain, part of a speech he made to the Savage Club in 1907, "I don't know anything that mars good literature so completely as too much truth. Facts contain a great deal of poetry, but you can't use too many of them without damaging your literature."¹¹

¹⁰ Twain, *Autobiography*, 42.

¹¹ On the wall of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum.



Figure 7. Panned art (on the left), and exalted art (on the right).

An interesting comment from a revered person and writer, to whom I dedicated one of my books. But Twain made no claim to accuracy. Even some recollections in his "factual" autobiography seem far-fetched. Perhaps when he finally wrote this book in his later years, he had succumbed to that affliction made famous by...well, let's give credit to Bob Dylan, just to even the score of his not giving credit to another dead writer. Perhaps Twain could have said, "Old habits die hard."

Yet Twain did engage in work that he wished to reflect not just his wonderful imagination, but the realities of life, the hard facts about living. He considered *Joan of Arc* his finest and most important work, "I like *Joan of Arc* best of all my books, and it is the best, I know it perfectly well. And besides, it furnished me seven times the pleasure afforded me by any of the others, twelve years of preparation, and two years of writing. The others needed no preparation and got none."¹²

So much of those famous, well-thought-out plots. I suspect Mr. Twain pretty much wrote what came to mind.

In contrast to Mark Twain, I have derived as much pleasure writing on matters that come to mind than I have from writing books about facts, which required months or years of research. Perhaps my recent writing is a welcome change of pace, as *Joan of Arc* was for Twain.

It was time to hit the Interstates again. I would have liked to have spent more time visiting and writing about Twain's Hannibal, Missouri. Perhaps some other time. For now, we continued our trek across this part of America to visit the homes of some former presidents, and recounted in the *Presidential Places* essays and reports.

¹² Back cover, *Joan of Arc* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).