President’s Column

Michael J. Kiskis
Elmira College
President, MTCA

My mother tried to teach me two lessons: never go to someone’s house empty-handed; and always say thank you (I am better at remembering the second, though still consistently fallible). The second applies here. I want to thank Vic Doyno for his good work as president of the Circle. He has been a treat to work with and, if anything, much too kind. If he has a hard edge, I haven’t been able to strike it. With luck I will have more opportunities. Thanks, Vic.

To business. As you read through this issue of the Circular, you may happen to turn to the end page and read the brief sketches that chart some of the history of the Circle. You’ll find that we have some celebrating to do. And some planning. This winter’s meeting at the MLA in Washington will, in fact, mark the tenth anniversary of the first gathering—in New York in 1986. I recall sitting quietly in the back of the room and rather sheepishly (yes, it’s hard to imagine) volunteering to work with several other new members to draft the first version of the bylaws. I suspect that none of us realized what we were about to start or understood the potential for intellectual excitement and just plain good fun that we were about to unleash. Since then the group has continued to grow both in membership and in reputation (we need not speculate on the variety or quality of individual reputations we have managed to entertain). Our programs at the yearly MLA and ALA meetings; the special symposium held in Cancún in 1994 sponsored jointly by the Circle, the American Humor Studies Association, and ALA; the Circle’s presence at the 1989, 1993, and upcoming 1997 Elmira conferences; and our support for the Mark Twain Project have contributed to a broadening of interest in Mark Twain. One look at the programs for the 1996 SAMLCA and MLA (listings appear elsewhere in this issue) reinforces the point: new ideas and perspectives have had and will continue to have ample opportunity to be heard and discussed.

The Circle, in short, has been a stunning success. We have become an organization that intentionally welcomes new voices in Twain studies. We have, it seems, become an audience known for its willingness to make way for ideas as well as a community that treats its work seriously while making sure that it does not take itself too seriously. Rivalries are (mostly) good-natured; we battle more out of skepticism than malice. It’s an unusually convivial group, a group more likely to break into jokes and order more drinks than to break up the intellectual furniture and order expulsions for unorthodox thinking.

All that in the first ten years. So, it’s time now to consider what we would like to do with that success—how we can best capitalize on it and how we can prepare for the next decade. And I would like to hear from all of you about possibilities. When Vic packed his files to send along to me, there were several folders that highlighted ongoing projects—for example, membership issues, high-school outreach, conference programs, and awards. Those will remain on our agenda. But I would like to hear from members so that we can build our agenda for the coming months and years. Mail (Humanities Division, Elmira College, Elmira, NY 14901), e-mail (mjkiskis@aol.com), fax (607-735-1758). We (the executive committee) may not be able to attend to all suggestions, but we will look at them all and attempt to set a clear direction.

Let me offer an example. Some time ago, I received a telephone call from a person who wanted me to file for the presidential ballot in New York State and then use Twain’s political

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commentary to set a platform as well as a legislative and moral agenda. I did not take up the challenge. (I can hear some of you out there asking, “But why the hell not?”) Having now thought a bit more about Twain’s acts of public dissent, I believe he would be immensely amused (maybe bemused, or just plain annoyed is more accurate) that a whole society of over 400 individuals has devoted itself to his circle of friends, literary acquaintances, ideas, novels, stories, lies. He might wonder just what we were doing talking so frequently to each other while so many of the damned human race are running full-tilt to hell.

Well, maybe not. But he would see the value in a strong collection of personalities and interests and relish the potential for finding the unexpected and then spreading the word. Let’s continue to work toward surprise. And let’s tell a whole lot of other people what we find.

Honorary Members
1996

Victor Doino
SUNY, Buffalo

Celebratory Remarks on a steamboat at the ALA conference.

“LADIEEZ and GENTLEMEN . . . Boys and Girls of ALL ages . . . Twainians and Twainiacs, our meeting is officially open.”

Officers of the Mark Twain Circle had been asked “to round up these unusual suspects.” Tom Inge, Sherwood Cummings, Horst Kruse, and Pascal Covic, were brought forward.

While champagne-colored liquid was being liberated from confining bottles—with random small popping sounds—outgoing President Vic Doino offered these remarks about a scholar’s life:

A long time ago there was a child who probably liked to hear stories, who liked to sit near a loved one while a book was being read aloud. Maybe this child developed some imagination, and perhaps this child learned to read relatively early.

Perhaps this child came from an ordinary background, but somehow along the way this child became good at figuring things out. Likely this child was not an utter conformist—possibly this child gradually developed a bit more autonomy or independence along with a greater than usual sustained curiosity and a persistent desire to know. Or else this child was just more unhappy with NOT knowing.

There must have been a lot of hard work, and probably the young person became good at enduring discouragement or loneliness. There were moments of non-recognition or even some mockery or ridicule. Gradually this growing person created an individual sense of what matters; there were moments of luck, good fortune, and preparation as the investigative curiosity strengthened. This adult might not always be easy to live with because others (even spouses!) could consider the person to be absent-minded—or not sufficiently present-minded! But the adult created a significant form of intellectual mastery, perhaps with a touch of eccentricity or minor madness to flavor the focused concentration.

Tonight we have gathered to do something many adult scholars seldom do or at least awkwardly. We wish, on behalf of the Mark Twain Circle, to grant Honorary Membership to these four valued, respected colleagues. To them we say tonight: “We recognize and honor your achievement. We toast you with intellectual affection and respect!”

A toast aboard the William D. Evans. Left to right: Vic Doino, Sherwood Cummings, Pascal Covic, Horst Kruse, Tom Inge.

Response

Further About the Mark Twain Circle at the ALA, San Diego, 1996. There was, as a colleague remarked, something genuinely Twainian about the situation. On 30 May 1996, the MTCA members had gathered, appropriately, on the main deck of the William D. Evans, a true sternwheeler, on beautiful Mission Bay.
in San Diego to inaugurate its new honorary members. Vic Doyno, the president, had them brought forward and read the award citations and was making a moving speech prior to a champagne toast for which the glasses had already been filled. Situation and rhetoric, as well as true sentiment, combined to produce in those being honored the urge to respond—and in doing so perhaps to become, as the master has it, "satisfyingly sentimental." At that very moment, much like the parrot with his "discordant, ear-splitting, metallic laugh" in Mark Twain's description, in chapter 48 of Life on the Mississippi, of what might have been a romantic tugboat excursion, the diesel engine of the William D. Evans began to start up with so much this-worldly noise as to drown all speech, and with such a hellish admixture of diesel oil fumes as to dispel all emotion—"Romance and sentiment," as we read in the account, "cannot long survive this sort of discouragement." For who would like to shout at the top of his voice when it comes to talking about feelings, let alone talking about love? So the general acclaim of the Circle members, loud enough to be heard above the roar of the engine, was left to conclude the function—along with a little frustration on the part of the honored ones about not being able to respond and express their gratitude.

Fortunately, there is the Mark Twain Circular to relieve such frustration, and here, in what is probably a more sober version, is what I would have liked to say that night:

For more than fifty years I have been carrying on a love affair with America, with American literature, and with the writings of Mark Twain, which epitomize both, and I feel that by being made an honorary member of the Mark Twain Circle of America the love affair has retroactively been accorded a particular blessing for which I am deeply grateful. The affair took a serious turn as long ago as 1953 at Cornell with my first presentation on Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in a seminar taught by Robert H. Eliot, and it became a permanent affair ten years later when I first visited the Mark Twain Papers at Berkeley, whose successive heads and whose staff have assisted and inspired me ever since. Berkeley also was the place through which over the years I have been fortunate to meet people similarly dedicated to exploring the rich meanings and the significance of what Mark Twain wrote. The Mark Twain Circle and its activities have put me in touch with many more of them, while at the same time I have carried on a kind of silent dialogue with others by reading their publications and so feeling part of a large and congenial community.

As love affairs go—and here is another blessing—mine has been distinctly different from the rest in that my wife Ursula has not only allowed me to continue what had begun before I met her, but has actively supported my quest and gladly joined me in many trips to the United States, accompanied me to libraries and archives, and spent hours upon hours at unwieldy microfilm readers in pursuit of elusive data.

You can readily see that the love affair I am talking about has greatly enriched my life, as a scholar, as a teacher, and as a person—and also why I should want to insist on thanking all of you for the honor that you are bestowing on me.

Response

Sherwood Cummings
Fullerton, CA

How did I become a Mark Twain scholar?
The answer is fraught with such ironies as might pique the interest of that connoisseur and creator of ironies—Twain himself.

I was one of that horde of not-quite-young people who early in 1946 descended on our universities to continue their war-interrupted educations. I had racked up 12 units of graduate work at the University of Wisconsin by 1939 and then, to support a bride—and by virtue of my science minors—began work in the laboratory of what would become a defense plant in my home town of Rockford, Illinois, and where I rode out the war on a series of draft deferrals.

In my spare time—somewhat limited when the work week rose to forty-five and then fifty hours—I read a good deal of detective fiction (of which Dorothy Sayers's was the most engaging) and, duly inspired, began to write my own mysteries. I'm still rather fond of the title of my factory-based novel—Time-and-a-Half for Murder—but it, along with my other efforts in that line, was routinely, and no doubt deservedly, rejected by publishers.

During that same period—and looking ahead to the end of the war—I engaged in two other quite contradictory enterprises. They were taking extension courses in metallurgy in anticipation of going for a BS in that field after the war, and studying the literature—from Chaucer to moderns—on Wisconsin's reading list for the MA in English.

English won out, and by virtue of "trading" apartments in those post-war, housing-hungry times, I moved the family to Madison, where, since I had been given no promise of a teaching
The plan was made quite dramatically unnecessary by the apparently unanticipated number of GI Bill-endowed veterans who registered at Madison that winter and who swamped the classes in composition. Would I please take two sections of freshman English? Indeed I would, and was more awed than chagrined when on entering each of my classrooms I found some ninety students gathered, most of them standing. By hook or crook the sections were reduced to thirty-five, and incredible as it seems to me now, the reading, marking, and grading of seventy themes a week was a privilege and a challenge.

A year or so later, with the master's well behind me, I began worrying about a dissertation topic. Why not, it occurred to me, write on the evolution of the detective story? During my detective-fiction period I had read enough in and around the subject to know that for all of Edgar Allan Poe's reputation as inventor of that genre, there had been a long foreground. I broached the subject to that paragon of professors, Philo Buck, who favored the idea and suggested that I register in an independent study course and try it out. During a semester's research I found intriguing examples of the genre in, for example, Charles Brockden Brown, Dickens, Voltaire, and Chaucer, and in the ancient literatures of China and India as far back as 400 BC.

A delightful vista opened up. I would not only write my dissertation on the evolution of the detective story but in due time put together an anthology of Detection Through the Ages which would, at least modestly, make my fortune and reputation.

My daydream was only incipient, however, when the redoubtable Harry Hayden Clark, professor of American literature, with whom I was taking a course, called me into his office. "I've been directing a series of dissertations on American writers and science," he said. "There've been [let's say] Charles Brockden Brown and Science, Poe and Science, Holmes and Science. Next is Mark Twain and Science. That will be your dissertation."

Well, I guess I can say along with Huck Finn that "I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither."

**Response**

M. Thomas Inge
Randolph-Macon C

There is no finer honor than to be recognized by one's peers as having done something more with one's life than entirely trivialize it, although the jury may still be out on that matter. Mark Twain himself once said, "It is better to deserve honors and not have them than to have them and not deserve them." When I consider my fellow honororesses this year, people like Pascal Covici, Horst Kruse, and Sherwood Cummings, not to mention those who have gone before, I'm afraid that I belong among the undeservedly recognized. Nevertheless, I will accept honorary membership in the Mark Twain Circle of America as the special thing it is intended to be and hope yet to measure up before the grand finale. Speaking of which, Twain once recommended "heaven for climate, and hell for company," and since he also said "there is no humor in heaven," I guess I know where I will be seeing the membership then.

**Mark Twain at MLA 1996**

Victor Doyno
SUNY, Buffalo

The Mark Twain Circle will sponsor two formal panels at the 1996 Modern Language Association conference:

1. "Mark Twain Influences Washington—And the Reverse!"
   - Presiding: Shelley Fisher Fishkin (U of Texas)
   - Speakers:
     1. Jeffrey Steinbrink (Franklin and Marshall C), "Mr. Clemens Goes to Washington—The Early Years"
     2. Gregg Camfield (U of the Pacific), "No Native Criminal Class Except Congress: Twain's Washington Correspondence"

2. "Mark Twain's Early Critics: Formative Influences or Distorters?"
   - Presiding: Michael Kiskis (Elmira C)
   - Speakers:
     1. David Barrow (Northern Illinois U), "De-volving DeVoto"
     2. John Bird (Winthrop U), "The Myth of Metaphor and Twain Studies"

These papers will form the basis of an extended discussion.

We will also have our much-valued breakfast and cocktail-hour sessions. Jim Wilson (U of Southwestern Louisiana) will present a talk titled "Calvinism Rediscovered: Mark Twain in Washington, DC"; Siva Vaidhyanathan (U of Texas) will present "Double Voices, Double Talk: Mark Twain and the American Copyright"; David Sanders (St. John Fisher) will present "Moses and the Bulrushers: The Exodus Saga in Huckleberry Finn."

These informal, cordial gatherings in the Twain suite allow time for extended collegial discussions. Coffee or other timely liquid refreshments have in the past been known to help lubricate the synapses! Please include these events in your conference plans. The suite will be in the names of Michael Kiskis and Tom Tenney.

**Mark Twain at SAMLA**

The Mark Twain Circle's SAMLA division will sponsor a session at the 1996 SAMLA convention at Savannah, GA (Marriott Riverfront Hotel), November 8–10, 1996. The topic will be "The New Huckleberry Finn: Inclusions and Exclusions." The following papers will be presented:

1. "Huckleberry Finn and Family Values: A Moral Tale for the 90's"—Michael J. Kiskis (Elmira C)
2. "Huck's Helplessness: A Reader's Response to Stupefied Humanity"
   - David E. E. Sloane (U of New Haven)
4. "Should College Teachers Adopt the 'New' Adventures of Huckleberry Finn?"—Joseph A. Alvarez (Central Piedmont CC)

There will also be a brief business meeting.

The session will be at 1:00 p.m. on Friday, November 8. Session chair is James S. Leonard (The Citadel); secretary is John Bird (Winthrop U).

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**Call for Papers**

**Mark Twain Circle**

American Literature Association: Baltimore, MD; May 22–25, 1997; two panels:
1. Open topic—any aspect of Mark Twain's work/life.
2. Topic: "Revisiting The Adventures of Tom Sawyer."

Deadline for papers/proposals is December 1, 1996.

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**Modern Language Association**

Toronto, Ontario.
1. Two panels: any aspect of Mark Twain's work/life.
2. Three slots for individual presentations as part of the Mark Twain Suite program.

Deadline for papers/proposals is February 1, 1997.

Inquiries (both ALA and MLA) to: Michael J. Kiskis, Humanities Division, Elmira College, Elmira, NY 14901; mjkiskis@aol.com

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**Call for Papers**

**American Literature Association Symposia**

Modern Short Story: Cabo San Lucas; November 7–10, 1996.

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**Call for Essay Proposals**

Book on Teaching American Realism and Naturalism

Thomas K. Dean and Louis J. Budd seek essay proposals for *Teaching American Realism and Naturalism*, a projected new volume in the MLA's Options for Teaching series. Intended as a resource guide primarily for college and university instructors, the book will offer essays treating a wide variety of approaches and topics: theoretical, analytical, cultural, and historical background as well as practical suggestions for teaching relevant issues and texts in the classroom. The editors also hope the book will advance the critical debate about American realism and naturalism: their definitions, canons, margins, and larger relationships to American and international culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Please send essay proposals and short vitae by 15 November 1996 to either editor: Thomas Dean, Department of American Thought and Language, Ernst Bessey Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1033, e-mail deanth@pilot.msu.edu; or Louis Budd, Department of English, Duke University, Box 90015, Durham, NC 27708.

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**Dates to Circle**

November 8–10, 1996. South Atlantic Modern Language Association Annual Conference; Savannah, GA (Marriot Riverfront Hotel). The Mark Twain Circle will sponsor a session titled "The New Huckleberry Finn." Chair: James S. Leonard; Secretary: John Bird; presentations by Victor A. Doyno, David E. E. Sloane, Michael J. Kiskis, and Joseph A. Alvarez.

December 12–15, 1996. ALA Symposium, "Influences, Friendships, and Rivalries: Relationships between Male and Female Writers of the United States"; Cancún, Mexico. Conference directors: Laura Skandera-Trombley (English Dept., SUNY-Potsdam, Potsdam, NY 13676) and Alfred Bendixen (English Dept., California State U, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90032; abendix@calstatela.edu).


May 22–25, 1997. ALA Conference on American Literature; Baltimore, MD. Conference Director: Gloria Cronin, English Dept., Brigham Young U, Provo, UT 84602; croning@khhbrc.byu.edu.


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Twain and Twainians to Watch:

1. "Mark" your calendar for the Arts & Entertainment Channel:
   AMERICA'S CASTLES: The Victorian Era.
   A visit to famous estates that captured the unique style of turn-of-the-century architecture. Includes a trip to the Mark Twain House and Thomas Edison's Glenmont.

   Sunday, October 27, 10:00 p.m.
   Monday, October 28, 2:00 a.m. (Repeat showing)

   [Info furnished by Kevin Bochynski.]

2. Also on the Arts and Entertainment Channel:
   Mark Twain Biography
   Hamlin Hill and Joe McCullough are featured guests.

   Monday, November 11
Everything You Need to Know...

ABOUT THE CIRCULAR. The Mark Twain Circular, newsletter of the Mark Twain Circle, was launched in January 1987 by Thomas A. Tenney (Editor of the Mark Twain Journal). James S. Leonard (The Citadel) assumed editorial responsibility with the February 1987 Circular and has continued in that capacity until the present. The Circular is published four times per year (Jan.–March, April–June, July–Sept., and Oct.–Dec), and is mailed, by the editor, to all members of the Mark Twain Circle.

ABOUT THE CIRCLE. The Mark Twain Circle of America was formed at an organizational meeting held at the 1986 Modern Language Association convention in New York; the membership has since grown to approximately 400. Current officers are displayed on p. 2. Past Presidents are Louis J. Budd, Alan Gribben, Pascal Covi, Jr., David E.E. Sloane, and Victor A. Doyao. Past Executive Coordinators: Everett Emerson, James D. Wilson, Michael J. Kiskis, and Laura Skander-Trombley. Although many members are academic specialists, the Circle also includes many non-academic Twain enthusiasts. The Circle is in communication with other Mark Twain organizations, including those associated with sites important in his life, and cooperates with them.

ABOUT THE MARK TWAIN JOURNAL. The Mark Twain Circular is published in cooperation with the Mark Twain Journal. Although the Mark Twain Circle and the Mark Twain Journal are separate entities, Circle members enjoy a reduced subscription rate for the Journal (see coupon below for prices), and the Mark Twain Circular is mailed (though often not in a very timely fashion) to Journal subscribers (usually bundled with Journal issues). Founded in 1936 by Cyril Clemens, the Mark Twain Journal is the oldest American magazine devoted to a single author. In 1982, the Journal moved to its present home in Charleston, S.C., under the editorship of Thomas A. Tenney. There are two issues per year, Spring and Fall, with a new volume each year (rather than every second year, as in the past). The Journal tends to appear late, and begs your patient indulgence. New subscribers may wish to begin with the 1993 issues rather than the 1996. Back issues from 13:1 to the present are available at $5.00 each, postpaid ($2.50 on orders for ten or more; pre-1983 issues are thinner than modern ones, and some are badly reprinted). An index 1936-83 counts as a back issue.

To: Prof. Joseph A. Alvarez
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   Charlotte, NC 28204

Please enroll me as a member of the Mark Twain Circle of America and subscriber to the Mark Twain Circular. I enclose a check for $10.00 ($11.00 for a non-U.S. address) made out to "Mark Twain Circle of America."

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(address)

Libraries: $18.00/year, no discount
Foreign: Add $2.00/year for postage
SERIAL LIBRARIANS: The *Mark Twain Circular* is entered selectively in the annual bibliographies of the Modern Language Association and the Modern Humanities Research Association, and in the *American Humanities Index*, the *Literary Criticism Register*, *American Literary Scholarship*, and "A Checklist of Scholarship on Southern Literature," which appears annually in the *Mississippi Quarterly* (Spring issues).

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