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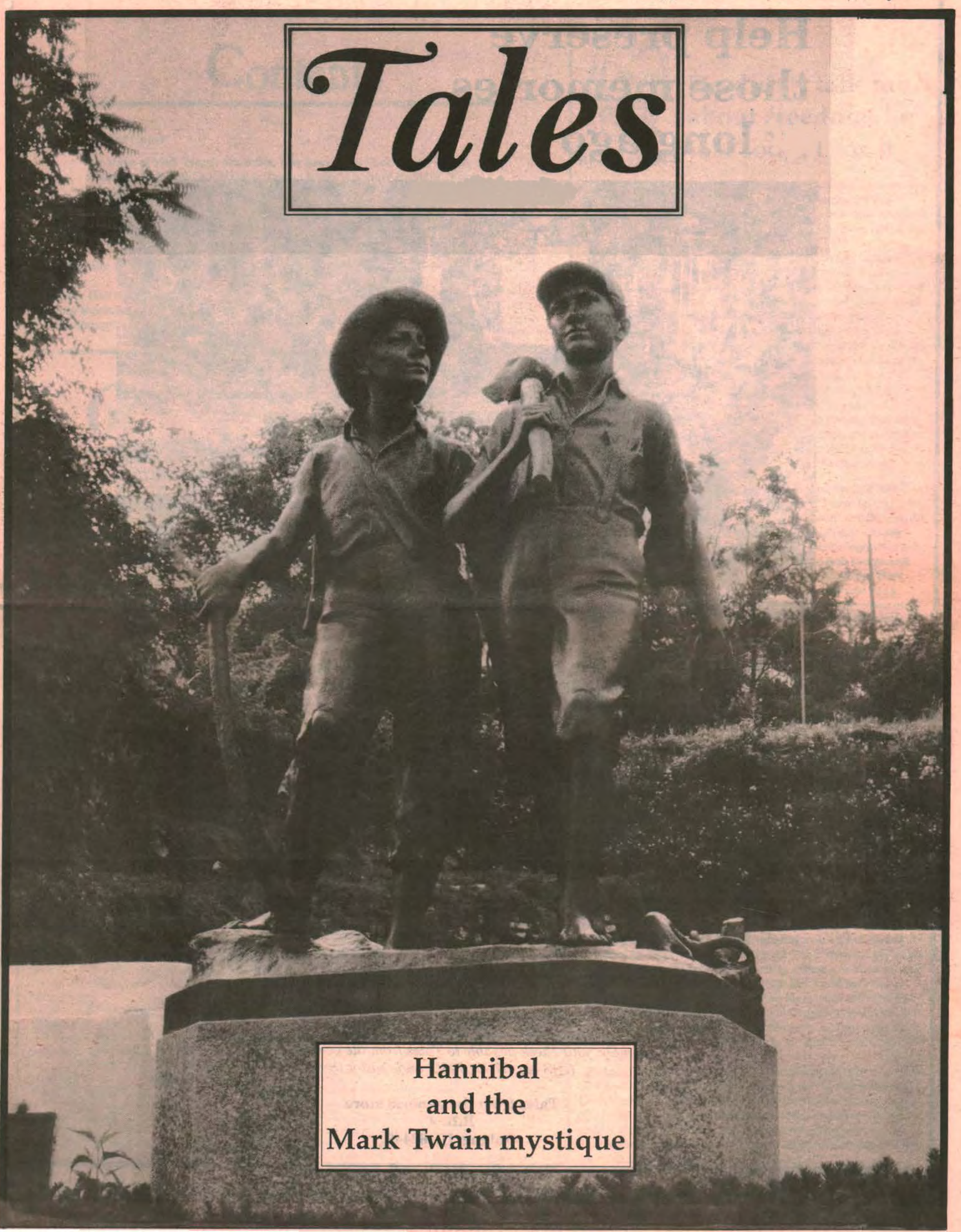

Hannibal and the Mark Twain mystique

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On the Cover

The statue of Mark Twain's characters, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, is situated at the foot of Cardiff Hill in Twain's boyhood home of Hannibal, Missouri. See story on page 8.

Photo by Ray Elliott

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Tales from the general store

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He didn't talk much about freedom; he just fought for it

By Ray Elliott

From the time I was in the lower grades of school until I got my last haircut before going off to the Marine Corps, a man named Ben Correll cut my hair. He was a kind, gentle, soft-spoken man who could tell a story with the best of them while giving you a flattop haircut so true that a carpenter's level couldn't argue with it.

As a 28-year-old Marine rifleman, he'd landed on Iwo Jima, an island that he'd never heard of until his ship was two days out of Hawaii. His company, A Company, 1st Battalion, 28th Regiment, was one of the most decorated companies at Iwo Jima—two men received the Medal of Honor for their actions during the campaign.

The 1st Battalion was to cut across the narrow part of the island while the 2nd Battalion turned south to take Mt. Suribachi. By the time his platoon started around Suribachi on the west beach, only 12 or 13 men were left. Ben was one of them. But not for long. He took shrapnel about six inches above his left knee, paralyzing his leg.

Four men loaded him in an ambulance jeep, and he and other wounded were taken back to the beach. Later that evening, they were loaded on the empty tank deck of an LST for the night and given their first food since they'd discarded rations to lighten their loads on D-Day. Next morning, the injured were taken to the hospital ship farther out from the island.

"As I was being winched over the side of the hospital ship later," Ben told me during an interview in the late '70s. "I turned on my side and looked back at the Rock. It was just before noon. And there on the top of Suribachi, a bleak sky in the background with the sun's rays shining on it just a little, was one of the most beautiful sights I've ever seen. The flag stood out in technicolor against the drab background.

"It had to be the second flag (the shot that won Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal a Pulitzer Prize and was made into a national monument at Arlington Cemetery just across the Potomac River from the nation's capitol). But it was something, a real tear-jerker. I'll never see anything like it again."

Shortly after that interview and "a lot of bonus years since" Iwo Jima, Ben died at 63 years of age. Although he was as patriotic as anybody, he never said much about patriotism. But then he didn't have to say anything. I knew he loved the flag and what it stands for, and was proud of his part in defending it. He often comes to mind when I hear people talk about love of country, love of flag, love of freedom.

That was particularly true at the Illinois State Fair last summer where I saw a man in his mid-40s, bearded, bifocaled, with graying slicked-back hair and bulging gut hanging several inches over his belt wearing a black T-shirt with an American flag on it. Printed on the T-shirt around the flag was, "Try to burn this one, asshole."

I assumed this was in response to the Supreme Court ruling that allows American citizens to burn flags as a protest in accordance with their First Amendment rights—a reaffirmation of the right, maybe. It seemed to be an excessive reaction to what one ignoramus started by burning the flag during the 1984 Republican Convention in Dallas, though.

But then I've always thought that displaying the American flag on a T-shirt or flying a flag over a chain restaurant, a gas station, a car lot or any number of businesses or displaying a ragged and shredded flag anywhere are just as appalling and disgusting as some jerk burning it. Instead of following my instincts to rip the T-shirt from the guy's chest or making some stupid remark and causing a scene, I went on my way around the fairgrounds and wondered how Ben would have reacted.

Of course, Ben wasn't around to tell me his reaction any more than he was to tell me what he thought about the flag-burning incident that sparked the original controversy. And Ben never said much that I ever heard about the First Amendment right to freedom of speech and the idea of freedom of expression.

So I really don't know how he'd have felt about the issues. I do think he'd have been appalled at anybody burning the flag, the symbol of freedom and independence he and his fellow Marines had fought and died for on Iwo Jima. And I think he would have found the T-shirt equally appalling. I suspect, though, he'd have agreed with the statement commonly attributed to Voltaire: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Ben Correll was that kind of American.

Mail's Here

Victory for *Tales*

Congrats on your win with the Postal Service. I, for one, feel *Tales* serves several purposes, including readership interests of Lewis Newspapers.

— BYRON TRACY
Editor
Robinson Daily News
Robinson, IL

Enjoying Walden family stories

Congratulations for your interesting and valuable project. Among other fine articles, I have enjoyed reading about Furl Walden, the bluebird man, and his children who were featured in your (first) issue.

— MILDRED C. FRAZIER
Marshall, IL

After his own heart

Congratulations on the recent issue of *Tales*. You are people after my own heart. I have been contributing such remembrances to the *Sumner Press* for several years and now in the *Olney Daily Mail* under the heading "Growing Up On Muddy Creek."

Thanks for keeping alive a great idea. I have been egging the University of Illinois College of Agriculture for years to do a *Foxfire*-like deal here in southern Illinois. It is far past time and later than we think.

— PERRY E. PIPER
West Liberty, IL

Bellair a quick vacation stop

This summer, we had a couple of days left in our vacation, and my husband asked me what I wanted to do. I said I wanted to go to the general store in Bellair.

We not only went there, we went to the ones in Pinkstaff, Birds and Flat Rock. We almost missed Bellair because it is off to the side of the road, and there is no sign for the small settlement. It was a nice summer drive, but sad. Oh, for the good old days.

— CAROLYN HUEY
Mt. Carmel, IL

More info available on Dr. Rutherford

I have just been reading Helen Parke's "Black settlement part of Douglas County history" in the summer issue of *Tales*. For additional information about Dr. Rutherford and the Matson Slave Trial, you might want to take a look at *On the Illinois Frontier: Dr. Hiram Rutherford, 1840-1848* by George and Willene Hendrick, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981. Helen was a great help when we were doing the book.

— GEORGE HENDRICK
Urbana, IL

Sit right down and write us a letter.

Letter to the Editor
Tales from the general store
R.R. 2
Oblong, IL 62449

Nothing like a favorite, old pair of shoes

By Laurie Goering

Old-time shoemaker Mike Crane keeps a yellow parakeet in a wooden cage hung over the bench where he plies his trade.

But he's not quite sure why.

"You see in old paintings and pictures of shoemakers that there's always a canary in the background," he says. "I suppose it's for one of two reasons. It could be like a radio--to break the monotony.

"But they also used a lot of chemicals and usually worked in a basement or backroom," he added. "So if it all got too strong, I guess the canary would die."

These days, Crane doesn't have to worry too much about being overcome with fumes, even though his parakeet, he says, is "a lot tougher than a canary."

That's because he, unlike his predecessors, does a lot of work in the open air, working both at Fort de Chartres Historic Site along the Mississippi River south of St. Louis, and following caravans of historic re-enactors who put on demonstrations throughout Illinois each year.

Crane's specialty is shoes from the 1700s, the French trading post days in Illinois when trappers needed footwear that could stand up to long hikes, canoe portages and the occasional scuffle with Indians.

The shoes are big and black and imposing looking, with tiny wooden pegs holding the soles to the uppers. But they're not heavy or uncomfortable, to the surprise of many who try them.

Crane, who is 32, got into the shoemaking business five years ago for the same time-honored reason as most old-time shoemakers who took up the trade: the money.

"It was greed mostly," he says. "Nobody else was doing it. I thought there was a lot of money in it.

"But," he admits, "I was wrong."

Still, that hasn't dimmed his enthusiasm for the old art, which he now practices with a "Save the starving shoemaker—please!" sign set out among his half-made shoes.

Crane, who looks the part of a frontier shoemaker with his long braided ponytail and leather apron, got started in the business by "buying equipment from antique and junk stores," then experimenting with designs.

"It was mostly trial and error," he remembers. For the most part, no patterns remained from the original shoes of the time, so he came up with one of his own, based on advice from old-time shoemakers.

He also quickly discovered that the few lasts—or shoemaking forms—that he had acquired from the period just weren't quite right.

"I got wooden lasts from a 71-year-old shoemaker in St. Louis," he said. "But the old models were too small. You have to make the shoes to fit 20th century feet, and they're so much bigger."

So with a few errors behind him, Crane began refining the process he still uses today.

It starts with just a big piece of good leather.

"I start from scratch," he says.

The leather, chosen for its strength and quality, is dyed, then cut and parts of the shoe sewn. Then the fledgling shoe is soaked in water and stretched around a last to give it the proper shape. As the shoe dries, the sole and heel are attached with tiny whittled wooden pegs about the size of broken-off matchsticks.

Crane, using his knees as a vise around the shoe, uses an awl to make a tiny hole in the leather, then pounds a peg in each hole, making sure it doesn't protrude from either the bottom or inside of the shoe. But as an added precaution, an insole is added to the shoe's interior before it is ready to wear.

The pegs, he says, hold up at least as well as the nails or glue used in most shoes today.

"Let's see your shoes," he says to a man passing by who questions the integrity of the pegs.

The man lifts up one of his boat shoe-shod feet, confident of the superiority of his shoes.

"Those are glued," Crane pronounces, deflating the man.

The finished shoes, which are sold mostly to other craftsmen and historic re-enactors, take the better part of a day to create. Crane rarely makes shoes in advance for sale, preferring instead to get orders and custom make them to the buyer's foot.

Because he is one of very few demonstrating old-time shoemakers remaining in Illinois, his work is in great demand, particularly at French and Indian War re-enactments. He tries to travel to at least six a year, outside of his work at Fort de Chartres, just west of the town of Prairie du Rocher.

"I just about do exactly what the craftsmen did back then," he says. "Follow the troops."

"The old models were too small. You have to make shoes to fit 20th century feet, and they're so much bigger."

— Mike Crane

Journalist Laurie Goering is a regular contributor to Tales.

Spectators watch two cyclists face off for a race in 1892 on the Urbana campus of the University of Illinois. The university was chartered in 1867 as a state-supported land grant institution.

Photo courtesy of the U. of I. Alumni Association

Did You Know...

Cities clashed over controversial bridge

In 1861 Chicagoans were sure that the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce was responsible for an attempt to burn down the Rock Island Railroad Bridge across the Mississippi River.

According to historian Natalia Belting's article published in the Nov. 11, 1984, Champaign-Urbana *News-Gazette*, the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce had tried to get an injunction against the bridge since 1853. It continued the battle even after the bridge was completed in 1855, claiming that the structure had not been approved by the federal government and was, therefore, illegal.

Despite these protests, the Rock Island Railroad Bridge was opened and carried thousands of tons of cattle and millions of bushels of wheat and corn eastward to Chicago, rather than south down the Mississippi to St. Louis. While the bridge was a great boost to Chicago's economy, it nearly destroyed the commerce of St. Louis.

On June 5, 1859, an employee of the bridge company testified that he had found two packages of powder, some bundles of lath and a number of bottles of varnish, some of which had been poured on the lath. The people of Chicago considered this to be a foiled attempt to burn down the bridge. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that members of the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce ought to "consult their dignity and honor by quietly dropping this warfare against the Rock Island Bridge."

No one was ever convicted of the attempted arson, and the bridge was replaced in 1872 because it interfered with river traffic. The perpetrators of the alleged arson attempt on the Rock Island Railroad Bridge remain a mystery to this day.

— John Schomberg
senior, Urbana High School

1st county was large, but inaccurate

In 1790, the first county was chartered in the territory which now lies within Illinois' current borders. It was named St. Clair County after the governor of the Northwest Territory at the time, Arthur St. Clair.

According to the *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois*, the definition of the borders of the county were "beginning at the mouth of the Little Michillimackanack River, running thence southerly in a direct line to the mouth of the little river above Fort Massac upon the Ohio River; thence with the said river to its junction with the Mississippi to the mouth of the Illinois, and so up the Illinois River to the place of beginning, with all the adjacent islands of said rivers, Illinois and Mississippi."

This definition of St. Clair County illustrates the lack of knowledge that early topographers had of Illinois. The aforementioned line drawn south from the mouth of the Michillimackanack, now known as the Mackinaw, would not reach the Ohio River, but instead travel down through what is now Springfield and meet the Mississippi over twenty miles west of the mouth of the Ohio.

— Jeremy Colby
senior, Urbana High School

Hospital became memorial to wife

To get away from all the hustle and bustle that accompanied the building of a new hospital in Champaign, attorney Albert C. Burnham and his wife, Julia F. Burnham, left for New York City on Oct. 22, 1894. Six days later, Julia died after suffering a stroke. As a memorial to his wife, Albert named the new Champaign hospital the Julia F. Burnham Memorial Hospital, which officially opened on March 5, 1895.

Burnham believed his wife deserved the honor of a memorial because of her loving companionship and outstanding community achievements. She had been one of the first women on the Champaign School Board and was secretary of the State Board of Charities.

The hospital has since merged with another facility to form Covenant Medical Center of Champaign.

— Brandy Steen
senior, Urbana High School

Ghost said to haunt high school tower

Rumor has it among present and former Urbana High School students that the school's belfry tower is haunted by the ghost of a teacher known as Miss Portia.

The tale of Portia began many years ago. However, different versions of how she met her doom have been told. The most outrageous story is that the young Portia committed suicide in front of shocked students.

The most common story is that Portia was murdered by an unknown person and her body was later discovered in the janitor's closet.

Since the time of her supposed death, students have claimed that Portia haunts thenow-closed tower.

— Beth Brotherton
sophomore,
Urbana High School

Old cemetery now site of park

The land that served as Urbana's early cemetery in the 1800s was neglected for many years, according to the *History of Champaign County*. Burials, including those of some of the area's prominent citizens, were made amid weeds and dense brush.

Eventually, because of sanitary concerns, Urbana officials prohibited any more burials on the grounds. In 1902, the city ordered the removal of all remains that could be identified. The land was then made into what is known today as Leal Park.

— Michele Spence
senior, Urbana High School

Reminiscences of the Model T

By Perry E. Piper

photo courtesy of Perry E. Piper

The relative simplicity of Henry Ford's Model T made automobiles more commonplace in America. But the Model T also caused some wide-reaching changes in American culture.

In the days of my youth there were but a few new-fangled automobiles in the neighborhood. The word automobile in those days meant the Olds, Chalmers, Chandlers, Buicks, Caddys, Saxtons, Dusenburgs, Stutz and hundreds of other long-forgotten names. Then there were the Fords, better known as Tin Lizzies.

Henry Ford didn't invent the automobile, as that was done nearly 20 years before Henry started to tinker in his little shop in Detroit. What Henry did was to make the automobile available to every family through his adoption of the assembly-line method of manufacturing and his philosophy of "what you had, you used." He even specified that packing crates used to ship engine parts into his plant be of certain specifications so that the boards from the boxes just fit the spaces built for the floorboards in the cars. I have seen such floorboards with the names of the shippers still visible on them.

In 1914 Henry announced that he would pay all of his workers five dollars a day, an unheard of wage at that time. He also announced a price cut on the new Ford. The touring car would be priced at $389. Yes, $389. This was for the full car. Most cars were open then and were called touring or open models. The few closed ones were sedans or coupes (pronounced "koopays").

One unique feature of the Ford was that there was no driver side door. You crawled over the side or slid in ahead of the passenger in the front seat.

The gasoline tank was under the front seat. To fill the tank with gas, you first removed the seat cushion, then unscrewed the gas cap and pushed your gas gauge stick down into the tank as far as it would go to see how much gas you had left. Contrary to popular mythology, one did not light a match to check the gas level. The car came with a specially marked stick, graduated to allow for the contour of the tank, and you read directly on the stick how much gas was in the tank.

However, these sticks were invariably misplaced, broken or lost so often that many firms issued new ones with their company name printed on them as advertising items. But you could use almost any old stick that would reach the bottom, and owners got pretty good at estimating the reserve by noting how far up on the stick the wet line was. The only objection to this method was that it didn't do well in the dark. But you could always go around to the front and hold the stick in front of the feeble light of the headlights, which were mighty weak when the car was idling because they were powered from the magneto and their intensity varied with the speed of the engine.

In those days, gassing up was a chore. "Filling" stations were few and far between. Their underground tanks usually leaked, which allowed ground water to mix with the gas. At least that was the excuse most operators gave when an excess of water was discovered in the sediment bowl of the car. Some purveyors, however, were not above supplementing their gasoline supply with a few gallons of water added to the storage tanks.

The Model T would run on almost anything that was liquid once you got it running. Knowledgeable owners of the early days bought their gasoline by the five-gallon can and poured it into the tank themselves using a filter made of chamois skin, which took quite awhile. But the driver was usually rewarded by the sight of handfuls of dirt and a cup of water that would not penetrate the chamois.

My experience was that "drip gas," the vile-smelling, slow-burning distillate that was collected in low places in the gas pipelines did pretty well. But when a boy took his best girl on a date, he usually sprinkled a bottle of Ben Hur perfume, available from the local five-and-dime, over the motor. It would burn off by the time he'd get to his girl's house, and she would be impressed with the financial affluence that allowed him to buy "store-boughten" gas. (Just one of the subterfuges necessary in youth.)

When you did get gas from the filling station, it was from a wonderful invention, the visible gas pump. This pump had a huge glass cylinder that was pumped full of gas by hand and then run into the tank with the aid of gravity. The operator could run overflows back into the glass cylinder. Gas was usually sold for about a dollar every five gallons, so it was sold in multiples of five.

I remember getting into a verbal altercation with an operator who had just installed a new-fangled pump with a nozzle that could shut off at any amount. I dressed him down for not "draining the hose." My experience in the past had taught me that a good quart would stay in the hose. Some of the less-affluent boys would often stop at every station to drain the hose and got along very well with what gas they found in the hose from a previous customer.

The T was equipped with a magneto, which generated the electric current needed to fire the spark plugs. Cars didn't have a storage battery until years later. There was a box with four coils under the dash that looked like small cigar boxes with a vibrator on top. There was an adjusting screw, also, and Model T owners spent a lot of time reaching under the dash, motor running, adjusting coils to get just the quality of spark needed for the car to run smoothly. Well, smoother, anyway. This job was no particular problem in dry weather, but a fellow could get an interesting tingle in his fingertips if it was raining.

These coils had many interest-

ing applications. Since they produced a hefty amount of voltage and they could generate a brilliant, long spark that could give the operator a jolt, especially if he were standing on wet ground. Some smart fellow found that he could attach the coil wire to the car body so that when anyone touched the car and the button was pushed, the current would flow and WHAM!

Another use was for building a wireless set by hooking the spark coil to a storage battery. Signals caused by interrupting the spark with a key at the right intervals, for example, could be picked up by a crystal set several miles away. And so was born the spark gap wireless. It was effective, but it sure played hob with any other sets in the area. I had a little experience with a spark gap one time and learned to my sorrow that there are some things that one is better off not experimenting with.

At least the magneto-powered headlights were better than the earlier ones that were gas jet lamps with a Prest-o-Lite tank on the runningboard. Driving carefully at night was essential, especially at high speed (25 or better) or when the car idled at high speed because the resulting surge of power would burn the bulbs out since there was no voltage regulator on the Ford. The careful driver always carried a spare box of bulbs in his tool box for just such an emergency.

Some oldsters may remember the operation of the Ford Model T. There were gas and spark levers on the steering column. The gas lever advanced the ignition timing or retarded it in relation to the position of the piston in the cylinders. If it was advanced too far and then carelessly cranked (there were no self-starters on 99 percent of the cars then), or it was cranked like an old-fashioned ice cream freezer, a rude jolt snapped many an arm.

If the engine fired just before the piston reached the dead center (TDC), the piston would try to go back from whence it came and for an instant, the engine would run backward and generally you were left holding your cranking arm and making piteous wails, using such language as "Oh, gee," "Good grief" or even more explicit words.

There were three pedals on the floor—one to go forward, one to go backward and one to brake. To move forward, you pushed down the low speed forward pedal and held it down until the car began to move. Then at about 10 mph, you let the lever alongside the left-hand door down at the same time you let up on the pedal, which gave the car just the right amount of gas, and Lo!, you went sailing right along into high gear.

The hand lever also doubled as a sort of emergency brake. In low gear there was enough power to push the old clunker up a 30-inch incline. In a high wind, you had a bit of trouble getting her up fast enough to kick into high gear. I knew one fellow who who had a load of about half a dozen girls one day when a heavy rain came up. He had to pull into a farmer's barn because the rain was coming through the side curtains, and the car refused to pull against that wind with such a load, and it was too far into town to risk burning up his low band. ...

Since the gas tank was under the seat and the fuel was fed by gravity, it was often necessary to back up a steep hill as the gas wouldn't get to the carburetor.

Those old Model Ts were known for their simplicity, though. Almost anyone could fix one if he was a bit handy with a screwdriver, a pair of pliers and a wrench. Repairs were often made using binder's twine or baling wire, so the term "shade tree mechanic" originated with the T.

The tires in those golden olden days were good for about 3,000 miles. Montgomery Ward came out with the Riverside tire that was guaranteed for 3,500 miles, but people scoffed that they would rot out before anyone ever drove them that many miles. We had a 1917 Buick that sat along the back fence until the scrap drive of World War II came along. It had 7,600 miles on the odometer and was considered worn out.

Flats were common. It took many years and much cement to cover up all those horseshoe nails that were lost along the nation's roads. Changing a flat was not a glorious experience. First you jacked the car up using a ratchet screw jack from under the seat. Then you pried the tire off the rim—a mean job that was often accompanied by some choice words. Out came the inner tube, and you spent 10 minutes finding the hole. That wasn't unusually difficult, but you quickly learned to check the opposite side of the tube for a possible second hole since the nails often penetrated both sides. Since the tires went down quickly, often with a bang, it was almost impossible to stop the car without either rim cutting the tube or making a second puncture.

After patching the hole(s) with a cold patch or one of the new-fangled "hot" patches lit with a match that burned your fingers while getting the tin form off the melted patch, it is said that Ford drivers contributed 10,000 new words to the English vocabulary.

Once the tire was back on the car, it had to be inflated with an overgrown bicycle pump to 55 pounds of pressure. Those pumps were back busters. They contributed about half a pound of air per down stroke, which was about 120 up-and-down strokes for a full head of air.

My first car was a 1921 Model T Coupe. We paid $15 for it, which was a bit above average. (Dad wanted to see if I could drive it, but little did he know that I had been sneaking the Buick out when he was gone and "practicing" in the back 40.) There were many Model Ts available for $5 or so. You could buy a new Ford at D.A. Pipers in Olney for $267 plus $10 for the self starter. Dad figured I could crank it for $10.

Mom drove the Buick but never got the knack of the three pedals. During the Depression, when that was all we had to drive, she gave up driving entirely.

My next Ford (of course) was a 1923 Touring with a starter. The Touring was similar to the one I found in a barn about 25 years ago and still have. It runs like a charm, can be repaired under the apple tree and always invokes wonder at the simplicity and smallness of it. Truly it was a compact long before the word became synonymous with the imports.

Now my neighbor and buddy, Art Vanatta, had the only new car in the neighborhood. It was a 1926 Roadster. His father had gone to upper Indiana to work in a Ford plant for $5 a day and used his discount as an employee to flaunt his summer job and financial superiority to the neighborhood by buying his son a *new* Ford.

The horse and buggy limited a person to a world of perhaps 20 miles around his birthplace. It was a rare person who traveled more than a few hundred miles in his lifetime. But when Henry Ford brought affordable transportation to the common people, they really took to it. More than 30 million Model Ts were built, and they added the new dimension of travel to the American way of life. It's logical, then, that the T inspired hundreds of books and thousands of stories and millions of jokes.

A typical Ford story, vintage 1915, went something like, "Did you know that in Iowa they have to paint all the Fords red?"

"How is that?"

"Because a new state law requires all tin cans containing gasoline to be of that color."

OK, so don't blame me; I only read it in a Ford joke book. Here is one more from the 1915 *Funny Stories about Fords*:

R.F.D. (rural Ford delivery) Village Postmaster carefully scrutinized a letter over his spectacles and said, "Well, by heck, folks have gotten so now they even expect you to deliver their mail by automobile."

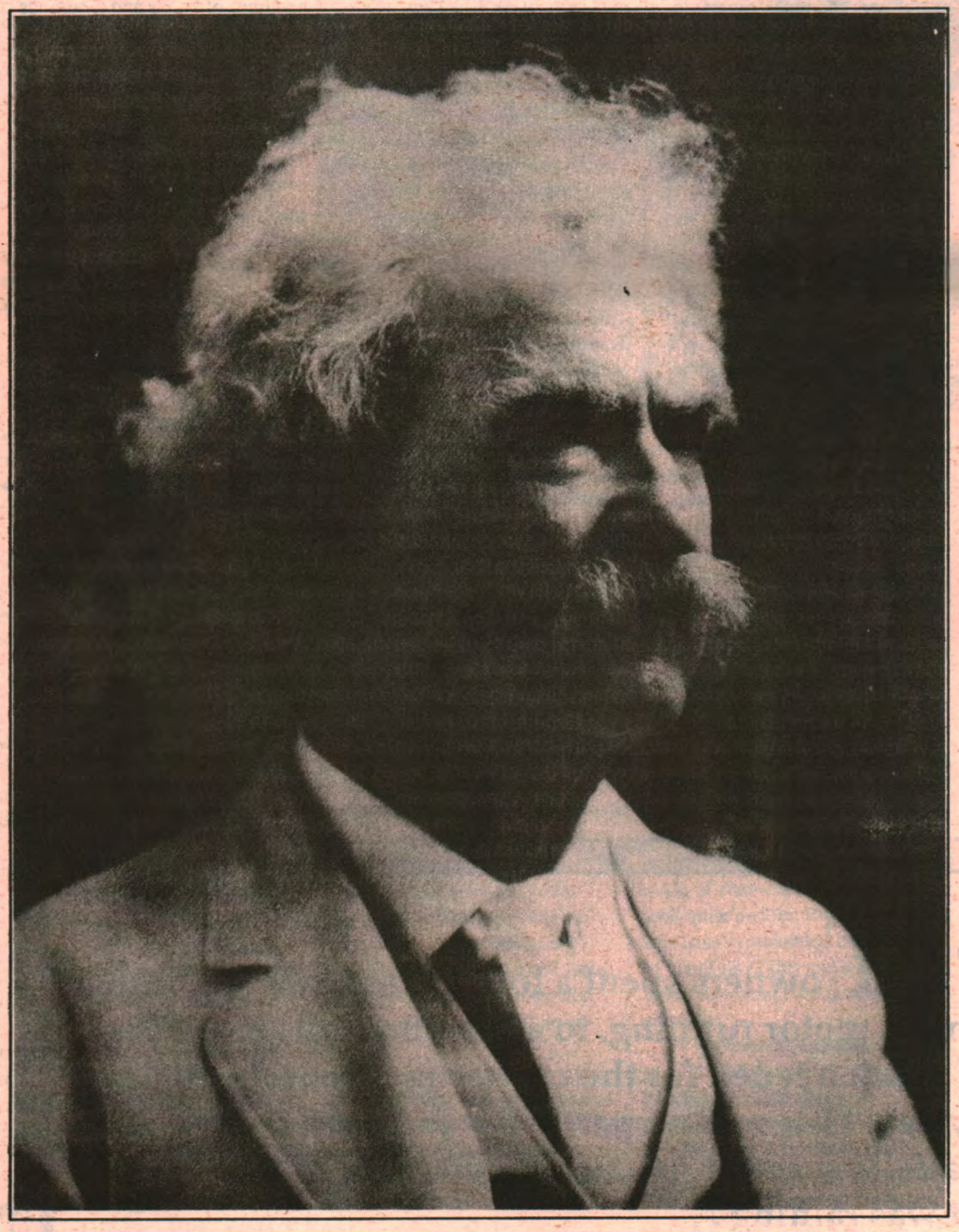
Then he held up a letter addressed to the college son of one of the prominent townspeople that was inscribed, "Please For'd."

Perry E. Piper publishes his "Life on Muddy Creek" columns about the good ol' days in area newspapers and lives in West Liberty, IL.

Model T owners spent a lot of time reaching under the dash, with the motor running, to adjust the coils to get just the quality of spark needed for the car to run smoothly. Well, smoother, anyway. This was no particular problem in dry weather, but a fellow could get an interesting tingle in his fingertips if it was raining . . .

Hannibal, Huck, Tom & Me

By Ray Elliott



Mark Twain *Photos courtesy of the Hannibal Visitors and Convention Bureau*

Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn had me running around the banks of the North Fork of the Embarras River as though it were the mighty Mississippi itself when I was a kid growing up in eastern Illinois. My friends and I swung on grapevines from nearby bluffs, wrapped potatoes in bottom-land mud and tossed them on the camp fire to cook, fished with cane poles for catfish in the summer or skated with clamp-on skates in the winter in and on the Old Bed of the North Fork, played tag while climbing the rafters of the nearby Old Mill or scouted the countryside in search of more adventure.

Not long after reading Mark Twain's books and meeting Huck and Tom, I just knew I could see an Indian or two still hiding in the woods long after "civilization" had killed them off around Bellair. One old timer helped the idea along when he told me his grandfather had told him years before about somebody shooting the last known Indian around and burying him on the spot in the woods south of town 100 years earlier. And any stranger driving through town was an outlaw in my mind. No doubt about it.

And like Tom, I wanted a gang and cleaned out an old chicken house for me and the boys to hold meetings and plan robberies, murders and mayhem. Not far away, we built a makeshift tree house to rendezvous in after a raid, hide out and rest for a while before going on to the next job. Mostly we spent the time there smoking poorly rolled cigarettes from a nickel sack of Bull Durham we pretended was haul from a holdup of the store or a package of Lucky Strikes I'd been able to slip out of my father's carton.

On Halloween, we'd occasionally tip over somebody's outhouse or stuff rags in an old flannel shirt and raggedy bib overalls, tie off the legs and arms and put an old hat over a tee shirt stuffed with rags and fastened to the shirt collar with pins, and lay the dummy in the middle of the road where traffic slowed to curve onto the bridge over North Fork. When a driver came along and slammed on the brakes, we'd drag the dummy back in the ditch with the attached baling twine and laugh hilariously, trying to suppress the noise while the driver jumped out to see what was in the road, then cussed us out when he saw the dummy being dragged away.

"You little bastards git on outa here afore somebody gets hurt with your shenanigans," one old boy said, standing in front of his car and shaking his fist as he hollered. "Wouldn't be so damn funny then."

Other than that, nothing much happened around Bellair. Nothing too memorable anyway. The bank had been robbed years earlier and had been closed almost as long. Searches for buried treasure ended up with big empty holes in the ground. And like Huck had been unimpressed with Tom's plans, nobody was much impressed with wild-goose chases that always ended the same place and the same way—back in town, empty-handed.

All we were looking for, though, was a good adventure, something exciting enough to make the time pass more quickly until we were grown and had what we imagined would be our real lives. What I usually had to settle for was a good story, one that kept my attention and let me jump right in the middle of things and enjoy the action as though I were really there.

That's what Mark Twain did for me. It didn't take long after I started reading his books to see that he was some kind of writer. Years later, I read that Ernest Hemingway said, "All modern literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*."

I don't know about that. It just seems that American literature was a long time getting to the point that it clearly defined the American character and experience. Then with *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain came out of the haze of the transition from European literature, used real American speech in dialogue and dealt with themes and topics facing people separated from a gentler way of life by the Atlantic Ocean.

But Mark Twain's books certainly began the American literary experience for me. He made me laugh, he made me cry and he made me happy to be where I was by showing Huck and Tom having "the run of the village" and enjoying it as Twain himself did. He liked his early years so well that later in life he said that the only part of his life he would live over was his childhood and that provided he would drown at age 15.

So it didn't matter that Twain wrote at the beginning of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to

find a moral will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot will be shot." I knew it was for kids everywhere like me to learn from and enjoy.

When Huck heard Tom's signal and slipped out of his upstairs room at Widow Douglas' house, my heart beat double-time at the promise of adventure, and I slipped out to prowl the streets a time or two myself. I laughed heartily as Tom lifted the hat of Miss Watson's slave, Jim, as he slept, and hung it on a nearby tree limb. I laughed even harder when Jim later told the boys he'd been visited by witches while he slept.

Yet in spite of the adventure and the fun Huck and Tom had that night and at other times, I also knew it wasn't right for Tom to play such tricks on the uneducated and superstitious Jim and always felt uncomfortable when I saw others tease and provoke the mentally and physically disabled and other people less fortunate than others.

I wasn't above playing Tom's kind of tricks on others, though. But it was Huck I admired. He seemed to get into situations where he was forced to choose between right and wrong in such a way that the choice wasn't always clear to him. Once Huck and Jim got separated on the river during the fog, Huck let Jim think it was all a dream, then told him what happened and showed him what a fool he had been for believing it was a dream.

Jim reacted strongly and told Huck he had been ready to die when he thought he would never see his friend again. Then Jim said that anyone who would play a trick as Huck had on a friend was "trash." In Huck's time, slaves could be hanged for talking to a white person like that. But Huck knew he was wrong and wrote, "It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed *his* foot to get him to take it back."

Still, with his background and life experience, Huck wrote, "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a'knowed it would make him feel that way."

Powerful stuff. And the more I read and reread Twain's work, the more I wanted to visit Hannibal, Missouri, and see some of the places in and around Hannibal, or St. Petersburg as he called it in his books, where he

The small clapboard house on Hill Street was built in 1844 and is currently undergoing renovation.

grew up and later wrote about that had such a great impact on so many people.

I didn't know quite how to articulate that desire until I heard Henry Sweets, curator of the Mark Twain Museum in Hannibal, tell about a visit internationally known Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges made to Hannibal in 1985.

"He was coming to St. Louis to go to Washington University to give a talk on Walt Whitman," Sweets said. "And he made it a precondition for his coming to St. Louis that they bring him to Hannibal because he had read Mark Twain as a boy."

Although Borges had never visited the area, he thought the Mississippi was the strength of Mark Twain's writing. At the time, "he was past 80 years (of age), almost blind (and) walking with a cane." Sweets and the entourage walked around with the old man on a tour of the historic downtown area, an early part of the old river town and Twain's boyhood playground.

Borges wanted to go two blocks farther on down to the edge of the river. So the old man and the group slowly made their way downhill to the river. When they reached the bank, Borges got down on his knees and put his hand in the water to feel its strength.

"He actually put his hand down in the water," Sweets said, almost in disbelief, "and just felt that he had had a religious experience almost, touching the source of the river he had read about in Mark Twain's writing. It's just the international reputation Mark Twain has."

The actions of the old writer, like the vivid imagery in Twain's stories, reflect the special feeling the setting of his work has for his readers. And that's why some 130-140,000 people from all over the world, including Jimmy Carter when he was president of the United States and Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa who was a candidate for president of his country, among other well-known world leaders and authors, stream through Hannibal to experience the Twain mystique.

Driving in from the Illinois side of the river, you are met with a sweeping panorama of the waterfront and the sprawling town nestled at the river's edge and spreading back up into the surrounding hills. It's quite a contrast to what it must have looked like 150 years ago when a young Sam Clemens roamed the area.

Then a thriving river town, Hannibal is now digging in its heels to keep from being sucked into the Mississippi and swept downriver with the rich farmland and washed away with whatever else gets caught up in the flood plains along the way. But the Sam Clemens presence is everywhere—the Mark Twain this, the Becky Thatcher that or the Huck Finn anything.

As Hannibal fights for its economic life and capitalizes on the legacy Twain left it, the town's appeal and why most people visit it takes on a bit of the carnival or Disneyland aura. The historic downtown has the appearance of a living museum, though, and most of the places along the street are open for one business or another as they have been since Twain's day. But the tourists dressed in Bermuda shorts and tennis shoes are a different looking lot than those who walked the streets when Hannibal was a bustling river town at the edge of the frontier and would probably give Twain cause to chuckle.

Today, these tourists move slowly through the area in and around Twain's Hill Street home and stop and gaze in wonder at the $500,000 renovation his simple boyhood home is undergoing. Upstairs in the northeast corner is the room Twain knew well as a boy and used for Huck to slip out of at night when he was staying with Widow Douglas at the beginning of *Huckleberry Finn* to meet Tom Sawyer and prowl St. Petersburg in search of adventure.

This is the Hannibal Twain's readers everywhere make the pilgrimage to see. It takes the kind of imagination he had to be able to see the world he was showing and preserving. You need only to close your eyes to the Bermuda shorts and block out the sounds of construction work to hear Tom's "me-yow!" me-yow!" signal and Huck's similar reply just before he crawled out the window onto the shed to meet Tom.

Just east of the house on the river side stands a few remaining planks of the board fence that Tom Sawyer conned his friends into painting and paying him for the honor to boot. The cobblestone street in front of the house has grass growing in the spaces between the bricks.

In preparation for the annual Tom Sawyer Days celebration held each July, two boys hired by the city work haphazardly at digging out the grass with a screwdriver. With the fence in full view and the story in mind, the two-less-than-enthusiastic boys presented an interesting juxtaposition to Tom's creative solution to the tedium of painting the fence. But Tom's imagination was more active than theirs seemed to be.

Across the street from Twain's home is the Becky Thatcher Bookshop, housing one of the largest selections of books by and about Mark Twain to be found anywhere. In the 1840s, Laura Hawkins lived in the stately but simple two-story house with her family. She was Sam Clemens' boyhood sweetheart, known ever after as Becky Thatcher to generations of Twain's readers. Somehow she comes to life as a thousand little boys' childhood sweetheart.

Next to Twain's house and across a paved lot are the two buildings of the Mark Twain Museum. Inside, a collection of photographs, Norman Rockwell paintings, first editions of Twain's works, letters, one of his famous white suits and other memorabilia line the walls and fill display cases and tell the story of the famous son's life. A more complete and narrated story is shown regularly in the museum film room.

Across the street and toward the river is the building Twain's father, John Marshall Clemens, used as his law office when it set a block and a half away on Bird Street. The building was moved to its present location to make it a part of the present Mark Twain mall concept.

Next door, but facing the river is the Pilaster House, the only other house still standing in Hannibal that Twain lived in. The Clemens family moved there for a short time in 1846-47 when the elder Clemens suffered financially and lost the family home. Dr. and Mrs. Orville Grant shared the upstairs rooms with the Clemenses. After John died in the winter of 1847, the family moved back across the street. The young Sam Clemens was soon apprenticed to Joseph Ament to learn the printing trade and help the family make a living.

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Adventure on the

By Vanessa Faurie

Ed Kinchen of rural Porterville remembers a day more than 30 years ago when he discussed his own writing ambitions with *From Here to Eternity* author James Jones in a Robinson drug store. Kinchen told Jones he had often given some thought to writing a book, but didn't know what to write about.

Jones suggested he take a solo boat trip down the Mississippi River and write about the adventure. Kinchen, who was a Navy man during the war, liked the sound of it. But the idea of taking such a trip never became a reality until 1989 when Kinchen was 65.

He bought a 12-foot wooden boat and a trailer at auction. The boat, made in 1939, had been stored in a barn since World War II after its owner never returned to claim it. Kinchen bought the boat from the soldier's parents for $30.

Rechristened the Titanic II, Kinchen painted the outside of the vessel white and the inside green in order to cut down on the sun's glare. The most expensive addition to the craft was a 7 1/2 horsepower Honda motor. A yellow canvas canopy supported by a frame was attached to shield the boat's captain from direct sunlight as well as rain.

Kinchen wasn't sure what to expect on his journey, but many friends and acquaintances gave him plenty of free advice and warnings. Some told him to watch out for snakes and alligators. Others said he should be more leery of untrustworthy strangers. But none of the advice deterred Kinchen from his goal. Two weeks into August, he launched his boat just outside of St. Paul, Minnesota.

"We've always had this saying," Kinchen said. "Old man fear comes a knockin' at your door, and if faith opens it, there'll be nobody there. And it's the truth."

Kinchen opened the door to the adventure he was looking for and found it to be as enjoyable as it was memorable.

Each day, Kinchen got up around sunrise. He bathed in the warm waters of the Mississippi amid the morning fog. He even hung a small mirror on the side of his boat to shave by.

"It makes you feel like a million bucks," Kinchen said about bathing in the river. He recalled the tales of his trip one fall afternoon over coffee, photographs sprawled across a table in his living room. "There's no way to explain how good you feel. Everything's all right with the world. Your mind is clear, and you start thinking clearer."

After his morning bath, he'd start his way down river—just him and the little boat with its few provisions: a tent and sleeping bag, an ice chest with canned foods, a kerosene cooker, a suitcase, a compass and a road map. He stored water in a five-gallon container and extra gasoline in two five-gallon cans. To help record the trip for his future book, he also had a camera and notebook along.

"I'd get on the river and say hello to people as I'd go by," he said. "Once in a while, you'd pass a marina. But I never passed one by. Even if I only needed a gallon of gas. I didn't know where all these marinas were. With my little motor, I used up three and a half gallons a day. And when that got about empty, I pulled in."

It was during those stops into towns along the river for gas and supplies that Kinchen discovered many of the strangers who helped him on his journey. Contrary to the warnings, Kinchen was constantly amazed and heartened by the kindness extended to him by the local people.

"You can't believe how nice they are," he said, as if he still has trouble persuading himself. "People said, 'Now watch your step. People will rob you blind,' which was a lot of bull, see. It's a fear people have: don't trust strangers. I couldn't believe how nice they were to me."

Kinchen mentioned the time he pulled into Comanche, Missouri, to wash his clothes in a local laundromat when he passed a woman and her children who insisted they give him a ride.

"I got my laundry in," he said, "and someone along the line digs up the electric line that goes through town. The whole town went out. So I waited 15 minutes, thinking it'd come back on surely. So then I thought I'd walk around town a little bit.

"I went up to the IGA store, and someone handed me a flashlight. So I go around picking up supplies. I get back and find out it's going to be all day before that electric gets turned back on. So I take all my laundry out of the washing machine, wring it out and stuff it in my trouser legs, pick up my groceries and start walking back."

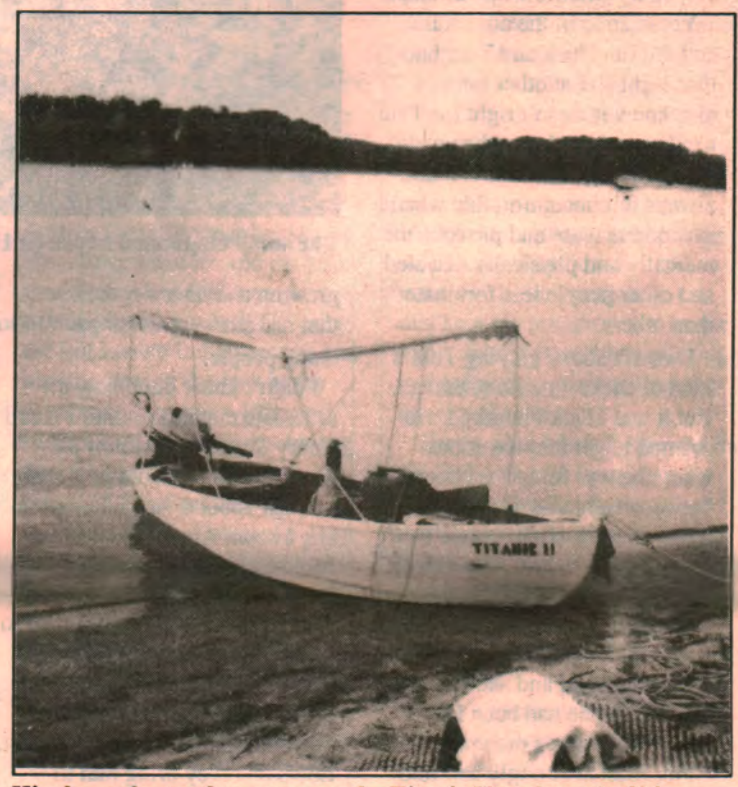
Almost back to the river, Kinchen passed the same woman who had given him a ride earlier. She was mowing her lawn.

"She said, 'I was gonna come and get ya,'" Kinchen continued. "I said, 'Naw, I just got another block to go. They (the woman and her children) started carrying my groceries and got me to the dock and saw me off.

"And so you think, how can I ever repay these people for being so nice? You get that way. You can be as hard as you want, after a while, you soften up."

As Kinchen continued his way down the river, he often talked with people on houseboats and yachts. Sometimes he was invited on board for coffee. The people often shared their experience and knowledge of river protocol with him.

"I got in the first lock with three other small craft," Kinchen said. "There were lines of rope hanging down, about 20 of them, and you grab hold of that and just hold on. Here I was going to tie (my boat) up, and this lady says, 'Don't do that! Don't do that, now, for you're going down and you're going to end up in the air.'



Kinchen reluctantly gave away the Titanic II at the end of his voyage. It was like selling a cherished automobile, he said.

"You'd never know you were being lowered down to the next level of water on the Mississippi. When I got to Lock 19, I didn't even hang onto the rope. I just kept going around in a circle. That's how big it is. It's a monstrous thing. It's hard to believe."

During the four weeks it took to get as far as St. Louis, Kinchen enjoyed the calm, quiet waters. The least enjoyable times were when it rained. But it only took the first storm to teach him one valuable lesson.

"I stayed in the tent all day, which was a terrible mistake," he said. "On the boat, you can get out of that rain in a half an hour. You could be soakin' wet, and all of a sudden about a half an hour out of that rain, you're dry.

"Except my feet never got dry," he added and laughed. "I always had water in the bottom of the boat. I kept two towels on each side. Water always came in toward the end, toward the stern of the boat. And I'd be wringing that out every once in a while. You'd hit choppy water. And the faster you'd go, the worse it was.

"I spent the day in that damn wet weather. I woke up the next morning and said I'm never gonna do this again. I listened to the radio till it was coming out my ears."

Kinchen would start to hunt for a sandbar at about 5 p.m. each evening to make the night's camp. Another lesson was learned when he camped out one night on a flat sandbar. Since the locks are regulated, they sometimes are opened it the water level gets too high.

"Water came creeping into my tent that night," he said. "And I didn't even put up my cooking utensils. Some of them floated away. And my coffee floated away. I hated that tea business. It was about two days before I could get any coffee."

mighty Mississippi

Kinchen says he can talk for hours about his adventures along the Mississippi River.

When he couldn't find a sandbar for the night, he pulled into a shallow area behind some barges, dropped anchor and slept on the boat. He said it made him a little "crazy" because he ended up going around in a circle all night. But when the sunlight hit his face in the morning, he was raring to go.

One of the more beautiful sites he saw on the river occurred at night when the search lights of a passing tugboat scanned back and forth across the river from buoy to buoy.

But the mood of the river changed when Kinchen got south of St. Louis. Not only did the current change to a stronger pace, but the people who traveled the river were also harsher. The people who, in Kinchen's view, "control" the river south of St. Louis are the tugboat crewmen and commercial boaters. Yet north of St. Louis, the pleasure boaters who spend their leisure time on yachts and houseboats are the ones who set the tone.

Kinchen found that those who worked in the depressed shipping industry seemed to have little tolerance for his small boat putting its way down river.

"When you get past St. Louis," he said, "you mind your manners and you respect the river. Tugs don't like you, especially the small tugs that are being eased out. They have a bitterness to them that they take out on anybody."

One tug was heading straight for the small boat when Kinchen maneuvered to get out of its way. But the tug also moved and kept coming at him. Kinchen finally had to move to the wrong side of the river to avoid the tug's harassment.

But as Kinchen approached New Orleans, the end of his journey, his troubles were just beginning.

On the advice of the harbor police, Kinchen planned to go through what's called the Industrial Canal to find a place to get out of the river. Most of the docks in the area are around 10 feet tall and were not meant to accommodate adventurers in their small boats. So Kinchen called his wife, Ruth, and arranged to meet her so they could head for home in the family pick-up truck with the Titanic II in tow.

"They told me to go through the Industrial Canal so my wife could pick me up," he said. "So I get down there, and the lockmaster is a devil. He and I had words. This jerk comes out and cusses at me. And I thought, who the hell do you think you're talking to? He opened (the lock) up to let a showboat out, and when he does that, the incoming traffic is supposed to go in. So I get about halfway in and he comes up yelling at me, 'My God, do you want to get crushed?' I said, 'Look, you blah, blah, blah, I've been waiting to get in here and you're acting like a jerk to me. I came all the way down the Mississippi and I have to listen to you?' So he let me on."

Unfortunately, Kinchen was misinformed and there was no place for him to get his small boat out of the river. That also meant there was no place to meet his wife, who by that time was already on her way to New Orleans.

"Here's where the mistake was," Kinchen said: "I listened to people I thought knew what they were talking about, and it wasn't true. When I went up the Industrial Canal, that was where Ruthie was supposed to meet me. Well, I had to come back and go through this rigmarole with the stupid lockmaster."

Kinchen took refuge with a group of homeless people who lived underneath the Canal Street dock in New Orleans. That dock was his home for the next three nights, waiting for his wife and daughter to arrive and eventually meet up with them.

Then another mishap occurred. While his boat was tied up under the pier, a large freighter passed by and the water from the ship's wake poured over the boat and sank it. Some of the homeless people helped Kinchen retrieve the boat and most of his belongings. But the most precious items, the notes and all the photographs taken south of St. Louis, were lost to him.

Kinchen quickly got to know some of the homeless people under the dock. During the day, they all disappeared into the streets to specifically beg and finagle cigarettes, food, alcohol, whatever. And at night, they congregated back under the dock and distributed the proceeds.

"One was called Shoeless," Kinchen said, explaining that the man didn't like to wear shoes. "He was my favorite. These guys were all bums. When they helped me pull my boat in, I said, 'Help yourself to this food.' And he said, 'Hell, I wouldn't eat that crap.' I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'Why hell, we eat pretty high.'

"When they're begging on the street, a lot of people say, 'Sure I'll give you a couple dollars for a hamburger' and then make 'em sit down and eat the hamburger in front of them. Or some will say, 'I'll buy you a steak.'"

Although the experience with his new friends was an education in itself, Kinchen was more interested in finding a way out of the river and reuniting with his family.

He didn't know it at the time, but the harbor police had issued an all-points bulletin on him when Ruth couldn't find him at the place where they had arranged to meet. Ironically, it was a tugboat captain who helped Kinchen find his family.

Kinchen was under the pier in his boat when a tugboat captain spotted two women on the river bank waving frantically, yet unsuccessfully, to get Kinchen's attention.

"I hear him through a megaphone: 'Ed Kinchen!' So I come wading out—I'm only in 2 feet of water under this pier. He says, 'Your wife and daughter are waiting for you over there.' So I go out, and this damn ferry almost hits me. I got out of his way and old Captain Jack (the tugboat captain) greeted me."

Although the tugboat had the capability to lift the little boat right out of the water, it could not for insurance reasons.

"I said, 'OK, you guys win.' I'm disgusted now and really tired. I said (to the captain), 'You want a boat?'"

Captain Jack declined, but one of his deckhands took Kinchen up on his offer and even helped unload Kinchen's belongings and the motor under the dock. So because the boat now belonged to the crewman, the tugboat's crane effortlessly hoisted the Titanic II on board.

"So I make a phone call to the harbor police again," he said. "I was still under the Canal Street dock."

The police then guided Kinchen's wife and daughter to the dock.

"I could see my truck coming," Kinchen said, "and I thought, thank God."

Looking back on the experience now, Ruth Kinchen frowns on the prospect of ever again participating to even the smallest degree on any future trips.

But Kinchen's own spirit has not dampened in the least. In fact, he wants to get another boat and take a trip on the Illinois River next.

Little did James Jones know what he started.

Vanessa Faurie is managing editor of Tales.

Learning the beauty of Allerton Park

By John Schomberg

Traveling the one-lane roads just outside Monticello, one word comes to mind. Corn. The stalks stretch up from the ground as far as the eye can see until you stumble upon a rarity—no, something that is really one-of-a-kind. The corn fields are quickly replaced by huge pine trees that stand in symmetrical rows along the sides of the road, framing a path to another world.

Entering the southeast entrance of Robert Allerton Park, visitors are greeted by two statues that mark the pathway to the past. Ahead on each side of the road are the partially flooded woodlands that line the riverbed of the Sangamon River. On the other side of a stone bridge, more rows of pines lead to Allerton's main entrance.

Statues of charioteers guard the entrance, which borders on the formal gardens created by Robert Allerton, the philanthropist and patron of the arts who made the land now known as Allerton Park his brainchild.

Several hundred yards into Allerton's horticultural masterpiece, past the rare, blue Fu Dog sculptures and the house of the Golden Buddhas that make up the Fu Dog Garden, is a visitor's center bordering the well-trimmed hedges of the formal gardens. When people come into the center looking for information, they often find park volunteer Buck Schroth with the answers.

Schroth has a long history with Allerton Park that has lasted from 1933 to the present. His pleasant smile and hearty handshake shows that he has worked with people all his life and is eager to please. Although in his mid-80s, a sparkle of energy and vibrance shines from behind his glasses, revealing a man who has remained young at heart.

He was more than willing to tell both his story and the story of Allerton Park. His association with the park began in 1933 when he was a young biology teacher and assistant coach in the Monticello school system.

"We made arrangements for some of our biology students to come out here for field trips because this was a novel place for that," Schroth said, sitting inside the visitor's center. "Across the river, the woodlands there are literally virgin woodlands. They're like they were when the Indians lived here. And as a result of that, it was a wonderful place to have a field trip.

"We came out very early in the morning for birdwatching and throughout the seasons for flowers and tree application and such like. But we didn't do a lot over on this side of the river because this is where the formal gardens were. This is where Mr. Allerton had his guests.

"I came over on this side only on occasion to visit with Mr. (Jimmy) Shields, who was Mr. Allerton's head gardener."

Schroth's friendship with Allerton's head gardener in the mid-to-late 30s allowed Schroth to learn about the gardens and to take occasional walks through the grounds. It was on one of these walks that Schroth first met Robert Allerton, which resulted in an on-going correspondence that lasted many years. Schroth learned a great deal about Allerton as well as the park.

Buck Schroth

The history of the Allerton family dates back to the Mayflower and the settlement created by its passengers. Isaac Allerton was not only a passenger on the famous voyage, he was also the third highest authority in the settlement.

A seventh-generation descendent of Isaac, Robert Allerton's father, Samuel, was originally from New York and was both a self-educated and a self-made man. He made most of his money in livestock and owned huge pieces of land throughout the Midwest. The elder Allerton was a big part in the creation of the Union Stockyards in Chicago and the formation of the First National Bank of Chicago. At one time, Samuel's popularity and power were such that he even campaigned for mayor.

Schroth has his own ideas about whether Robert Allerton followed the family tradition of leadership and good business sense through his creation of Allerton Park.

"There's a story, a legend I guess you'd call it, that people tell that probably has a bit of truth in it," Schroth said. "He and his dad were riding in a horse and buggy over the Farms (the land now containing Allerton Park and its surrounding farms) way back when he was a very young man.

"They were driving around the edge of the park, perhaps this time of year when the colors of the leaves were beginning to show and the place looked beautiful. Young Robert turned to the woodlands and said, 'Dad, aren't those trees beautiful?' His dad turned to Robert and said, 'Look over there, son. That corn field is beautiful. That's the gold of this part of the country.'

"Robert had a sense of beauty and the fine things in life, while his dad was a money maker."

The young Allerton pursued his love of art by studying in Munich, Paris and London in the mid-1890s. But he gave up his artistic aspirations to return to the United States in 1897 to manage his father's farm in Monticello. It was at that time that Allerton began to contemplate what he was going to do with his father's land.

First, he decided that he needed

a manor house and so traveled to England with Eastern architect John Borie to find a model for his dream mansion. After extensive touring, the two men decided to model the mansion after Ham House, an estate that was built in 1610.

With the completion of Allerton's Georgian mansion in 1900, the two men commenced work on the landscape of the surrounding grounds.

"He wanted a place of beauty, of design, of artificial beauty through the gardens with all formalized areas," Schroth said. "But he also wanted people to know that, right out of the woodlands, something like this could be carved.

"Outside of this formal area," Schroth continued, motioning to the gardens, "he wanted things to be natural, just as wild and ordinary as they could be. Let nature take its own place—that was his concept of art and nature combining to make the kind of park that Allerton Park is. On the south side of the (Sangamon) river, nothing but virginal, natural wood; on this side of the river, the beautiful artwork. But he didn't destroy the nature stuff in spots. He left it hanging close by."

In addition to sculpting the land, Allerton collected statuary to present in his formal gardens. He purchased the statues in his travels around the world and commissioned people ranging from students in Bangkok to some of his art chums in Europe to complete his works. He added his last piece of statuary in 1942.

The landscaping was completed in 1932 with the help of John Gregg, who later became John Gregg Allerton when Allerton legally adopted him. The two first met in 1922 at a Dad's Day fraternity dinner at the University of Illinois, where Gregg was studying architecture and landscaping. The two got along well from the beginning of what became a life-long relationship.

Allerton and Gregg traveled around the world during the 1930s. On a trip to Hawaii, Allerton purchased a 300-acre estate on the island of Kauai, which later became their permanent home in the 1940s.

In 1946, Allerton decided to give his Monticello estate, including about 3,800 acres of his farms, to the University of Illinois to serve as a park. Included with the estate, the house was to serve as a university conference center.

A few years later, Schroth's own involvement with Allerton Park increased when the U. of I. dean of university extension asked Schroth to be the resident at Allerton House in 1952.

"I did for 15 years," he said. "And during that period of time I spent an awful lot of my spare hours walking, studying and learning in the woods.

"I had many opportunities to visit with Mr. Allerton when he came back from Hawaii, as he did in the spring of the year. Every year in early May he would come back and spend a week to two weeks.

"As the result of our discussions, I became really enamored with what was here."

As Schroth learned more about the park, he also learned more about Robert Allerton himself.

"He was a very stern man in wanting accuracy and correctness about things." Schroth said. "His eye for beauty and for balance in art, I think, was remarkable. And I'm not in any way, shape or form an authority on art who knows all the answers in art. I just know that people like art because they like art, the things they see."

A smile sneaked across Schroth's face as he reflected on Allerton Park. "(It's) a real remarkable place in a setting that few people can visualize. We have visitors here from all over the world, and every time they come, they may expect to see something like (Allerton Park) in the old world, but here in the middle of the corn fields? No way! But here it is, and they're enthralled by it."

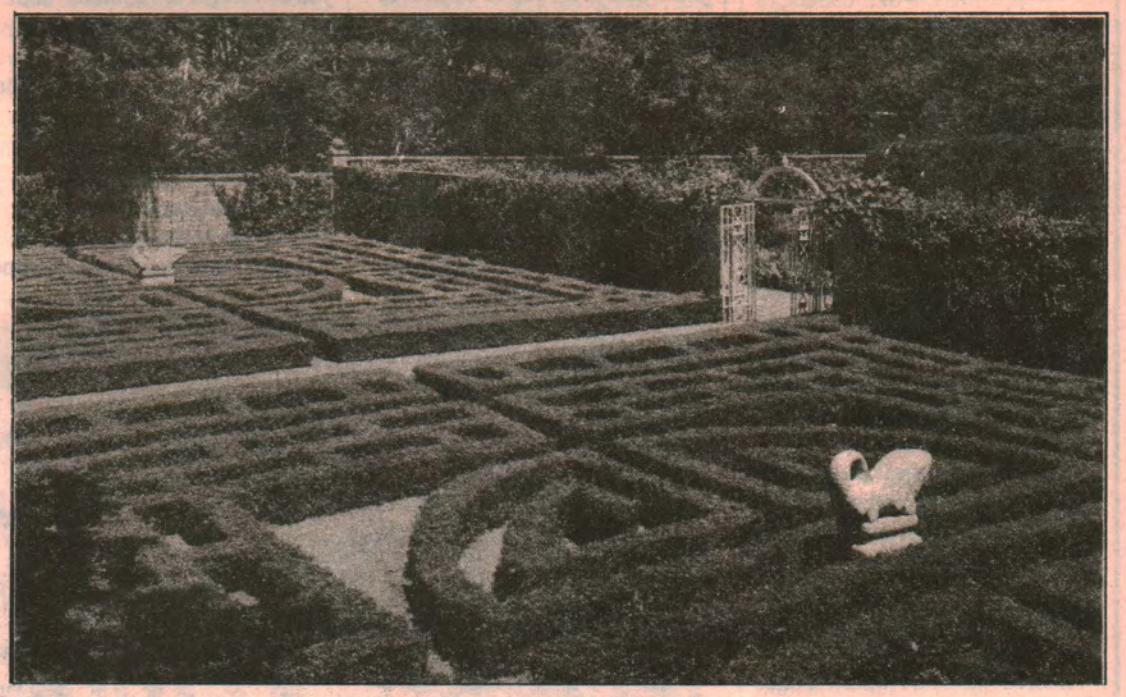
In his 15 years as resident, Buck Schroth continued to be enamored with the park through the good times and the bad. Yes, there were some bad times.

"In the late 60s there was a lot of vandalism in the park. We didn't have enough money to support a program of security at that time. Because of that, the vandalism was really terrible."

Left: one of the Chinese Fu Dog sculptures that keeps watch in the Fu Dog Garden

Below: the simultaneous elegance and complexity of the Formal Gardens

Allerton Park photographs courtesy of the Illinois Alumni News



But the park continued to thrive and draw people, despite the threat of vandalism and occasional financial difficulties that Schroth dealt with through 1967. He retired that year from his position with the university and relocated to San Diego and Tucson, where he taught earth science for the next seven and one-half years.

After their stay in the West, Schroth and his wife returned to the Monticello area, to where she had her roots and to the place that the two of them truly call home.

"This was one of the unique places in my life," he said, a smile crossing his face as he leaned back and considered why he returned to Monticello and continues to volunteer at Allerton Park. "As a teacher first, then as the resident here . . . this is home. And people usually come back to their home. One writer said, 'You can't go home again.' But you can, and a great many people do."

John Schomberg is a senior at Urbana High School in Urbana, Illinois.

Twain

Continued from page 9

Dr. Grant ran a drugstore in the bottom of the Pilaster House, the first building on the west side of the street in a block of row buildings running south on Main Street for a block. These and the buildings on the east side of the street were built during Twain's youth between 1840 and 1850. Grant's Drugstore was the site of a shooting Twain witnessed as a boy and was used as a model for the shooting incident in *Huckleberry Finn* where a drunk named Boggs comes into an Arkansas town and said he was going to kill a Colonel Sherburn for swindling him.

Visitors, then, get the historical perspective form the living-museum effect of the restored period buildings, mostly housing private businesses selling Mark Twain memorabilia or food and drinks. It was the food that made me most aware of the less obvious differences between Twain's time and today.

After traipsing around the Hannibal area all day and imagining Huck and Tom with a string of river bullhead or channel catfish, cooking them in a skillet of hot grease over an open camp fire, my mouth was nearly watering at the thought of a mess of catfish. At a restaurant in the historic section of town that evening, I hardly glanced at the other selections and ordered the catfish dinner.

"Those are frozen, sir," the waitress said. "We don't have fresh catfish."

"No fresh catfish in Hannibal?" I asked rather incredulously.

"You might find some, but they aren't fit to eat. With all the rain we've had lately, the flooding has brought the chemicals out of the farms and carried them down into the river. I sure wouldn't eat the fish."

"I guess not," I said and ordered a steak, which turned out to be about the same as ordering catfish in Kansas City, a town known for its steaks.

Back at the Fifth Street Mansion, a bed and breakfast in a restored Victorian mansion once owned by members of the Garth family who were among Twain's lifelong friends, where Twain reportedly visited the former owners, I tried to imagine him in one of his famous white suits, sitting in the parlor, sipping a shot of whiskey and telling stories of old Hannibal as he mixed his reaction to today's Hannibal where you couldn't buy a healthy fresh catfish. The eerie quietness of the parlor seemed incongruous for such a discussion for the fun-loving Twain.

An early morning walk through the streets of non-historic Hannibal reveals an up-close look at the economic devastation brought on this river town of 18,800 by a lack of industrial growth and a decline in river activity. Hannibal natives often get out of town as quickly as possible.

"They don't have anything for the young people to do," one former resident now in her fifties who has been gone since she graduated from high school said. "Anybody who stays does so because they like the place, can't leave or drives up to Quincy (Illinois) to work."

The young Sam Clemens could identify with leaving town, leaving himself at age 17 to follow the printing trade he learned as an apprentice after his father died. Henry Sweets, however, who enjoyed Hannibal as a kid growing up, was ambivalent about leaving.

"I don't think it was a conscious thought that I did or I didn't want to return to Hannibal," he said. "I was just off on a new adventure, which was college."

He was gone more than ten years before the job of curator of the museum was offered to him. Now nearly 13 years later, Sweets stays enthusiastic about the future of historic Hannibal and its connection to its famous son. Sweets works tirelessly at everything from answering mail to fielding inquiries about Twain from around the world to giving interviews in his capacity as museum curator to involving the museum with area schools—giving presentations on Twain's life, helping with field trips and participating in choosing the 7th grade boy and girl who will represent Hannibal as Tom and Becky for a year.

Not everyone in Hannibal is as fortunate as Sweets, though. The tourists don't make the locals who don't have jobs with the Twain-phenomenon industry prosperous. Store building after store building is empty and in need of repair, a grim reminder that stable industry is needed to keep the residents at home and employed. Little activity is apparent that is not tourist-related.

On the riverfront, a small park boasts of the Twain connection. People live on the boats docked nearby and rise and walk to jobs a few blocks away. Grass grows raggedly between cracks in the sidewalks and the retainer walls along the river. Dead fish float belly up and rock gently against the shore with the waves.

A few blocks away and a steep but refreshing climb in the early morning, Cardiff Hill offers a majestic view of the river and enough cover from the trees that you can forget for a minute and see Huck and Tom and their friends darting through them. Much of the hill seems to be little different than it must have been in Twain's early days, until you get to the top of the hill and see the houses lining the street running along the bluff.

Jackson Island, where Huck and Jim met in *Huckleberry Finn* before their raft trip down the Mississippi, is located across and downriver and looks pretty much the same as it must have when Jim was running away from slavery and Huck was trying to make it appear he had been murdered. Lover's Leap juts up 240 feet from the river across and downriver from the island.

Both are seemingly lackluster landmarks unless you can imagine Huck and Tom in the picture. A steamboat trip brings back the feeling of nostalgia, but in more of the Disneyland atmosphere as the young pilot narrates the sights and history in a sing-songy, phony-sounding voice devoid of enthusiasm, the result of a thousand presentations.

"That's Lover's Leap off on the starboard side of the boat," the pilot says and laughs. "Local legend has it that the river bluff got its name from a newspaper story Orion Clemens, Mark Twain's brother, wrote in 1840. Seems there was a young Indian brave and Indian princess who were very much in love. They belonged to different tribes. Now the tribes were at war with each other. . . ."

Well, you can figure out what ultimately happened, contributing to the sense of unreality. But then inside the Mark Twain Cave, a feeling of reality about Twain's writing comes to life. Generations of boys and men, beginning with Jack Simms who discovered the cave as his dogs followed a panther to the entrance in 1820, have explored the cave and used candle and torch soot and knives to leave names and dates going all the way back to 1820 and continuing through the early 1970s when a federal law was passed prohibiting defacing the walls of the cave. The dates look as new as the day they were put there.

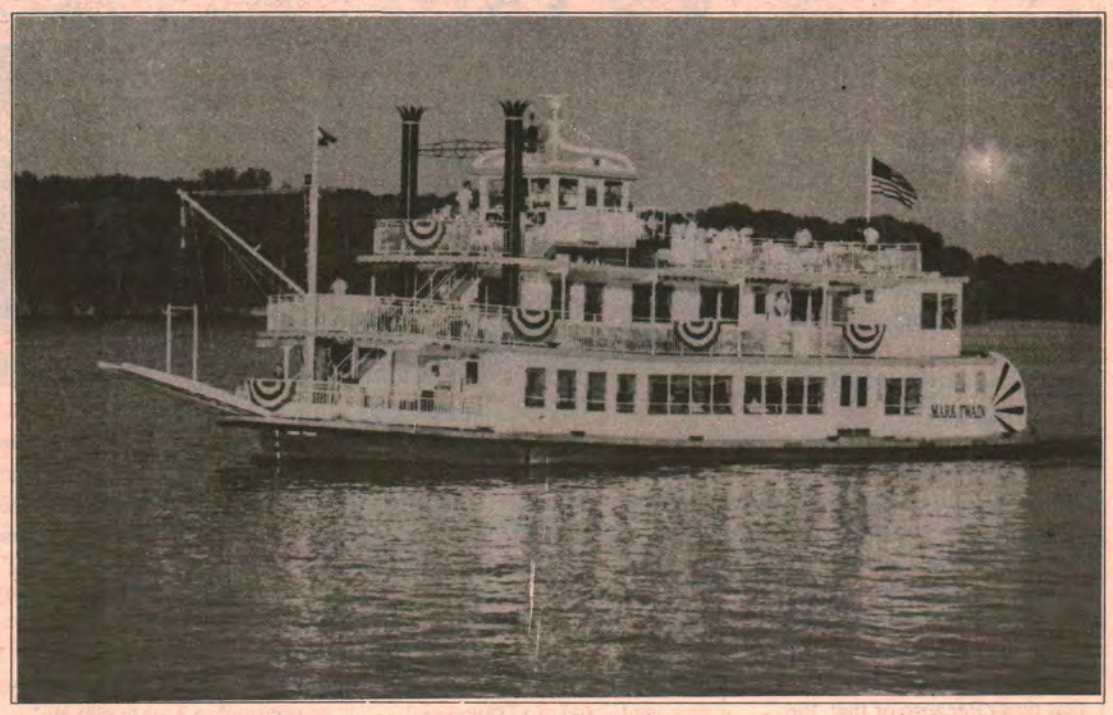
About halfway through the tour of the cave, you begin to realize that the names the guide is giving to the areas you're walking through—"The Drawing-Room," "The Cathedral" and "Aladdin's Palace"—are the names you read years ago in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* when Tom and Becky were lost in the cave and "smoked their own names under an overhanging shelf and moved on." Then you come to a place where a bench-like rock sets in a wide part of the cave.

In the book it reads, "At the end of twenty steps the corridor ended in a 'jumping-off place.'" The "jumping-off place" was five or six feet down and has been filled in and leveled off so visitors can now walk over it. But Tom got to the spot in the book, "got down on his knees and felt below, and then as far around the corner as he could reach with his hands conveniently; he made an effort to stretch yet a little farther to the right, and at that moment, not twenty feet away, a human hand, holding a candle, appeared from behind a rock."

Being lost and somewhat frightened, Tom started to shout in relief. Just in time, he realized it was Injun Joe, whom he had testified against in court. Tom couldn't move and stared in disbelief as Injun Joe whirled and moved off in the other direction. . . .

The scene flashes through your mind. Finally, you can close your eyes and realize exactly what you came to see. If only you could shut the lights off, light a candle and peer through the darkness alone, you could go back in time. I know I could see Injun Joe hurrying away just as I used to see the Indians through the trees down on the North Fork after I first read about Huck and Tom.

Somehow, I knew then that what I had been wanting to visit Hannibal for for all these years had been realized. I didn't even have to close my eyes and imagine any longer. It was all there. Reading Mark Twain would be just a little more special now than it had even been before.



The riverboat named for Hannibal's favorite son, the Mark Twain, takes tourists on sight-seeing excursions and dinner cruises.

Ray Elliott is editor of Tales.

The Last Word

No one rescued the rescuer

By Miles Harvey

Mitch Snyder made a career out of flirting with suicide. For two decades, the controversial homeless-rights advocate fought an amazingly effective one-man battle with the powers-that-be in the nation's capital by repeatedly threatening to starve himself to death.

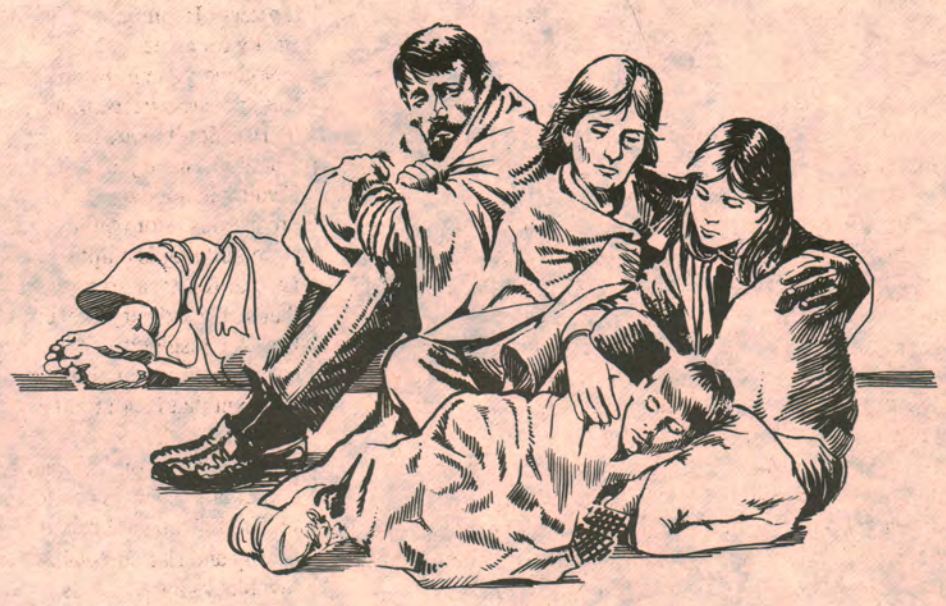
By his own estimation, Snyder spent more than two years of his life on hunger strikes. For a proponent of an unpopular cause who lacked money and other political resources, refusing to eat was the only weapon available—and it proved a formidable one. In 1984, for example, Snyder forced President Reagan to say "uncle," a feat not accomplished by many world leaders or anyone in the entire Democratic Party. Two days before the presidential election that year, Reagan bowed to Snyder's demand that the White House fix up a Washington, D.C., homeless shelter. Reagan backed down after an emaciated Snyder—in the midst of a 51-day hunger strike in which he lost more than 60 pounds—caused a national stir by appearing on "Nightline" and "Sixty Minutes."

To admirers (I was one), Snyder seemed a selfless crusader in the mold of Ghandi. To opponents, he was "Hollywood Mitch," a self-promoting radical with a martyr complex. But supporters and detractors alike agreed that Snyder was a brilliant manipulator of the media. "Mitch gives the best 20-second sound bites in TV history," a network reporter once told *Esquire* magazine.

There were no television cameras present, however, when Mitch Snyder's life came to an end in early July. He died alone, apparently, by hanging himself. Snyder's high-profile suicide threats had made him a household name and the subject of a made-for-TV movie starring Martin Sheen. But when the long-threatened event finally happened, it seemed disturbingly inexpicable and modest. In the end, private demons, not a public crusade, had prompted Snyder to stop living. For those of us who had looked up to him, it was sobering to realize that our hero was only a man after all, and perhaps not such a strong one at that.

I met Snyder in the fall of 1984. I had spent the summer in Bellair writing for *Tales*, and then had gone to Washington to work as a reporting intern for *The Los Angeles Times*. The move involved a lot of culture shock. Southeastern Illinois and the District of Columbia had almost nothing in common except hard times. In the Midwest, one family farm after another had been going out of business. The land was dotted with abandoned houses, eerie reminders that all was not well with the prosperous, happy America we kept hearing about on the news. In Washington, there were even more disturbing reminders. There, the problem was not homes without people, but people without homes—by the thousands.

My editors at the *Times* assigned me to cover a ballot initiative, which Snyder was pushing (successfully, it turned out), designed to guarantee the right to shelter every man, woman and child in the city. I did what I had been taught in journalism school and talked to all of the main parties involved: the activists like Snyder, the politicians, the experts—and the people most affected by the initiative, the homeless. When I gave the story to my editor, he left in the activists, politicians and experts, but cut all my quotes from homeless people. "This is an issue story, not a people story," he told me coldly. The federal government seemed to have a similar attitude: after unsightly humans began finding warm places to sleep on steam grates in front of one government building, bureaucrats solved the problem by ordering the grates covered. Government, like my editor, was concerned with the issue of homelessness, and those irritating homeless people were getting in the way again.



Snyder, however, was concerned with the people. The first time I interviewed him was in Lafayette Park in front of the White House. He was wearing his trademark Army fatigue jacket, and with his unkempt mop of hair and his wild, piercing eyes, it was hard to tell him from the street people with whom he was talking politics and sharing a few jokes that afternoon. I asked him some uninspired questions about the issue at hand, to which he gave me some inspired answers, and then, as sometimes happens, we drifted off the immediate subject, and our interview faded into a conversation.

What I remember talking about was a book that had not yet been written, but which Snyder felt should be. The book was to be about the lives of homeless people, in their own words. Snyder didn't strike me as particularly romantic about the homeless—he lived among them, after all, and knew their myriad problems first-hand—but he did think it would be a good thing if the rest of the country got acquainted with its neighbors in the street a little more personally.

My only contact with the homeless now is the exchange of an occasional quarter and some small talk in a subway station.

I don't know if that book has ever been written. For a time, I fancied that I would do it myself, but then I kept finding safer, less troublesome things to do. As ever, my only contact with the homeless now is the exchange of an occasional quarter and some small talk in a subway station. Even those few moments ofter leave me feeling drained and depressed. Like my editor in Washington and the government bureaucrats who covered the steam grates, I find the issue of homelessness much easier to face up to than the people.

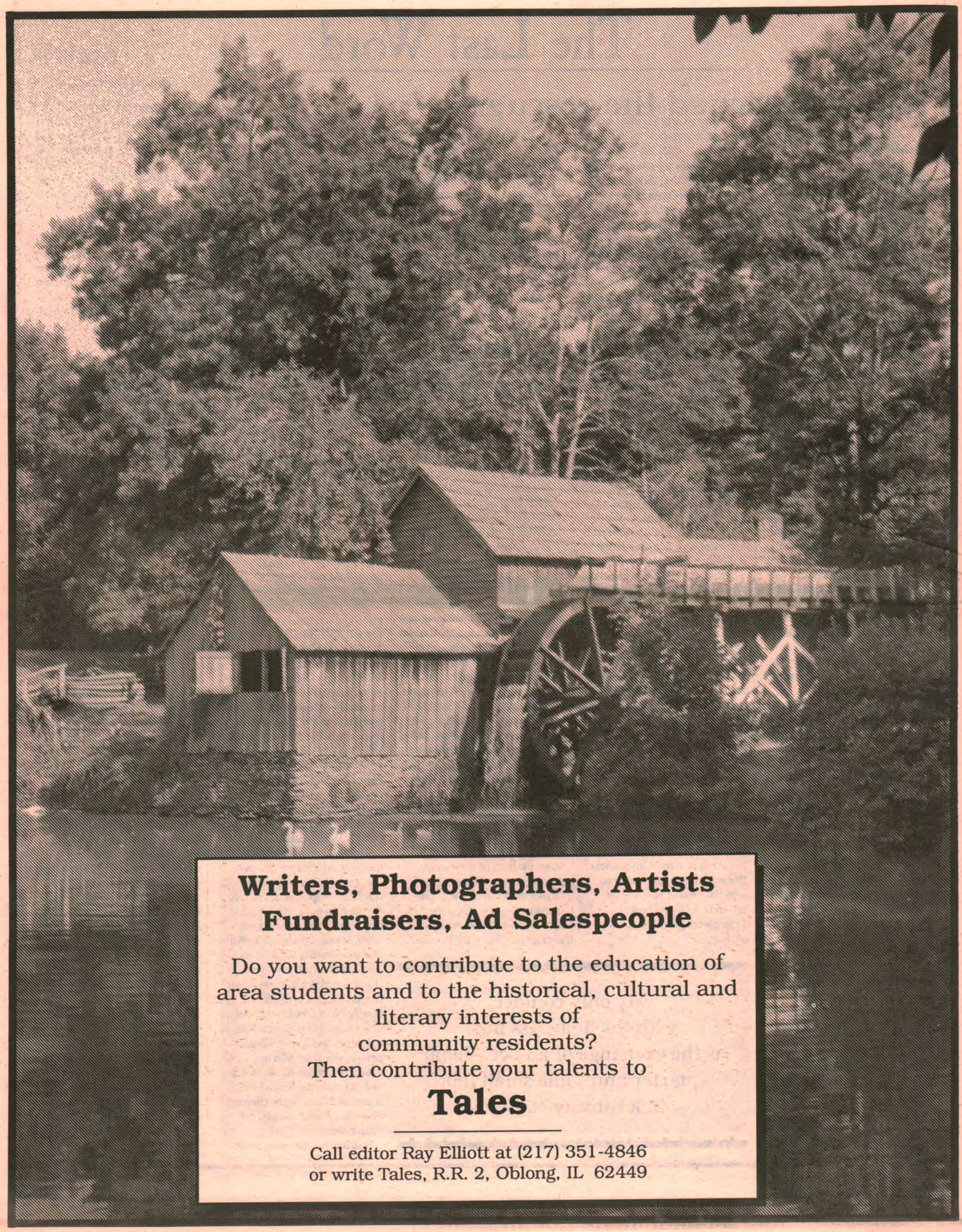
Experts on that issue tell us that many individuals are driven to the streets because of a breakdown in "support systems"—an isolation from families, friends and mainstream social institutions. It's perhaps because of this that we normally think of homelessness as an urban dilemma. Rural America has its problems, but its "support systems" are largely intact. People still feel an obligation to family members, neighbors and fellow worshippers—even those who are poor, addicted or mentally ill. Down-and-out individuals still have names and faces in the country. They are, in other words, still people there.

It strikes me that what made Mitch Snyder's life important was his uncompromising devotion to protecting the basic humanity of those lost in a hostile urban environment. Experts might say that he built "support systems," but I like the way one of those mourning his death explained it to the *Chicago Tribune*: "Don't nobody care about people on the bottom. Government don't care. That man ... he cared about poor people."

The second time I interviewed Snyder, he was well into the hunger strike that broke Ronald Reagan's will. In his tiny room at the ramshackle headquarters of his organization, the Community for Creative Non-Violence, he lay in bed, gaunt and pale, answering reporters' questions. True, there was an air of spectacle to the event; Snyder's body seemed to go more limp, his voice more soft, when the lights of the TV cameras switched on. Yet he was clearly risking his life—and not for some grandiose or egotistical ideal. He was demanding only a clean place for a few fellow human beings to sleep.

Snyder once explained that "fasting is like rescuing someone from a burning building." The tragic irony is that when Mitch Snyder needed it most, there was no one to rescue him.

Miles Harvey is a former editor of Tales *and* In These Times.



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