

History

## Beloved Mark Twain made Bermuda famous

Samuel Langhorne Clemens — who rebranded himself as Mark Twain after piloting steamboats on the Mississippi River — did much to make Bermuda what it is today. The celebrated writer with the unruly red hair, droopy moustache, distinctive gait and Southern accent made several trips here between 1867 and 1910, and he advised his many readers to do the same.

Twain achieved worldwide fame as an author, lecturer and satirist. His editors treated him like a 19th-century rock star. His speaking engagements sold out. His magazine articles got tongues wagging across the world. Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and other prominent successors declared his works — including the powerful *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* — as major influences on the 20th century.

Born November 30, 1835, young Samuel grew up impoverished in the river town of Hannibal, Missouri, began writing seriously at 12, and developed his unique voice, style and wit. Without tuition for college, he apprenticed himself to a printer, wrote copy for the *Hannibal Journal*, and picked up the kind of frontier humour he would later ply so eloquently on behalf of social causes — and his adopted Bermuda.

In New Orleans, Twain worked as a steamboat pilot and took the pen name of Mark Twain, a river term meaning 12 feet, deep enough to pass. The experience painted a colourful background for many of his stories. He travelled to San Francisco in 1864, winning fame for “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (1865). Later, he travelled to the Mediterranean, the Holy Land and, in

November 1867, Bermuda. During the voyage, he penned his successful travel book *The Innocents Abroad*.

Arriving in Bermuda, Twain surveyed a large rubber tree, still standing in Par-la-Ville Park, and complained with tongue in cheek that it bore no rubber overshoes or hot water bottles. He became Bermuda's most famous visitor, and he introduced his fellow Americans to the islands — a touchy subject after the U.S. Civil War, in which many Bermudians supported the Confederacy.

The writer extolled the virtues of Bermuda for extended winter escapes from North America's bitter winters. The newfangled technology of the telegraph, recently installed in Bermuda, allowed Twain to dispatch his stories around the world quickly.

In 1870, Twain married Olivia Langdon of Elmira, New York, and the newlywed settled down in the East, serving briefly as a newspaper editor before abandoning journalism in favour of serious literature. He produced *The Gilded Age* (1873), a satire of contemporary get-rich-quick schemes, and *Tom Sawyer* (1875), his classic tale of boyhood on the Mississippi River.

During Twain's second visit here, he observed that blacks enjoyed basic rights still lacking in his homeland, despite the Civil War, and he wrote a series of articles published by the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1877–78.

He wrote an historical novel, *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), completed his *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), and finally released the most renowned work of his career, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). A later satire, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), handed up a powerful indictment of social injustice.

As a businessman, however, Mark Twain was a great writer. Financial problems prompted his move to Europe in 1891. His publishing company failed, as did a typesetting machine in which he had invested. He went bankrupt. His eldest daughter died in 1896, and his wife, in 1904. His writings became pessimistic.

In these later years, he regarded Bermuda as his second home. Here he was inspired to write his final and most significant pieces, while promoting Bermuda tourism and raising funds for the Bermuda Cottage Hospital, now called King Edward VII Memorial Hospital. He also worked to ban automobiles from the islands and entertained such famous friends as Woodrow Wilson — before he became president.

Through magazine articles, he painted a portrait of Bermuda that elevated travel writing to an art form, concentrating on the fascinating people here, rather than just the beautiful places. Twain was especially impressed to see well dressed, well spoken blacks and whites — businessmen, farmers, exporters — living and working together. He enjoyed the black culture here as he could not have done in the states.

On several visits, he was a guest at the Flatt's Village home of Charles Maxwell Allan, then assistant consul general of the United States, and his wife, Marion Schuyler Allan. But Twain spent most of his time at Bay House, which faces Hamilton Harbour at 4 Old Slip Lane, a tranquil road in Pembroke. He spent mornings with his books, manuscripts, cigars, and pipes. He relaxed in a kimono and slippers before lunch. His ground-floor room opened onto a veranda.

For drinks and meals, he was a regular at the Princess. He often walked from Bay House to the Tucker Sister's Tea Room at Barr's Bay Park, now the park area west of Albouy's Point, and chatted with the little girl who lived at Faulkner House, now Aggie's Garden & Waterside Café.

Twain visited Bermuda twice in 1908. Then on Christmas Eve 1909, his youngest daughter died of an epileptic seizure at 29, affecting him severely, and he returned to Bermuda.

After his heart attack on March 22, 1910, he spoke of his late wife constantly. He left the islands for the last time in early April, giving away his books to his hosts at Bay House. On his last voyage home, he was so weak he could not even dress.

The great Mark Twain died on April 21, 1910, at home in Redding, Connecticut, at the age of 75.

Bermudians received the sad news the next day — from the telegraph office he had used so frequently to make Bermuda famous.