

THE HUCK FINN HOUSE

Virtual Tour by Richard Plunkett, age 14

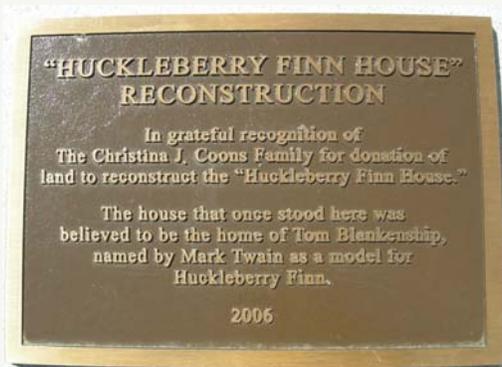


Nestled in the heart of historic downtown Hannibal on North Street, the **Huckleberry Finn House** is a monument that embodies the spirit of Mark Twain's restless character, Huck Finn. As a boy, Samuel Langhorne Clemens played with a child by the name of Thomas Blankenship, who lived scarcely a block away from the Clemens household. The Blankenship family consisted of seven or eight children and both parents, but they were desperately poor. Tom's father was reputed to be the town

drunk, and oftentimes, they could not afford to send their children to school. Therefore, Sam Clemens, like many other children in the village, was generally forbidden to associate with or even talk to Tom Blankenship. But, like the character of Huck Finn, that made his desire to befriend the boy increase all the more. Twain did become very good friends with Blankenship during his childhood, describing the boy as, "ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed; but he had as good a heart as any boy ever had." Twain further commented that Blankenship's liberties were unrestricted and he was the only true independent person in the town. Tom Blankenship proved to be ample inspiration for the famous author - a person Twain instinctively knew had potential to become an interesting and realistic character. And thus, the aberrant

and somewhat lawless character of Huckleberry Finn was born, a person who, similar to Blankenship, suffered terrible poverty and received little approval. Although Huck Finn was based upon Blankenship, Twain truly personified a character all his own in his famous masterpieces, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In *Tom Sawyer*, Huck Finn is first revealed to be a motherless son of the violent town drunk, with no siblings, no permanent household, and little to no possessions to call his own. This is contrary to the real-life character of Tom Blankenship, who, although suffering poverty, had a real family.

Also, in reality, Tom and



SHORTLY TOM CAME UPON THE JUVENILE PARIAH OF THE VILLAGE, HUCKLEBERRY FINN, SON OF THE TOWN DRUNKARD. HUCKLEBERRY WAS CORDIALLY HATED AND DREADED BY ALL THE MOTHERS OF THE TOWN, BECAUSE HE WAS IDLE AND LAWLESS AND VULGAR AND BAD - AND BECAUSE ALL THEIR CHILDREN ADMIRING HIM SO, AND DELIGHTED IN HIS FORBIDDEN SOCIETY, AND WISHED THEY DARED TO BE LIKE HIM. (FROM THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER)

The Huck Finn House was reconstructed using old photographs taken prior to its demolition in 1911



AFTERWARDS WE
WOULD WATCH THE
LONESOMENESS
OF THE RIVER, AND
KIND OF LAZY

ALONG, AND BY
AND BY LAZY OFF
TO SLEEP. WAKE
UP BY AND BY, AND
LOOK TO SEE WHAT
DONE IT, AND
MAYBE SEE A
STEAMBOAT
COUGHING ALONG
UP-STREAM...

~HUCK FINN

his family lived in a diminutive dwelling that, although cramped, would have been large enough to provide adequate shelter. It is unknown whether the family owned or rented the property or was simply squatting, moving from place to place as they were discovered. This is one of many mysteries that surrounds the Blankenship house. The reproduction of the original abode would eventually become an honored monument to the fictional character of Huckleberry

Finn. Fortunately, historians decided it was better to recreate the home using authentic materials as a tribute to Twain's devilish delinquent.

The Huck Finn House has suffered quite a few hardships throughout the years, occasionally being torn down and rebuilt for various purposes. The current home, which was recently rebuilt using old photos as a guide, was dedicated in 2007. It is now recognized as a landmark that provides a glimpse

into the mid-1800s, and will remain so forever. Although the actual house was demolished in 1911, wooden beams from the era were salvaged from other local buildings and were eventually incorporated into the reconstructed Huck Finn House. This adds an air of nostalgia to the building, which boasts a thriving vegetable garden out back, further enhancing the feel of authenticity. Observing the house from a distance, it doesn't appear noteworthy or impressive in



this modern era, but inside visitors learn about the controversies that have surrounded *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* since its publication. The Mark Twain Museum, which maintains the property, does not shy away from discussing the issues of slavery, class, and racism as the interior displays reflect.

Recently, the museum unveiled plans to create a shed or outhouse in the side yard of the Huck Finn House, which will provide more realism to the setting. The house allows every visitor a chance to imagine how living in such a cramped space must have been like for the Blankenship residents and appreciate how the character of Huck Finn evolved from young Tom Blankenship.

The Huckleberry Finn House rises upon a slight hill leading up from the admirably restored Sam Clemens Boyhood House, the sun illuminating its white siding and providing ample light to read informational placards displayed on the interior walls. The ceilings are no higher than six feet, and the uncarpeted, harsh wooden floors realistically convey the type of living quarters typical for a lower-

class family such as the Blankenships. The only members of society who ranked lower than the Blankenships were the slaves who also lived in Hannibal at that time. The two-roomed house includes two fireplaces for cooking and heating.

Originally, *Huckleberry Finn* was billed as “vulgar and coarse” and “trashy and vicious” by some critics of the late-1800s, based on the dialect and language. The controversy has never abated, and the book is consistently ranked in the Top Ten Books that are challenged in public libraries making it the only 19th century book to remain so controversial. However, most people recognize the satire, irony, humor and adventure in

Twain’s beloved classic, and the story of Huckleberry Finn is commonly accepted as Twain’s true masterpiece.

Samuel Clemens’ impact on all of American life and literature cannot be doubted, and his influence on the little town of Hannibal is forever displayed in the monuments spread throughout the town. And, although he may not be widely known or recognized, the humble Tom Blankenship delivered Clemens his first inspirations as Huckleberry Finn, the boy that would become a renowned character in the world of American literature.

~R.P.



A garden out back lends an air of authenticity



AS SOON AS TOM WAS BACK WE CUT ALONG THE PATH, AROUND THE GARDEN FENCE, AND BY AND BY FETCHED UP ON THE STEEP TOP OF THE HILL THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HOUSE.

~HUCK FINN