

# On the Campus

*Professor devoted thesis and dissertation to author*

## Promoting the works of Mark Twain

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The Suffolk Sun

When Samuel Clemens died at 74, he left a mass of material equal to that he had already published under his pen name, Mark Twain.

The general attitude in 1910 was, "So what?" For many years, Twain was not held in high esteem. Some critics grudgingly admitted he was a fine humorist, but they faulted him for lack of purpose.

During the past two decades, however, that trend has reversed itself thanks to people like Dr. John Davis, a 50-year-old professor of English who teaches American Literature at Chowan College.

A founder of the Mark Twain Circle, which distributes information on Twain, Davis has contributed 13 articles to the Mark Twain Encyclopedia and last year presented a paper at the third annual Fall Twain Symposium in Hartford, Conn. There is a lot to discuss at such gatherings.

"Twain wrote everything — novels, essays, sketches, short stories, travel pieces," Davis said. "The output is in the thousands."

An equal number of manuscripts went unpublished, most of them languishing in the library of the University of California at Berkeley.

In 1967, publication of some of those items began, including his notebooks, love letters and an autobiography.

"They were \$10 a book then," said Davis. "Now they're \$40."

The West Coast university is involved in "intense investigation of Twain's published and unpublished works," he said.

A few years later, it was a struggle getting some of the items published because Clara, one of Twain's three daughters, claimed some people

would not understand some of her father's writings.

"He wrote an attack on organized religion and fundamentalism," said Davis, adding that the author "was probably not arguing with God but with what many people did in His name. He said there was only one Christian and that they got Him and killed Him, early."

In a similar vein, the humorist once described the earth as "a wart — insignificant."

The significance of Twain's contributions to American literature began to impress Davis when he was a student at Hueytown High, "and I met a fellow named Doyle Brown," he said. "We sat around and talked about Twain."



Dr. John Davis

Davis, the son of an Alabama steelworker, has been teaching at Chowan for 13 years. He is a graduate of Alabama College, now the University of Montevallo, and has a bachelor's degree from Auburn University.

His master's thesis and Ph.D. dissertation at Auburn were devoted to Twain.

Davis and his wife live within walking distance of the Chowan campus. They have a son, Hugh, and a daughter, whose name Twain would have

appreciated — Sarah Tarah.

The humorist's wife, Olivia, served as his censor, ostensibly to keep him out of trouble, Davis said.

"Often Twain would put in cuss words just so his wife could 'x' them out," he said, recalling one of the author's saltiest writings.

It was a letter he dashed off to the gas department because the gas kept shutting off accidentally. A phrase of profanity fills that epistle.

It is a phrase that probably filled the last 20 years of Twain's life, when involvement in get-rich-quick schemes helped put him in debt.

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Cbowan's becoming a senior college has been the "answer to my prayers"

## Levy becomes American citizen and nears goal for B.S. degree

No one would ever guess that Ann Levy has not lived in the United States all of her life.

Born in Jamaica, Levy emigrated to the United States when she was 13 years old and became a permanent resident of this country. Last December, however, she achieved a goal she had sought since that time when she was awarded a Certificate of Naturalization and became a American citizen.

Levy began her college career at a New Jersey college in 1975. She moved to North Carolina in 1982 after visiting her sister and found that she wanted to live in the northeastern section of the state.

Transferring her college credits to Chowan, she completed the requirements for an associate degree in business administration in 1983. Levy then completed one semester at East Carolina University before returning to live in Conway and accepting full-time employment.

Classified as "an excellent student" by

her professors, Levy said she always wanted to earn a baccalaureate degree and said Chowan's return to senior college status is "an answer to my prayers."

Attending Chowan on a parttime basis in order to continue her employment, Levy plans to earn a B.S. degree in business administration with an emphasis in accounting.

The fall semester was quite busy for the new U. S. citizen. She completed several academic courses at Chowan, worked full-time as a case worker with the Hertford County Department of Social Services, and studied to prepare for taking a written examination to earn citizenship.

After filing the appropriate applications, Levy successfully passed the written examination and on December 3, she participated in the official ceremony in Fayetteville to become a citizen.

She is quick to express her pride in becoming a citizen and says "I have already registered to vote!"

## Dr. Davis' Favorites

Samuel Langhorne Clemens — Mark Twain — was born Nov. 30, 1835 in Florida, Mo. He is known for his sarcastic wit.

These are some of his most famous lines: "Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to," and "Pity is for the living, envy is for the dead."

Among Davis' favorites are "Let's be thankful to Adam. He brought death to the world." Another has to do with what he describes as one of the many advantages of Adam and Eve. "They escaped teething." A third is a description of April Fool's Day: "We're reminded of what we are the other 364 days of the year."

"He went bankrupt," Davis said. "He toured the world lecturing to pay the debts."

Lecturing and writing kept Twain going financially and emotionally. His best books were written between 1871 and 1891 when he lived in a house in Hartford that resembled a Mississippi River steamboat. His neighbor was Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Davis has visited there often. he would, of course, have preferred a visit while Twain was still in residence.

"We're the same height, so I could look him in the eye, and we're both Sagitarians," Davis said. "I'd be in awe of him, but he was a friendly man and loved talking to people."

Davis is the same way, with Twain being a favorite topic. The professor is particularly happy when he can discover something new about the author.

"A missing part of 'Huckleberry Finn' was recently discovered," he said.

The manuscript is at the University of Buffalo. Twain, a former reporter, was once part owner of The Express in that city.

"The missing part has to do with Jim (Huck's black friend) cleaning a cadaver in a mortician's office," Davis said. "If printed today it would be considered racist."

Therein lies another sore point about Twain.

"'Huckleberry Finn' is not racist," Davis said. "It's about the brotherhood of man. Huck helps a slave escape. His conviction is so strong, he felt they'd go to hell for doing it. But the two were very close friends, so he took that chance."

Huckleberry's adventures were originally banned in Boston.

"When that happened, Twain said 'hot dog — now I'll sell thousands more books.'" said Davis, who describes the feisty Huck as "white trash who cussed, smoked, played hooky."

Davis loves that story, but his favorite Twain piece is "The Great Dark," which he describes as "strange, weird. And, I love the tragedy of 'Pudd'head Wilson.'"

Davis loves Twain because, he said, "he's funny, an American original. He makes everything enjoyable. He used humor as a tool to expose hypocrisy, racism and other social ills."

There are times in Twain's writings when there is no humor.

"In 'Tom Sawyer', Indian Joe starves to death in a cave," Davis said. "In 'Huckleberry Finn' a drunk was put in a window so people could watch him die."

"A Bible was put on his chest for the religionists. The drunk was a better man than those in the mob," said Davis, who describes the story as a "children's book that adults enjoy."

"I believe Twain was a genius," Davis said.

"My second favorite writer is Faulkner," he said, "and he was influenced by Twain."