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National Mark Twain Day, 1985

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Like the comet that startled the night sky at his birth and returned as a bright chariot to "carry him home" 75 years later, the literary achievements of Mark Twain can truly be called an "astronomical" phenomenon.

Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, November 30, 1835, in Florida, Missouri, he enjoyed an idyllic boyhood in Hannibal, Missouri. There by the banks of the mighty Mississippi, he came to know and love the common people of America. Their crotchets and kindnesses; their exasperating foibles; their endearing loyalties; their dreams and hopes were printed indelibly in his memory. Annealed through time and art, those recollections would be transformed by his genius into immortal characters in masterworks that not only won great popularity in his day but have also stood the test of time.

Today, as we commemorate the 150th anniversary of Mark Twain's birth—and as Halley's Comet again brightens the skies of our planet—the wit, the wisdom, and the inimitable style of Mark Twain continue to delight and instruct young and old—in more than 50 languages.

It is a measure of the richness of Twain's genius and the complexity of his character that debates still go on as to whether he was primarily a humorist, a novelist, a charming spinner of provincial yarns, a cynic, or a sentimentalist. The truth is he was all of these—and more.

He was American to the core and he was also a sophisticated world traveller. He evoked the concrete details of his own time and place as no one else could, and he was also deeply versed in history.

He relished the innocent joys of childhood and the storybook adventures of his young manhood. He knew the fulfillment of a happy marriage and the heady wine of wealth and adulation. The dons of Yale and Oxford honored him with exalted degrees, and when he died the common people wept.

Twain also knew the shattering humiliation of betrayal and bankruptcy. He endured the soul-searing desolation of bereavement, and in the depths of his grief he could sometimes rail like the proverbial village atheist. But he could also write of the saintly Joan of Arc with the awe and ardor of a hagiographer. In many ways Twain remains a riddle. He still awaits a definitive biography. He would probably have been amused at all the fuss that has been made over him and chuckle at some of the theories the critics have spun about him and his works. Self-deprecation was the hallmark of his humor; he loved to puncture pomposity—even his own.

New York, Connecticut, California, and Hawaii are only some of the States that can claim to have shaped his life, but Hannibal, Missouri, where he grew up, will always have a prior claim. And so it is especially fitting that while all Americans celebrate this anniversary, Hannibal—which maintains his boyhood home as a museum—has been the scene of special events starting in May and culminating on November 30, the 150th anniversary of his birth.

The Congress, by House Joint Resolution 259, has designated November 30, 1985, as "National Mark Twain Day" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this event.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim November 30, 1985, as National Mark Twain Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe such day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-sixth day of November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-five, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and tenth.

Ronald Reagan