



"Stormfield," Mark Twain's home at Redding, Connecticut, during the last years of his life

The History of Stormfield

From notes left by Margaret Mooney, former librarian, and Harold Mueller, former board president, of the Mark Twain Library.

1906

Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) was living in New York City in 1906, at 21, Fifth Avenue. In January of that year, Albert Bigelow Paine attended a birthday party given in honor of Mark Twain by "The Players". From this contact developed the suggestion from Mr. Paine, and the invitation given to him by Mr. Clemens, to write the biography of Mark Twain. Mr. Paine was then living in Redding, Connecticut, in an old farmhouse he had recently bought. That Christmas Mr. Clemens had been given a billiard table, and he was anxious to use it, as billiards was one of his passions. He persuaded Mr. Paine to play with him after the biography sessions. This game developed into a continued contest.

As the friendship grew, Mr. Paine talked about the delights of Redding, and persuaded Mr. Clemens to buy some land there as an investment. Mr. Paine and Mr. Nickerson of Redding looked for land and found 195 beautiful acres on the top of a hill, which Mr. Clemens bought, sight unseen.

Both Samuel Clemens and Mr. Paine spent that summer in New Hampshire, working on the biography and enjoying the countryside. When the story, "Captain Stormfield" was sold, Samuel Clemens decided to build on his new property with the money, to give him a place to visit in the summer. That fall, his daughter, Clara Clemens, inspected the property and chose a building site.

1907

That winter, Mr. Clemens appointed John Mead Howells, son of his friend William Howells, editor of Harpers, as architect. His only stipulation was that the house should be in the Italian style, similar to the house the whole family had enjoyed one winter near Florence.



Samuel Clemens approved Mr. Howells plans, and the builders, Mr. William W. Sunderland and his son Philip, from Danbury, were engaged for the work. Mr. Clemens declared he wanted no responsibility, simply the pleasure of having it finished. Ground was broken in the spring. At first the house was called, "Innocents At Home" as a balance to the book, "Innocents Abroad".

View from the back of Stormfield, overlooking Samuel Clemens' property.

1908

The New Home

The house was finished and ready for occupancy in June; the grounds landscaped, the whole house furnished completely, under Mr. Clemens secretary, Isabel Lyon's, supervision.

June 18th Samuel Clemens arrived in Redding aboard the first trip of the Berkshire Special at the Redding railroad station, a little after six o'clock. The party, which consisted of Mr. Clemens, Mr. Paine and his daughter Louise, photographers and reporters, was met by many townspeople. In flower bedecked carriages they followed the Samuel Clemens party the three miles to the driveway of the new house.

Mr. Clemens was delighted with everything; the setting, the arrangements, the furnishings, and above all, his precious orchestrelle and his beloved billiard table installed. Even the cats were asleep on the hearth. He settled into a delightful life in his new home, among his friendly neighbors. He took an active part in the life of the community, meeting with both children and adults. And his billiard games were assured by the proximity of his neighbor, Albert Bigelow Paine. His billiard table is now installed in the Mark Twain House and Museum in Hartford, and the orchestrelle in Mark Twain's home in Hannibal.

On an autumn day a heavy storm swept across the fields, inspiring the name of "Stormfield" to replace "Innocents at Home"; a more appropriate name as the book, Captain Stormfield, had supplied the funds for the building of the house.

By this time, Samuel Clemens, happy with his life in the country, had decided to stay in Redding and to close his New York City apartment. During the year, Samuel Clemens bought two other parcels of land, increasing his property by 154 acres.

The Burglary

One night in September, two burglars ransacked "Stormfield". They were caught by Deputy Sherriff Banks, on board a train near Bethel, and were sent to prison. While there, one of the men made a model of a Mississippi River steamboat as an act of repentance. The model is now at the Mark Twain Library.

The Library

Samuel Clemens felt the town needed a library and started a campaign to raise funds to build one. "Stormfield" was constantly busy with visitors, and Mr. Clemens began to demand money from each male guest, for the benefit of the library. On the mantel shelf in "Stormfield" was a sign, cajoling each visitor to pay at least one dollar toward the library fund. This sign can still be seen at the Mark Twain Library.

By October a temporary library had been established in a deserted chapel on Umpawaug Hill, using a collection of about 1,000 books donated by Samuel Clemens as a core collection. Some of those original books remain in the present day library. He soon started a series of benefits to raise funds for "a proper building of our own". He gave many readings from the poets and others at his home, "passing the hat" each time for the library fund.



Mark Twain library, Redding, Connecticut, 1911

The Angel Fish

"Stormfield" became the headquarters for a group of young girls whom Samuel Clemens named "the angel fish", with himself as "curator of the aquarium". The requirements for belonging were that each member should write frequently to the curator, and that they should at all times wear the enameled pin in the shape of an angel fish sent to each by the curator, from Bermuda. Each was invited to choose her favorite of the many pictures of fish

hanging in the dining room. On this her name was inscribed.

The Cat Party

One of the neighborhood children tells of a “cat party” given for a group of nearby children. Bessie was bathed and dressed and went off up the hill with her cat in her basket. This was not liked by the cat, and he clawed his way out and ran off across the fields, with Bessie chasing after him. Finally catching her cat, she returned him to the basket, fastened him in and trudged along up the hill to the party. She arrived with her dress torn and dirty, her face tearstained and scratched; but she won the prize for having “the most adventurous cat”.

The Elephant

At Christmas time, Willie Collier wrote Mark Twain that he would soon receive an elephant from him as a gift. Quarters were prepared, and many arrangements made, under directions from a trainer from Barnum and Bailey in Bridgeport. A room was cleared for the elephant’s lodging and food stacked ready for him. When the elephant arrived by freight, it proved to be made of flannel, about two feet in length. Chortling correspondence then ensued between the two men, over such a delightful hoax.

1909

Mark Twain’s youngest daughter came home to Redding, and Mark Twain bought a farm for her nearby. She began to act as his secretary. By the summer, Clara also arrived to stay with her father, and she busied herself developing her singing voice and arranging for a concert tour. During that same summer, there were many guests at Stormfield, among them Ossip Gabrilowitsch, who stayed for some time, recuperating from a surgical operation. He and the Clemens family had developed a great friendship during their stay in Vienna.

The wedding

On September 21st, a very successful concert was given at “Stormfield”. Mr. Gabrilowitsch played the piano, David Bispham and Clara Clemens sang, and Samuel Clemens acted as Master of Ceremonies. That night Clara and Ossip announced their engagement to be married. The marriage took place on October 6th at “Stormfield”. The couple left immediately to fulfill concert commitments of Mr. Gabrilowitsch.



Samuel Clemens. Jervis Langdon, Jean Clemons, Ossip Gabrilowitsch, Clara Clemens, & Rev. Joseph Twichell.

Death of Jean

In November, Samuel Clemens, feeling his heart may be failing, persuaded Albert Bigelow Paine to accompany him to Bermuda. There, in the lovely, peaceful atmosphere of the island, he hoped to recuperate. He did improve, and was ready to return home for Christmas. They sailed from Bermuda on December 18th, arriving on the 23rd, and were met by Jean. They found her happy and busy in the midst of many plans for the holidays.

On the morning of December 24th, Jean was found dead in her bath, of a heart attack during an epileptic seizure. Her body was taken to Elmira for burial beside her mother. As the cortege left the house, Mr. Paine played on the orchestrelle, and Mr. Clemens watched through falling snow, from an upstairs window’ as Jean left “Stormfield” for the last time.

Samuel Clemens was desolate, all alone, his family dead, with the one exception of Clara. He spent the next few days writing, "The Death of Jean", the last substantial work he ever completed.

1910

Crushed by his daughter's death, and with his heart condition growing worse, Samuel Clemens returned to Bermuda in early January, begging Mr. and Mrs. Paine to keep the house open for whenever he might return. After a pleasant evening with the Paines on January 4th, he left the next day for the island in the south. He felt better for a while, but soon his heart deteriorated again, and he became weaker and weaker.

The Death of Samuel Clemens



By April, both doctors and friends reported to Mr. Paine of Mr. Clemens deteriorating condition, and Mr. Paine sailed to his aid. They returned home to "Stormfield" on April 12th 1910. Clara and her husband were summoned, and returned from Europe on April 17th. This proved a great solace to her father. Samuel Clemens died in his home in Redding on April 21st. His body was also taken to Elmira for burial. Mr. and Mrs. Gabrilowitsch stayed at "Stormfield" until their baby, Nina, was born in the fall.

Samuel Clemens returning from Bermuda a few weeks before he died

Stormfield

Stormfield was emptied and put up for sale, for \$50,000. It didn't sell until 1923. During that time, many people came to see it, some of them souvenir hunters. At one point Booth Tarkington offered \$25,000, but that was refused.

Between 1910 and 1923, seven parcels of his land were sold to various people, lessening the acreage of 340 acres to 268 acres.

1923 to date

In 1923, Stormfield was purchased by Margaret Given and her husband. While renovations were being carried out, fire broke out among the paints, and the house burned to the ground.

In 1924, Miss Mary Millett and her mother bought the property and rebuilt the house on the same floor plan, but a little smaller.

The property remains in private hands to this day.

