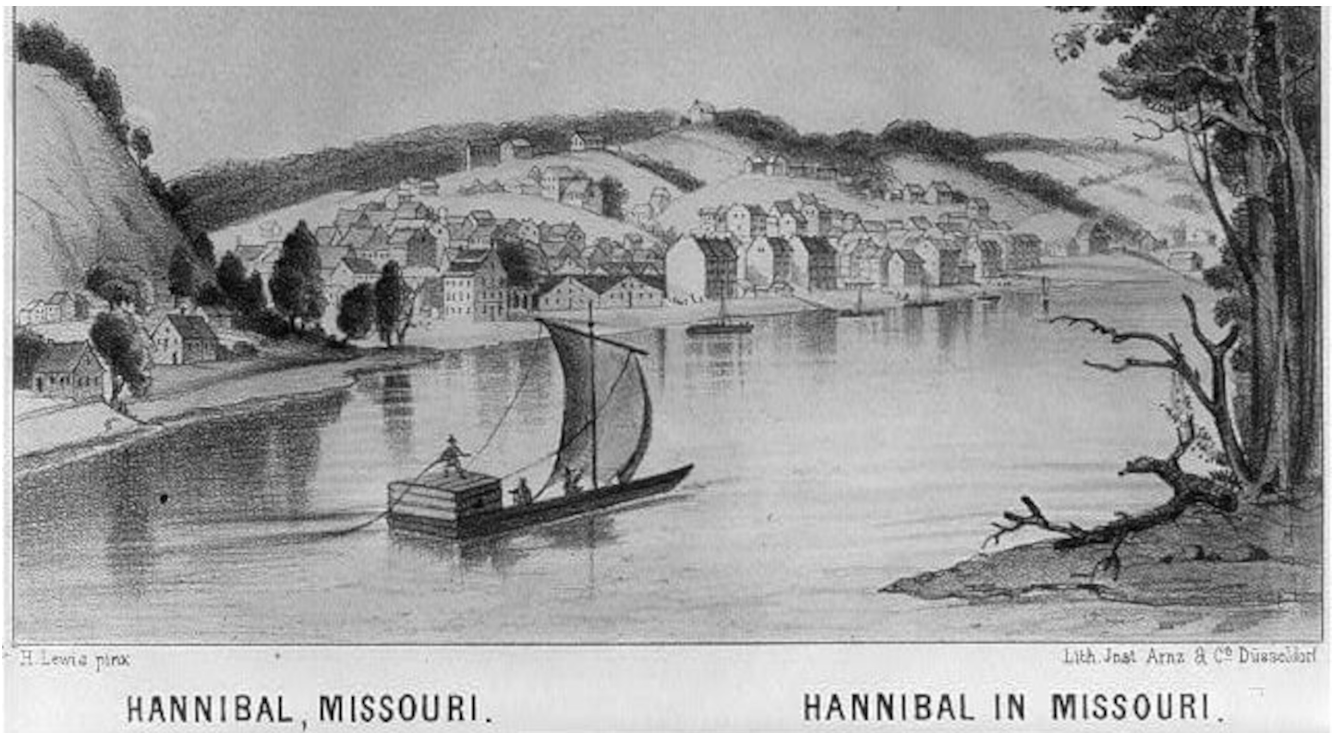
Mark Twain's Boyhood Home, Hannibal, MO



B. Scott Holmes

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In November of 1839, Sam Clemens aka Mark Twain, moved with his family to Hannibal, Missouri, his boyhood home. His family, John Marshall Clemens (father), Jane Lampton Clemens (mother), and siblings Orion, Pamela, Benjamin and Henry, along with their slave, Jennie, relocated from Florida, Missouri. Sam's sister Margaret had died of "bilious [Yellow] fever." three months prior.

Suffering from the Panic of 1837, Clemens thought it best to depart Florida. His brother-in-law, John Quarles, had already established Quarles' Farm, north of Florida. Clemens found a notice in the February 27, 1839, edition *Peake's Commercial Advertiser*. Property was available in a large and growing village, Hannibal, some forty miles to the northeast, "on the banks of a great river." He contacted the seller, Big Ira Stout, and began trying to scrape together the purchase price.

In November of that year, a couple of weeks before Sammy's fourth birthday, Clemens had negotiated a deal, Stout would pay $3,000 for more than 160 acres of Clemens' Florida land. In return, Stout would sell Clemens a quarter of a city block with a hotel, 9,000 square feet, for $7,000. Clemens recovered $2,000 a few days later, when Stout purchased an additional 326 acres.

He traveled to St. Louis soon after the family's arrival in Hannibal to see James Clemens, Jr., a distant cousin. The two men had not previously met but had corresponded as youths. Clemens borrowed $250. He also borrowed $750 from James Andrew Hays Lampton, Janes half brother.

Hannibal was platted in 1819 and saw its first frame house built about 1830, its first brick house in 1832 or 1833, growing slowly during its early years. In 1833 its population numbered only about 50. By 1837 it had increased to 400 or 500, and census figures for 1840, 1,034 people.

Hannibal, chartered as a town by the state, was a one-horse hamlet with a cigar factory, tobacco warehouse and a weekly newspaper. W.D. Howells described it as a “loafing, out-at-elbows, down-at-the-heels, slave-holding Mississippi River Town”.

Within a couple of years it had four general stores, three sawmills, two planing mills, three blacksmith forges, two hotels, three saloons, two churches, a hemp factory, and a distillery. It had pork-packing plants on the south side of Bear Creek.

The Clemens family moved into the second floor of the hotel and opened a store with inventory bought on $2,000 credit from James Kerr, a merchant in St. Louis.

The *Virginia House* was a wood-frame hotel a few dozen yards from the Mississippi riverbank. Clemens hoped to draw revenue from guests. Hannibal did not need another general store. The economy was based on sawmilling and hog slaughtering. Three mills processed local timber into boards for building permanent houses to replace log cabins. Hogs jostled dogs for primacy on the dirt streets. The hogs were driven by farmers to the pork-packing plants on the south side of Bear Creek. Their hides ended up at the nearby tanyard, where they were cured for processing into shoes, boots, and saddles.

The river meant everything to the town. It carried away tobacco, hemp, pork, and whiskey, and brought back cash. It offered a continuing vaudeville of floating humanity: the solitary canoeists—trappers, Indians, the raftsmen and flatboatmen and the keelboatmen.

The main attraction:

> “First the deep coughing of the engines from perhaps a mile distant. Then a series of whistle blasts that echoed off the hillsides. Then the emergence from behind the bluff of the towering white emissary from Somewhere most unmistakably Else: first the prow of the three-tiered superstructure, the thirty-foot smokestacks pumping plumes of soot into the air; the high pilothouse and a figure at the knobbed wheel, staring ahead through the unglassed window; and then the rest of the boat’s curving three-hundred-foot length, festooned with fluttering banners, pennants, the American flag; the boat’s name written in bright decorative script across the paddle-wheel casing to break the whiteness.”

When a steamboat docked at the levee,

> “a land-locked local could glimpse a civilization unimaginable to one bred on the prairie at the nation’s far rim: a civilization of chandeliers, brass fittings, draperied windows, and gold-framed mirrors; of red velvet carpets and gilded saloons and skylights of colored glass; a civilization of oil paintings and calliopes and great stacked bales of cotton to be exchanged somewhere for great stacks of money. A civilization inhabited by astounding diverse creatures. Strolling the decks or stepping onto the levee to stretch their legs were Southern planters in striped frock coats and wide-brimmed hats, their wives nearly invisible under deep bonnets, their floor-length silk dresses expanded by petticoat and restrained by

> corset; immigrants newly arrived from Europe at New Orleans; perfumed French merchants and high-hatted British speculators; expressionless gamblers in their ruffled blouses and jackets with velvet piping; mustachioed military men; assorted divines, actors, whores, circus troupes, politicians, trappers with their sidearms handy."

In the Fall of 1840, Ira Stout bought a consignment of merchandise, declared bankruptcy then refused to pay for it. The *Virginia House* slipped from Clemens' grasp. He had naively agreed to stand behind the loans to the unscrupulous land speculator. When Stout defaulted, Clemens accepted the debt.

Mark Twain recalled that this honorable action "bankrupted" his father. No records have been found that document this deception, but on October 13, 1841 Clemens surrendered the title of the *Virginia House* to James Kerr, to whom they were most indebted. Even this transaction failed to wipe out Clemens' debt. Although the merchant may have been satisfied, Clemens's code of honor did not allow it. Sammy and the other children looked on as their parents stripped down their household, offering up their furniture, forks and spoons, and even the family cow in a prideful effort to pay off every cent that they owed. A character trait later, perhaps, exhibited by Mark Twain lecturing around the world in 1895-6.

[Sammy] suffered nightmares. His sleepwalking continued. He was prone to convulsions. Not until he was seven did he enjoy the health of a normal child. Jane and Sammy seemed to feed on each other's hair-trigger nerves. Sammy would slip bats and snakes into her sewing basket; she told him tales of brutal and sadistic Indian attacks on her mother's people. A loathing of Indians, ..., was the one prejudice Mark Twain could never shake off.

He escaped the household at every opportunity. Out in the world, he took physical risks. He ventured onto the frozen Mississippi in winter and cavorted on its heaving ice floes. Dangerous water drew him; he dived into the depths of Bear Creek, which emptied into the Mississippi. The fact that he could not swim did not seem to matter; he recalls having been rescued from drowning seven or nine times. One of these episodes prompted Jane's famous wisecrack that "[p]eople born to be hanged are safe in water."

Sammy discovered another means of escape shortly after his family arrived in Hannibal. He learned to read.

Orion was apprenticed to the *Hannibal Journal*.

December 1841, Clemens traveled through Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky trying to find money. Charley, an aged slave traded to Clemens, was sold for ten barrels of tar, worth $40.

Clemens returns to Hannibal in April 1842, Benjamin dies in May from Yellow Fever.

They continued to live in the hotel as tenants.

By the end of 1842, Orion completed his apprenticeship and moved to St. Louis. He went to work for Thomas Watt Ustick's print shop as a journeyman printer. He lived on bread and water, read the Bible and got up before dawn. He was elected president of the St. Louis Apprentices' Association.

In his Nov. 30, 1906 dictation., Mark Twain recalled minstrel shows in Hannibal:

> I remember the first negro-minstrel show I ever saw. It must have been in the early '40s. It was a new institution. In our village of Hannibal, on the banks of the Mississippi, we had not heard of it before, and it burst upon us as a glad and stunning surprise.
>
> The show remained a week, and gave a performance every night. Church members did not attend these performances, but all the worldlings flocked to them, and were enchanted. …
>
> The minstrels appeared with coal-black hands and faces, and their clothing was a loud and extravagant burlesque of the clothing worn by the plantation slave of the time….Standing collars were in fashion in that day, and the minstrel appeared in a collar which engulfed and hid the half of his head and projected so far forward that he could hardly see sideways over its points. His coat was sometimes made of curtain calico, with a swallow-tail that hung nearly to his heels and had buttons as big as a blacking box. His shoes were rusty, and clumsy, and cumbersome, and five or six sizes too large for him. There were many variations upon this costume, and they were all extravagant, and were by many believed to be funny.
>
> The minstrel used a very broad negro dialect; he used it competently, and with easy facility,and it was funny—delightfully and satisfyingly funny.

John Clemens was forced to sell his slave, Jennie. Scharnhorst noted that Jennie had been a wedding gift from Jane's grandmother when the Clemens' married in Kentucky, in 1823. Albert Bigelow Paine reports "She was tall, well formed, nearly black, and brought a good price". Powers disgrees in regards to the "good price". Jennie had helped Jane keep Sammy alive in his sickly early months. In Hannibal she had saved him from drowning in Bear Creek. John Clemens sold her to William Beebe for $500. Beebe was considered "wolfish" even among owners of blacks in Hannibal, known as "the nigger-trader" because of his unrepentant dealings with the New Orleans slave market.

It is not clear whether Jennie was sold against her will or whether she naively requested the transaction herself, as Mark Twain maintained. In *Villagers,* Mark Twain recalled that Judge Carpenter [a pseudonym for John Clemens] "[h]ad but one slave—she wanted to be sold to Beebe, and was. He [that is, Beebe] sold her down the river. Was seen, years later, chambermaid on a steamboat. Cried and lamented." Mark Twain describes this woman as being "like one of the family," and suggests that she had been beguiled by Beebe with "all sorts of fine and alluring promises." A fate with strikingly similar components is visited on the nearly white slave Roxana of The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson.

The sale of Jennie did nothing to help the Clemens' finances. John Clemens apparently never collected, ending up with two promissory notes from Beebe.

Clemens sued Beebe but was awarded a trifling that included a nine-year-old Negro girl whom he sold the following year.

A month after the trial concluded, Clemens surrendered all his property to his creditors

In 1843, seven-year-old Sam Clemens spent the first of five summers with his mother, sister Pamela, and brother Henry at the Quarles farm.

Late in 1843 the Clemens family moved out of the *Virginia House* and into a small home next door. James Kerr sold the building lot, about twenty feet in width, to James Clemens Jr. in late October for $330, Clemens leased the land for $28 a year and built *Mark Twain Boyhood Home*.

Spring of 1844: Will Bowen and the measles.

February 24, 1845: Hannibal was granted a city charter.

March 19, 1845: Hannibal Library Institute was chartered by the General Assembly of Missouri.

Summer of 1845: Sammy stowed away on a steamboat heading south. He was discovered and put ashore at Louisiana, Missouri. He spent the night with Lampton relatives and was sent home the following day.

Summer of 1846: Cholera claimed 30 lives in Hannibal.

In 1846, the Clemens family hit rock bottom. John Clemens had previously sued William Beebe. Clemens got John Quarles to try to collect on a $300 note. The slave trader, in revenge, got possession of a $290.55 debt claim on Clemens from a local store-keeper and, in August 1846, he gleefully sued Clemens back. The judge awarded Beebe not only the amount of the debt, but also $126.50 in damages. A week before Christmas, the trader pressured the court to order the sheriff to sell off the "goods and chattels and real estate" of John Clemens toward payment of the award.

The sheriff could find nothing to sell. John Clemens had foreseen the move and evacuated his family from the little house at 206 Hill Street, surrendering its title back to his cousin James in St. Louis. James rented the house to Dr. Hugh Meredith and his two elderly unmarried sisters.

The Clemens' accepted lodgings offered by the druggist Orville Grant across the street, just downhill from the prosperous Hawkins family. Jane cooked the Grants' meals and washed their clothes. Pamela salvaged the family's weather-beaten piano and continued giving music lessons to help keep her family afloat.

In 1847 the *Gazette* discussed Hannibal and its prospects with great enthusiasm. Estimating the population at 3,000, the editor stated that

> "everything had a strangely new appearance" as nearly all the buildings had been erected within the last six years. Due to Hannibal's rapid growth, "Already, buildings of no ordinary kind, of no mean design, dot the entire valley, and begin to crown the high bluffs which surround her, as a bulwark. The tall square-topped three and four story brick business house towers up here and there—the columned portico, and frescoed front of the private dwelling tell of a classic taste and liberality. Viewing the City from the river, the buildings rise one above another, up the ascent, having an appearance of compactness and extent, which vanishes as you look down from some of the over-topping hills around, and the intermediate unoccupied lots are revealed, showing room for quadrupling the present population without disturbing the repose of the hills. [*Hannibal Gazette, February 25, 1847.]*

The building boom was especially evident in South Hannibal, which lay south of Bear Creek, where new construction in 1846 included a Baptist Church, two slaughterhouses, a three-story brick business house, 45 other buildings, and a bridge across Bear Creek . *[Hannibal Gazette, February 25]*

Much of this activity was due to Hannibal's rapid growth as a river port which handled the business of the surrounding area. The *Gazette* noted in 1847 that "There is a good wharf, of considerable extent—upon which the steamer discharges her cargo of imports. The space between the wharf and the buildings is near two hundred feet—the buildings are good, and adapted in size and character for storage and commission." *[Hannibal Gazette, February 25, 1847.]*

During the 1846 season the wharves handled 1,080 steamboat arrivals and exports valued at $1,200,000. Produce marketed at and shipped from Hannibal in the six months prior to March 1, 1847, included 110,000 bushels of wheat, 200 tons of hemp, and 400,000 pounds of tobacco. Among commodity prices at this time were wheat, 55-70¢ per bushel; hemp, $2.75-$3.00 per hundredweight; tobacco, $1.50-$2.50 a hundredweight; bacon, 4 1/2-5¢ per pound; butter, 10-12 1/ 2 ¢ per pound; and eggs, 5-6 1/4¢ per dozen. [*Hannibal Gazette, February 25, 1847*]

The increasing flow of produce into Hannibal caused the city council to adopt in 1847 an ordinance which established a public market for the sale of provisions and commodities.

The leading industry of Hannibal was meatpacking—particularly pork.

In November, 1846, three plants were in operation with Samuel & Haines, a new plant, "large and superior . . . to any in the West," killing 75 cattle daily. *[Hannibal Gazette, November 5, 1846.*] within a half mile of the Clemens' home.

In early 1847 Hannibal reported four slaughterhouses and several packing houses which employed about 300 men during the killing season. *[Hannibal Gazette, February 25, 1847.]*

And in preparation for the 1847 season Dowling & Company built a new stone "hog hospital" with 20,000 square feet of floor space plus a 66 by 90 foot addition for the packing operation. As the season

progressed Dowling's "Hibernia Packing House" alone was able to turn out some 500 barrels of processed meat daily. *[Hannibal Gazette, November 25, 1847.]*

With a forty-thousand-square-foot slaughterhouse, the firm of Samuel & Moss was among the largest pork and beef packinghouses in the United States. According to Lorio [Orion's *nom de plume*] in one of his Hannibal letters to the *St. Louis Reveille*, the senior partner, William Samuel, "cleared some twenty thousand dollars by dealing in pork" during the fall and winter of 1846-47. ... Two new slaughterhouses were built on Bear Creek in 1846, and Dowling & Company, one of the rivals of Samuel & Moss, built a twenty-thousand-square-foot slaughterhouse a year later that enabled the business to ship five hundred barrels of processed meat and lard per day. The packers paid local farmers a premium price, about five cents per pound for porkers that weighed at least 180 pounds, and the Missouri Courier reported in December 1849 that together the "slaughtering houses kill from 1000 to 1500 [hogs] per day" during the late fall and winter."

The result was environmental disaster. The farmers herded their droves through the streets of Hannibal en route to slaughter, and not until 1911 were the streets cleaned routinely. The first town council considered the packinghouses a public health hazard and decreed "that no vegetable matter, unclean substance or filthy water be thrown into the streets or into Bear Creek, that refuse from the slaughterhouses be conducted into the Mississippi and out into the current so that it could not return to the shore." But the ordinance did not prevent tons of offal from draining into the river. Bear Creek became so polluted with dissolved fat it was nicknamed Soap Alley. For obvious reasons, the preachers baptized their converts and boys went swimming in the creek upstream from the packing plants or in the Mississippi above the mouth of the creek.

Closely related to the packing industry was the manufacture of barrels and casks, and in 1847 Hannibal had eight cooper shops which turned out an immense quantity of cooperage. *[Hannibal Gazette, February 25, 1847.]*

In early 1847 the young city's businesses also included 14 dry goods houses, five commission houses, two hardware stores, one iron merchant, two druggists, five grocers, two tinners and dealers in stoves and castings, two drapers and clothing merchants, eight tailors, one hat manufacturer, three saddler shops, four boot and shoe shops, two watchmakers and jewellers, one sculptor, six brickyards, three hotels ("one German"), two livery stables, two steam grist mills, two steam sawmills, two confectionaries and bakeries, five cabinet makers and undertakers, six blacksmith shops, one steam distillery, eight dram shops, one iron foundry, one tobacco warehouse, two rope walks, one carding machine and one tannery. Among the skilled artisans were three house and sign painters, 20 carpenters and six bricklayers. The professional class included 15 physicians and 12 attorneys at law. [*Hannibal Gazette, February 25, 1847]*

By the spring of 1847, Marshall Clemens was poised to revive his legal career. He worked during the winter of 1846—47 to found a Masonic college in Hannibal. He became active in town meetings and chaired a committee that recommended the construction of what eventually became the *Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad*. He served on a committee that tried to redraw the line between Marion and Ralls

Counties, and he lobbied to extend the National Road (which ran from Cumberland, Maryland, to Springfield, Illinois) another hundred miles to Hannibal. By early 1847 he was nominated by the Whigs for the office of clerk of the local circuit court and selected as a delegate to the Whig state party convention.

Hannibal also had a Library Association, more commonly called the Library Institute, which at its fourth annual meeting, on January 28, 1847, presided over by John M. Clemens, president, reported that it had over 400 volumes and was debt free.

March 11, 1847 Thursday – John Marshall Clemens rode to the village of Palmyra (the county seat) to attend a judicial hearing that would clear him of the Beebe debt matter. Judge Ezra Hunt of the Circuit Court at Palmyra "accepted John M. Clemens' reasonable plea that his own unpaid claims against Beebe be considered as an offset to Beebe's demands upon him—and with that decision the case fades from the records" . Riding home he was chilled by a sleet storm. He became ill and on March 24, 1847, John Marshall Clemens died.

Orion, in St. Louis had been sending home three of the weekly ten dollars earned setting type for the *St. Louis Reveille*. Pamela had moved to Paris to teach music. The family continued to live above Grant's Drug Store.

April 12, 1847: Orion leased the Hill Street House from James Clemens Jr. and the family moved back in. Pamela returned from Paris to look after her mother, Jane.

When Marshall Clemens died, according to his widow, she thought then, if ever there

> "was the proper time to make a lasting impression on the boy and work a change in him, so I took him by the hand and went with him into the room where the coffin was and in which the father lay, and with it between Sam and me I said to him that here in this presence I had some serious requests to make of him, and that I knew his word once given was never broken. ... He turned his streaming eyes upon me and cried out, (Oh, mother, I will do anything, anything you ask of me except to go to school; I can't do that!"
>
> It was, of course, 'the very request I was going to make. Well, we afterward had a sober talk," and they compromised." If Sam would continue to attend school, he could also work part-time for the *Hannibal Gazette*, the first Democratic paper in the village, founded in November 1846 and owned and edited by Henry La Cossitt. Sam was an apprentice and journeyman printer for the next nine years. He also worked at a variety of odd jobs: delivery boy, drugstore and grocery clerk, law student, apprentice in a blacksmith shop, and bookstore assistant. Had there "been a few more occupations to experiment on," he later mused, "I might have made a dazzling success at last." From the day his father died "until the end of 1856 or the first days of 1857," he added, "I worked—not diligently, not willingly, but fretfully, lazily, repiningly, complainingly, disgustedly, and always shirking the work when I was not watched."

In *Roughing It* (1872), he claimed he "had gone out into the world to shift for myself at the age of thirteen.” He may have gone to work at thirteen, but his mother lived nearby and her pantry door was always open.

In May 1848 Joseph P. Ament, the twenty-four-year-old owner of the *Missouri Courier*, moved the four-page weekly from Palmyra to Hannibal, bought the *Hannibal Gazette*, and merged the two papers. The next month, even as he completed his final year of formal education, Sam was apprenticed to Ament. As Jane Clemens explained, in a stunning understatement, “I concluded to let him go into a printing office to learn the trade, as I couldn't have him running wild. He did so, and has gradually picked up enough education to enable him to do about as well as those who were more studious in early life." Much as Marshall Clemens apprenticed Orion in 1841 to reduce household expenses when his store and hotel in Hannibal failed, Jane apprenticed Sam to reduce household expenses after his father died.

The tasks performed by a printer's devil were menial and tedious, to say the least, and Sam was little more than an indentured servant. He not only collected money from subscribers by walking door-to-door but learned to sort and set 154 different pieces of type. He built Ament’s fire on winter mornings,

> and I brought his water from the village pump; I swept out his office; I picked up his type from under his stand; and, if he was there to see, I put the good type in his case and the broken ones among the “hell matter’; and if he wasn't there to see, I dumped it all with the “pi" on the imposing stone. . . . I wetted down the paper Saturdays, I turned it Sundays—for this was a country weekly; I rolled, I washed the rollers, I washed the forms, I folded the papers, I carried them around at dawn Thursday mornings. . . . I enveloped the papers that were for the mail—we had a hundred town subscribers and three hundred and fifty county ones; the town subscribers paid in groceries and the country ones in cabbages and cordwood—when they paid at all, which was merely sometimes, and then we always stated the fact in the paper and gave them a puff; and if we forgot it they stopped the paper. Every man on the town list helped edit the thing; that is, he gave orders as to how it was to be edited; dictated its opinions, marked out its course for it, and every time the boss failed to connect, he stopped his paper.

Sam also claimed sixty years later that he “helped to edit the paper when no one was watching.”

He received no wages—merely room, board, and two suits of clothes a year, usually oversized hand-me-downs from Ament. Sam was only about half Ament's size. however, and when he wore one of his boss's old shirts “I felt as if I had on a circus tent. I had to turn the trousers up to my ears to make them short enough."

Hannibal, like most frontier communities of the time, was handicapped by a scarcity of hard money. Businesses, especially the publishers, repeatedly advertised that they would barter for commodities in exchange for their goods. The *Gazette* stated in the fall of 1847 that "We want every body to have a paper, and especially every family, and in order to put it in the reach of all— we will take wood, corn,

potatoes, or marketing, which a family can use, in exchange for the 'GAZETTE ‘." [*Hannibal Gazette, November 4, 1847.]*

The local businessmen were especially disturbed by two problems. One, the poor mail service, had been with the city from the beginning. In early 1848, after a disgruntled patron wrote on the post office door that he wished it would remain open longer hours and on Sundays, the postmaster placed a letter in the *Gazette*, stating that "the office is a poor, and miserably contemplated thing, and nothing but my poverty could induce me to keep it at all . The fact that I kept it in my dwelling heretofore, and was there to be called on at all hours of all days may have induced some to suppose that the law regulating it required such attention. . . . il [sic] has been and still is my intention to be as accommodating as the nature of the case will allow. The pay of the office is so low that I cannot employ assistance; and when I go to meals or boats the office must be closed. " *[Hannibal Gazette, May 4, 1848.]*

A second business problem resulted from the packet service which brought St. Louis businesses within easy reach of Hannibal customers. One local merchant, demanding that citizens patronize local firms, advertised,

> “ENCOURAGE, YOUR OWN!! It will cost $5.00 at least to go to St. Louis and back, $1.50 per day while there, notwithstanding this, their [sic] are some, so opposed to encouraging home industry, and enerprise [sic], that they will go to St. Louis to procure their FURNATURE [sic], Get a flimzy stuck-to-gether, auction room article and pay the drayage and freight on it rather than buy AT HOME, When as fashionable and as cheap an article of much better workmanship, Can be had at all times at ‘Wild Cat Corner,’ Hannibal, Mo . " *[Hannibal Gazette, April 29, 1847.]*

The people of Hannibal faced many other problems. Fire was a continual source of fear in communities where structures of wood predominated, and in January, 1847, after stressing the complete absence of firefighting equipment and noting five alarms in one day due to "ignition of chimney flues, " the *Gazette* called for "great precaution, when the weather requires such quantities of fuel to be used as at present." [*Hannibal Gazette, January 21, 1847.*]

A few weeks later fire destroyed five buildings in the business section and damaged the *Virginia Hotel*, which "was on fire several times, but by the best of care and management it was saved." *[Hannibal Gazette, April 29, 1847.]*

In May, 1847, the council adopted an ordinance providing that when the owners of a major part of a block petitioned the mayor requesting that no additional wooden buildings be erected in that block, the mayor should so order. *[Journal, May 20, 1847.]*

Public apathy delayed further action, however, and in September the *Journal* conceded that "It seems finally and decisively settled that the city of Hannibal is not shortly to have a fire company. We regret this because we believe that the money which would be necessary to buy an engine could not be better expended." *[Journal, September 9, 1847.]*

Hannibal's streets also drew much comment, the type depending upon the season. In February, 1847, the *Gazette* reported that on Main Street "a crowd of men, horses and wagons, from Ralls, Monroe, Shelby, Randolph, Macon, Adair, Knox and other counties, are seen every day, and the hum and bustle of business is heard throughout the week." *[Hannibal Gazette, February 25, 1847.]*

Spring brought serious damage to streets, making some "actually dangerous to waggons [sic] coming into the City after night. Let the gullies be filled up, if nothing more. The condition of Main street, needs some attention; it is perfectly flat, and in wet weather is covered with mud and water to the depth of two or three inches." *[Hannibal Gazette, April 15, 22, 1847.]*

In July the editor queried, "We should like to know what has become of that benevolent old gentleman, who appeared last summer with a hogshead on a dray, so in-dust-riously giving the streets a showerbath! His services are needed." *[Hannibal Gazette, July 1, 1847.]*

A wet autumn brought new comments: "we wonder if they [the city council] ever get up so far as the square between Hill & Bird on Main, for their own sakes we hope not unless prepaired [sic] in making the 'crossings’ to wade in 'scant three feet,’ or ‘march under mud twain.' No doubt this is pleasant enough to those who like it, but the ladies (bless their pretty faces) are compelled to stay at home, and the merchants, [merchants’] Laces, Caps, Ribbons, Cloves [Gloves], and Plumes, lie untouched, and the cry is ‘hard times, money scarce no business,’ whilst this together with many other evils arrising [sic] from the situation of our thoroughfairs [sic] might so easily be remedied.” *[Hannibal Gazette, November 25, 1847.]*

Another nuisance was closely related to the same industry. “If a stranger visits our city, " stated the Journal,"the first living thing that welcomes him is a dog; if he leaves the corporate limits, the last living thing that notices him is a dog; even in his midnight slumbers he hears the 'deep mouthed' baying of a hundred throats, and his dreams are strangely mixed up with hydrophobia and the thousand other ills that dog 'flesh is heir to.' No other animal can pass the streets without running the gauntlet of a score of curs." *[Journal, July 15, 1847.]*

To alleviate the problem the council prohibited a family from keeping more than one dog unless it should secure a license at 60¢ for each additional dog. Only two months later a new ordinance provided that all dogs must be licensed annually, males at 50¢ for the first dog, $1 for the second, and $2 for the third, and females at $1 for the first, $4 for the second and $10 for the third. *[Journal, July 15, September 9,1847.]*

A busy river port would by its nature attract many undesirables. In the fall of 1846 the *Gazette* called attention to "the fearful inroads that vice, in its worst forms, and all kinds of immorality are making in Hannibal" and asked, "Do we desire that Hannibal shall be known for its quiet, its order -loving—peace-keeping habits, or do we wish to see it as notorious for indignity as Louisville, and Natchez have been." *[Hannibal Gazette, November 12, 1846.]*

A few weeks later it spoke of the "’gentlemen’ of dubious character .. . about our town," advised the citizens to examine all the bank notes which they handled and to bar their doors at night, and warned

that "Our friends from the country, would do well to keep a sharp look out—and avoid all games with those who may ask them to play." In February, 1847, it further noted the presence of thieves, and in the fall a fresh warning spoke of a "swarm of gentlemen black-legs, who hang round the Coffee Houses, ready to pounce upon, and fleece any whom they can lure into their meshes" and cautioned further that "they will attempt to accomplish their purposes by foul means, if they cannot by fair." *[Hannibal Gazette, January 14, February 25, September 2, 1847.]*

The presence of the Negro on Hannibal streets also proved an annoyance to many residents. The Gazette complained that "our streets are lined with negroes loafing and rowdying every Sabbath day. Crowds of them occupy the street corners, and fill the kitchens of our citizens, and have became [sic] really annoyance." *[Hannibal Gazette, October 14, 1847.]*

This condition existed in spite of city ordinances which provided that no free Negro or mulatto could reside within the city without securing a license from the mayor, and that to secure this permit he must show evidence of good moral character and behavior, pay $5 annually for the use of the city, and give a maximum bond of $1,000 for his good behavior. Any unlicensed Negro without proof of freedom might be jailed as a runaway slave, and any Negro going about after 9 p.m. without a pass was subject to fine. Nor were Negroes allowed to hold an assemblage at night or remain at any ball or meeting after 11 p.m. without the mayors permission. The ordinances further decreed that any white person over the age of ten who was found at any Negro social affair should be fined $50, that anyone giving a slave a pass illegally should be fined from $20 to the value of the slave, and that a master allowing his slave to hire out to others should be fined from $5 to $20. [*Journal, February 25, 1847.]*

An active branch of the *American Colonization Society* existed in Hannibal, and on June 24, 1847, it authorized a committee composed of two ministers and one doctor to publish a letter inviting the Hannibal clergy to devote their first July sermon to colonization and to take up a collection for the benefit of the cause. This, the letter added, would be an appropriate time to think of "putting our African brother in possession of all the civil, social, and religious blessings which gladden our homes, on the very soil from which he has been ruthlessly severed and torn." *[Hannibal Gazette, July 1, 1847.]*

In 1847 the council became increasingly conscious of the need for improved sanitation, and in July it ordered that the street commissioner see that all public wells and pumps be kept in good repair and that no animals be watered at any public well except two designated for that purpose. *[Journal, July 15, 1847.]*

The council also decreed that no vegetable matter, unclean substance or filthy water be thrown into the streets or into Bear Creek, that refuse from the slaughterhouses be conducted into the Mississippi River and out into the current so that it could not return to the shore, and that "The pits of all privies hereaftsr [sic] constructed or built within the city, shall be at least ten feet deep, and walled up with brick or stone." *[Journal, June 3 , 1847.]*

In order to control the populace the council in 1847 published a list of misdemeanors which were punishable by fines of $1 to $100, including disturbing the peace, riot or unlawful assembly, disturbing religious worship, false alarm of fire, intoxication in public, nudity or improper dress , sale of indecent pictures and books, insufficient clothing while swimming in the Mississippi River or in any water in the city between one hour before sunrise and one hour after sunset, playing billiards or ten pins or participating in any public amusement on Sunday, public sale of liquor on Sunday except in cases of sickness or death, keeping a bawdy house, riding or driving a beast of burden faster than a moderate gait except in necessity, flying a kite in a highway or any sport which might frighten horses and exhibiting a jack, bull, or stallion in a public place and near a house or dwelling. *[Journal, June 16, 1847.]*

All of this necessitated the construction of a jail, and in May, 1847, the mayor stated "that the City has completed the fitting up of a Calaboose, for the accommodation of those gentlemen who might otherwise injure their health by exposure to the night air. " *[Hannibal Gazette, May 20, 1847.]*

The council also established a workhouse to satisfy the demand that those convicted of minor crimes should "be put to work—not locked up, and fed in idleness, to confirm their habits of vagrancy, and send them forth punished, but not reformed, worse instead of better." *[Journal, July 29, 1847; Hannibal Gazette, August 12, 1847.]*

Hannibal had 15 physicians in 1847 but the people had a tendency to rely upon home remedies and patent medicines. The *Journal* in 1847, for example, offered the following for its readers: "The bark of a willow tree , burnt to ashes, mixed with strong vinegar, and applied to the parts, will remove all warts, corns, and other excrescences on any part of the body or limbs. " *[Journal, January 21, 1847.]*

> And readily available were such nostrums as Dr. Bragg's Sugar Coated Pills, an "improved treatment for Fever and Ague, and Bilious Fevers" and excellent for "all diseases prevalent in a western and southern climate"; Dr. Wistar's Balsam of Wild Cherry, for consumption and liver complaint, which "brings back the bloom of health to the cheek, lustre to the eye, strength to the system, joy and gladness to the soul, and happiness to man" [the advertisement also states that "we sincerely pledge ourselves to make no assertions as to the virtues of this medicine, and to hold out no hope to suffering humanity, which facts will not warrant"] ; Comstock's Concentrated Compound Fluid Extract of Sarsaparilla "for the cure of Scrofula, chronic rheumatism, general debility, cutaneous diseases, Scaly eruptions of the Skin, . . . Mercurical and Syphiless Disease, . . . pains and swealing [sic] of the bones, . . .[and] Costiveness in females and males"; Genuine Balm of Columbia for creating a "luxuriant head of hair, free from dandruff" ["In cases of baldness it will more than exceed your expectations. Many who have lost their hair for twenty years have had it restored to its original perfection . . .it also causes the fluid to flow with which the delicate hair tubes is [sic] filled; by which thousands (whose, hair was as grey as the Asiatic eagle) have had their hair restored to its natural color"] ; Connell's Magical Pain Extractor for chilblains, burns, swellings, and sore feet; Langley's Great Western Indian Panacea,

> recommended for practically all ills from colds to piles; Dr. Larzello's Juno Cordial or Procreative Elixer for both male and female "debility, impotency and barrenness, and all irregularities of nature," a "remedy for those in the married state without offspring"; Dr. McNair's Accoustic [sic] Oil, a cure for deafness, which has enabled many to throw away their ear trumpets; Dr. Connell's mixture for Gonorrhoea and Gleet, Seminal effusions, and Weakness of Utera and Bladder, "equally good and certain for females"; Buchan's Hungarian Balsam of Life; Wistar's Balsam of Wild Cherry; Kolmstock's Vermifuge for worms; Hay's Liniment for piles; and Dr. Storm's Scotch Cough Candy, which "not only allays Chronical Irritation, but operating as a very mild purge, it keeps the stomach and bowels in a healthy condition, leaving the patient an appetite which few other Cough Mixtures could impart. " *[Hannibal Gazette, April 20, 1848.]*

When a smallpox epidemic was reported in St. Louis and fear spread that it might be communicated to Hannibal, the Journal did report, however, that "Those desiring it, can be vaccinated by applying to the members of the Board of Health." *[Journal, June 10, 1847.]*

Occasionally a quack was exposed, and on one occasion the *Journal* blasted a man named Robinson to whom, it had earlier referred as "Professor of diseases of the eye, from the London Opthalmic Institution":

> "A scamp named ROBINSON, and calling himself Doctor, who has been blowing about the country for some months past, after managing to get smartly into our debt, left, a few days ago, for parts unknown. He professes to be an oculist, but we conjecture it would puzzle him to tell the difference between fistula in oculo and fistula in ano. He is about five feet 6 or 7 inches high, rather slender, popeyed, and had on when he left a gray frock coat with brass buttons. . . he may infallibly be recognized by his cockney brogue, liverystable gait, vulgar manners, and a habit he has, when on horseback, of galloping as if the Devil or the constable was hard after him. He always requires one-third of his pay in advance—a practice . . . which we wish we had adopted in our transactions with him." *[Journal, October 21, 1847.]*

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the variety of remedies available, death was common in Hannibal, and then the bereaved might call upon the services of an artisan like Jacob Coffman, a cabinet maker, who advertised that "Particular pains will be taken to put up COFFINS in the neatest style, and on the shortest notice possible. He keeps a Hearse, the services of which can be had free of charge, when connected with his business. For the convenience of those who may wish his services at night, a light will be kept burning in his front room." *[Hannibal Gazette, January 14, 1847.]*

In the spring of 1849 Hannibal became a way station to the West, a crossroads during the Gold Rush. It was "just far enough north to be where West was South and East was North," James M. Cox once explained. A decade earlier, six-day-per-week steamboat service had been established during the summer months between Keokuk, Iowa, sixty-five miles north of Hannibal, and St. Louis, about a

hundred miles south as the buzzard flies, with travel connections to all points on the compass. By 1846 three steamboats on average stopped in Hannibal every day, a total of 1,080 during the year. "All emigrants went through there," Sam noted. Over two hundred Hannibal citizens rushed to California after the discovery of gold, about eighty of them in the spring of 1849.

"I remember the departure of the cavalcade when it spurred westward, Sam remembered over a half century later. "We were all there to see and to envy." As Jane and Pamela informed Orion in late January 1850, "Nearly all those who went from here last spring have written back that they are making large fortunes." Others were not so lucky... A half century later, Sam condemned the "Californian rush for wealth" for the change it wrought in the nation. It "begot the lust for money which is the rule of life to-day, and the hardness and cynicism which is the spirit of to-day. But when he traveled west to the mining camps in 1861 he was no less culpable, ironically, than the hoards he condemned for succumbing to the sound of the chink of gold.

The Gold Rush also funneled a steady stream of vagrants and varmints through the village. Barney Farthing recalled that every day during the spring and summer" of 1849 and 1850 "long trains of canvas covered wagons, drawn by horses, mules, or oxen" passed through Hannibal. "Long processions of big whiskered men, wearing red shirts, blue jeans trousers, and high top boots, carrying at shoulder or belt, guns, pistols, and big butcher knives, rode or walked beside these trains." Sam remembered in particular a "young California emigrant who was stabbed with the bowie knife by a drunken comrade: I saw the red life gush from his breast"—probably the murder in a local saloon reported in the *Hannibal Courier* on April 11, 1850. Injun Joe's threats to the Widow Douglas are also likely based on an actual incident in May 1850, when a young Californian passing through the town shouted "coarse challenges and obscenities" at the door of the Widow Weir, who shot and killed him. …

In the summer of 1850 Orion returned to Hannibal.   He'd received $50 from the sale of some of the Tennessee Land and borrowed $500 from a distant cousin, John Moorman Johnson. He purchased a hand press and some type and moved his family back into the Hill Street House.

In September 1851 Pamela married William Anderson Moffett, a former Hannibal resident.

Mark Twain by GH Jones, 1850

Mid-September 1852, Orion took a two week trip to Tennessee in an attempt to sell some of the Tennessee Land. He left Sam in charge of the paper. Orion, Sam thought, "was very angry when he got back-unreasonably so, considering what an impetus I had given the paper". The following May, Orion went to St. Louis for ten days. The disparity between the two brothers was such that Sam frustrated and itching for a change fled his apprenticeship and "ran away" from home.

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